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:

- Mentions how the priests gave the Blackfoot a new calendar.
- Discusses how the Indians count.

George First Rider: Okay, the Blackfoot illustration. The Blackfoot illustration was never explained clearly. There are a few Indian words, Indian words are that few. When the Holy White Man (priest) came his name is Good Heart (Father Lacombe) and the other Holy White Man's name is Chief Bird (Father Lepine) and another priest his name is Sitting Above and we all know Little Priest. When these priests spoke to the Indians they told them, "How do you know the months and a year?" The old people went to them with some sticks. They make notches on the sticks for every night and the rawhide thongs that they tied in knots. The priest told them, "This is not a good way. This is how I am going to teach you. The New Year Moon is the time when life starts again and the year." So it was called
Kissing Holy Day (New Year's Day). So that is how they taught and there is Eagle Moon (February).

The next is Duck Moon (March). The next is when the long time rain comes* (April). The next moon is when the leaves come out (May). The next moon is the Frog Moon (June). The next moon is when the long time rain comes (July); that's when the rivers flood, the other month. Then comes the summer Holy Day Moon. They say that the years are counted separately at that point. The Indians also count the moons separately at that same point. There are seven moons in a year in the Indian count and in the white count there are twelve months in one year. The white people count the days and the Indians count the nights. He (priest) explained this too.

There is the moon when haying time comes (August). There is the moon when the Fall Long Time Rain comes (September). There is the moon when the leaves fall (October). There is the moon when the autumn snow storm comes (November). There is the moon when the rivers freeze (December). There is the moon when winter comes (?). There is the Big Holy Day (Christmas) moon (December). It is just said that it was a Big Holy Day. We don't know what this Big Holy Day is. We don't know that the

*April is called Frog Moon in Blackfoot. The long time rain doesn't come in July it comes in April and the other one comes in September is called Fall Long Time Rain in Blackfoot.

Creator was born on that day. These are new what we know now. Then they gave us the calendars that they made. They mark the days with five ones and they mark the Sunday with a cross. The next are five again and a cross. So the two weeks. The number ones are 12 so we know the 30 days by those numbers are 31.

They draw a road with holy spirits (angels) on the road and they draw a dome at the top with a cross on top of the dome. They said, "This is the house of the Creator." And on the other side there is a serpent and it's got feet and there is a dome at the top with a fire and there are birds in it. Those are called in Blackfoot All Over Tipi Poles (bats). Later on the birds were called obscene names. I will not name them now because the name is obscene. He (priest) said, "The wicked people will go to this place; they will live in that fire." When he illustrated the calendar in that way, the summer months are six and there are six winter months. When he illustrated everything then he taught us how to count. The Indians only know to count up to one hundred. The Indian count never faded away, Nisii, Natohka, Niuka, Niso, Nisito, Naw, Ihkitskia, Naniso, Piikhiso, Kliipo. So they count once then they count again up to 10 and that's two. They'll count again and finally they'll count the 10s ten times and it is a hundred. That is how the people count.

Then they realized that we live up to a hundred years, so they counted a hundred years from that point, and now in every
prayer, a person will ask to live up to a hundred years. The people before that, that didn't know the count the years, the hundred years, will pray like this, "Help may I be crawling out. May I depart from this world from my crawling out." What are they going to do? Why do they want to be crawling around?

Now the new people (new generation) know that we live up to a hundred years; that is the count. It is the teaching of the priests. The priests did not teach the white man talk (English), they learned the Blackfoot language instead. When they learned the Blackfoot language then they started to teach the white man talk. That is why the first people are not educated good. A white man will learn the Blackfoot language first and then he could talk to an Indian; then he taught him the words. It is now over fifty years since these Indian calendars, the ones that the priest illustrated, were extinct. And now it is hard to find some of those calendars. They are long with Indian words; they are signs. There are birds that are drawn on the 30 count. Some are ducks; we know that this is the Duck Moon (March). Some are eagles; we know that this is the Eagle Moon (February), the eagles will come at that month. Flowers are painted on the other one; so it is called.

