

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: GEORGE FIRST RIDER
THE SIGNIFICANCE AND
FUNCTION OF THE OWL DURING
MEDICINE PIPE (ENTMORIE, OF
THE BEAVER INDIANS)
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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:

- Tells of the significance of the owl to the Medicine Pipe. George First Rider: Now this is another question asked and I am going to tell a story. I am told to tell the story. I illustrate stories. At this point I am questioned why the owl is in the Medicine Pipe Bundle. I am questioned why the loon is in the Medicine Pipe Bundle. So I am going to illustrate those.

The owl is a bird. It was after Christmas in the Eagle Moon (February) when I saw an owl sitting in its nest. When a bird is sitting in its nest it is called the bird's rectum is sitting back in. The owl's rectum was sitting back in when I saw it and I shot the owl. I killed it right in its nest. I

shot it in the head and I climbed up the tree. When I threw it down there were its eggs in the nest. So I found owl eggs in the Eagle Moon (February).

A man wandered off. It's like this. They were on the warpath and when they fled from the enemy he fled in a different direction alone. So he walked and walked until he came to the Big River (Columbia River). When he looked the Big River (Columbia River) was flooded so he couldn't get across. He thought, "I will make a raft so I won't sink." The man took some rails and set them in an equilateral shape. Then he peeled the barks of silver berry trees and he braided them together. He made a rope out of the barks. So he tied together the three logs with the rope that he made. It was getting dark, so he thought, "I'll sleep here and I will swim across early in the morning, so I will see where I am going to swim to." The man took some willows and tied them onto the logs to make a floor. He is not going to ride on the raft. He will put his clothes and his bow and arrows on it, keep them from getting wet, and if he gets tired of swimming he'll hang on to the raft. He built the raft for that reason.

The man completed his raft and set it ready for the next morning. Then he went and slept under a tree. The man prayed before he went to sleep so that nobody may see him and so that nobody may come upon him. When he went to sleep he heard an owl from the eastern direction. He suspected the hooting of an owl and the second time it hooted it came a little closer and the third time it hooted it came very close to him. The fourth time he heard the owl right above him. The owl made a coughing sound. The owl sang. The words in the owl's song are, "I love that tree."

The man didn't know that a man was buried beneath the tree where he was sleeping. The dead man loved the tree. After the owl sang it made a sound like this, "ho, ho, hoo, ho, ho, hoo, ho, ho, hoo, ho, ho, hoo." The owl made four sounds. The owl told the man, "You came here as my neighbor and I appreciate

that and since nobody saw you and still nobody will see you. Even if people are looking at you, you will make yourself invisible at any time." It's the owl that sang. It sang a Medicine Pipe song. The song is called the owl song. The owl told him, "Us owls, we are ghosts. If we don't want anybody to see us we will make ourselves invisible. Now I give you the power to make yourself invisible. You will not be seen when you are raiding your enemy." The owl told him, "Steal that pipe. You will not be seen when you are raiding your enemy." The owl told him, "Steal that pipe. You will not be seen," and the owl sang the Medicine Pipe song. It's the owl that gave the people the idea of stealing Medicine Pipes. When a Medicine Pipe is stolen the person that stole a Medicine Pipe has the property to pay for the Medicine Pipe that he stole. I will illustrate it this way. If somebody steals he will be arrested for theft and he will be fined for stealing. It's the same for the stealing of a Medicine Pipe and a Medicine Pipe

will be stolen on account of the owl. The man that wandered off from its company made an offering and hung it on the tree. The man didn't sleep and just at dawn he took his clothes off and he put his bow and arrows and his clothes on the raft which is not very big. Then he dragged the raft into the river. Then he held on to it with the sharp point of the raft in front and the raft started to float away and he paddled with his feet. He swam northward with the sharp point of the raft pointing upstream. He wasn't swept downstream very far. When he got to the other shore, he took the raft apart and threw the logs and the willows into the river so that nobody will find the raft, if they will know that somebody had swam across the river.

The man put his clothes on, took his bow and arrows and walked away praying. He didn't go very far when he saw a rider and hid himself. "O owl, help me. You said that I will not be seen by anyone and you told me to steal. May I get a horse to ride so's I can go home faster?" He saw the rider very early in the morning and he just hid himself in the bushes. He laid where he hid himself all day. He saw the rider going over a hill. When it got dark he got up and started to run in the direction which the rider went. He ran quite a ways when he saw the camps; there were five tipis. When the lights went out he approached the camps. The horses were not tied, they were just all hobbled. He saw one horse which seemed to be livelier than the rest. He walked up to the horse and put his rope around its neck. The horse has owl feathers on its head as a topknot. Another horse poked its head up. He looked like as if he had two heads, with its head pieces. He approached it too and roped it. The horse had also owl feathers on its head. The owl feathers that the horses wore were useless. Eagle tail feathers are precious. When a horse is decorated with an eagle

tail feather the horse will not be turned loose with the eagle tail feather; the feather will be taken off after the celebration is over. The owl feathers are useless and the horse is turned loose with the owl feathers. The man rode the second best horse and led the other horses with his rope and he fled and by morning he was a long ways off from the enemy camps. He didn't expose himself. He rode where he will not be seen. He didn't travel during the day. He tied the horses in a secluded place and he went up a hill and covered himself with grass. From there he spied around and he didn't sense anything. When it got dark he went back to the horses and got on one of them; then he fled again. On his third night -- this kind of saying -- we will tell a person, "How many nights did it take you?" He will say, "It took me that many nights." It means he had travelled for three nights. The people of the past count the nights, not the days. So he travelled for three nights and on the morning of the third night he found the camps of his people. He came up on the ridge and he sang the Medicine Pipe song while he was standing on the ridge. His companions were all home by this time. The people said, "That's the one that fled alone in a different direction."

They had a big gathering for him and he told what happened and

he said, "I stole these horses." Not long after his return, he killed an owl. He skinned the owl and stuffed the owl skin with sweet smelling herbs and pine needles. Then he made the eyes with two small pieces of bones from a shoulder blade and he painted the eyes red and the owl had red eyes. Now the horses that he stole belonged to the people in the five tipis. It was not mentioned which Medicine Pipe that he took. He kept his attention on the man that owned a Medicine Pipe. He approached the tipi when the Medicine Pipe man owner went to sleep. He went into the tipi very quietly and he took the Medicine Pipe and he walked out with the pipe and brought it into his tipi and he laid the pipe down and he went to sleep. The man got up at dawn and he invited an elderly man to his tipi. He told the elderly man, "Here is a Medicine Pipe that I stole. When the people notice that the Medicine Pipe is missing you will go out and sing a song of praise for me. They will transfer the