We don't know the flowers. All we know is the buffalo flowers (Buffalo Bean, Golden Bean). The month when the buffalo flowers are in bloom, now the buffaloes are going to get fat. The people of the past don't know the statements of the white man. Okay, the people of the past know the summer day, the spring, by the gophers. If the gophers pile a lot of dirt outside of their dens they will say the buffaloes will not be good.

The gophers have dug deep into the ground, that means the grass will not be good, the buffalo flowers will be very small. The buffalo flowers makes the buffaloes fat. The buffalo flowers are just like oats. The buffalo flowers fattens the buffaloes so the people will get wearied if the gophers did dig deep into the ground. They will know what the winter will be by the ducks. If they fly high when they are migrating means that it's going to be a mild winter. Okay, if they fly low it's going to be hard winter.

They also know what the winter will be by the muskrats. If they build their huts at the edge of the water means that it is not going to be a hard winter. If they build their huts close to the center of the lake means that it is going to be a hard winter. And if they build their huts not too far from the shore the weather will be 50-50.

They'll kill the porcupines. As there are a lot of them in the woods, they'll be killed and we'll know how many months have gone. A porcupine's liver is in sections like as if it is cut. If the liver is in three sections we'll know that three winter months have gone. If it's in four sections we'll know that four winter months have gone. If there are five sections we'll know that five winter months have gone. If the liver is in
section numbered six we'll know that six winter months are gone and there will be only one more month of cold weather.

Another porcupine will be killed, and not one special porcupine -- any porcupine will be killed. On the seventh month the liver will be in seven sections and if we go into the woods we hear the chickadee chirping, "summertime, summertime*" and when they are killed we'll look at the tongue. The tongue has seven streaks and they are saying it is summer. There is no other way to know the months by, the days.

*When these little birds are singing they sound like they were singing summertime in Blackfoot.

When the northern lights are on we say, "The woods white men are having a dance. They are going to have a dance now." The woods white men have had a dance, the lights are moving in all directions and two days after a bad storm comes sometimes there won't be very many lights moving. It is called, "The woods white men are having a dance." Sometimes just a big wind comes. So we know the weather by that. We know what the weather will be like by the sun, who is called Old Man. We'll say there will be two things on each side of it. They are called, "The sun ochred its face." They are also called, "It has thrown its painted streaks (sundogs) up." That's what it is. This OSIPITAWN is when a person thinks very aggressively he'll paint two streaks down on each side of his temples; that's OSIPITAWN. The word will be traced again. A person, let us illustrate it this way, when he gets rich, a person who kills the enemy, he is an aggressive person. We'll say he has improved the means, he is a wealthy person. That is why he painted the streaks on his face; he has now improved. So that is how it is illustrated. The sun has thrown its painted streaks; it also means facial painting.

The sundogs are paint all offerings and on altars. There is a song to the facial paint. I (First Rider) know it and I am almost singing the facial paint. The reason why it is called facial paint, these are illustrations. Now the other one, there will be a light around the sun. One will be purple and the other one is yellow. The other is just a plain light and the other ring of light is red. The ring of lights will be tight around the sun. They'll say, "The sun is torn in pieces. It is going to be very miserable tonight." A bad storm will come during the night. We'll look at it again and there will be another ring of light around the sun and it's away from the sun and a storm will come after two days. We'll illustrate this ring of light. A child, the woman and the man have no long tails (spoons). They are served berry soup in a real bowl (wooden bowl). When the woman finishes her berry soup that she was slurping she will use her forefinger to wipe her bowl; she'll be licking her finger. The child and the man did not want to put his hand in the bowl because he has pride; that is why he did not want to put his hand in the bowl. When he finishes the berry soup he'll lick the bowl and the blood berry
soup will be smeared around his mouth. He'll be told, "You
have a sloppy ring around your mouth." That's what the ring
around the sun is; that's what it means.

Now the thing that I had mentioned when the moon's leg was
chopped off she disappeared at that time. When she went up
into the sky it was called, how many days is it? It's one day,
it means it's one night since she died. It's two days, finally
the thirty days were counted by that.

When a woman gets pregnant she will know the day of the month
when she got pregnant, and the woman will start counting from
there. If the woman gets pregnant on the last quarter of the
moon she will have nine months to go. The Indians don't have
ten months of pregnancy; the days are counted in the white
count. The only time they have ten months is if a woman gets
pregnant when the month is half gone. She will start counting
the nine months and she will have her baby on the fifteenth day
of the tenth month; that makes ten months.

Some people, let's say a person is asked for something. When a
person is going on a buffalo hunt his favorite wife tells him,
"Please get me some liver." The woman treats hides with the
liver. The man will tie a rawhide thong on his little finger
and he says, "That what I tied on my finger is what my woman
asked for." His other wife also tells him, "Please try and get
me a brain." The brains of the buffalo are taken out from the
throat. They can't break the skulls because the buffaloes have
thick skulls. Okay, his other wife may tell him -- this is
funny and it sounds bad but the people of the past are not
sensitive to it. His old lady will tell him, "Please cut me
some testicles." If he kills a bull buffalo he'll cut the
testicles for her. He will tie a thong on his finger again.
When he makes his kill he will look at his finger. He'll know,
"I tied this one on first for the one that I sit by. I am
going to get a liver for her. And I tied this one for the
other one. I am going to get her a brain." He didn't untie
the thongs, he kept them on.

When he brings the meat home his wives went to him. He did not
have to tie anything on his fingers for his other wives that
went with him. They'll take what they want to take for
themselves. When he gets the meat home he'll tell the one that
he sits next to, "Here is the liver that you asked for." Here
he unties the rawhide thong that he tied on his finger. He'll
tell the other one, "Here is the brain," and he unties the
other one. And then the other, he'll tell, "Here are the
testicles that I cut for you," and he will untie the other
thong. It's just like as if he wrote down what he is going to
buy, in tying his finger.

The children all asked for something. He doesn't have to count
what he is going to take, he'll just tie thongs on all of his
fingers. Some kids will ask for temporalis muscle, some will
ask for a kidney, some will ask for a brisket. He'll tie
thongs on his other fingers what his children asked for.
People that have a lot of children will tie their fingers like as if they cut their fingers. When they come home with the meat they'll know the thing that they tied their finger for. He gives his children what they asked for and he unties the thongs. He puts away the rawhide thongs. He puts them in his awl case, and the next time he is going on a buffalo hunt he'll tell his children and his wives that he is going to leave behind, "What shall I get for you?" And he ties his fingers.

Okay, he also marked his arrows. He ties a wolf hide, a wolf fur, at the bud of the arrow that he is going to shoot the buffalo with. He'll know, "This is the arrow I am going to use to shoot a buffalo." A buffalo will be at a distance and he'll shoot it with the arrow; that's his best arrow. He'll put owl feathers on the other arrow. He uses that for hunting. He'll shoot the arrow up at a tree and it won't get stuck up in the tree. So he'll know what kind of an arrow he has. The other arrow, he'll put a red dye on the arrow. These dyes are on pine trees. He knows that he'll hit an animal with it. That will be the first arrow that he shoots the buffalo with. He knows that he doesn't miss with that arrow, so he has four good arrows. They call them shaggy ornamented arrows. The arrows that they use for getting food are their best arrows; they also mark them.

Okay, as soon as he finished shooting with his bow, it is said he bended it then, the word bend will be traced. What is it? When a bow is not in use it will be straight; when it is used in shooting it will bend. That is why these sinew-glued bows were made; they will move like green wood in severe cold weather. If a snake-glued bow is used in a cold day the snake will freeze and it will tear. The sinew-glued bow is the chief. The snake will tear where the bow is held in the middle. The sinew-glued bow never breaks because it is a sinew. It will not break even if it freezes. So that is how they mark the bow that they use in a buffalo chase in wintertime.

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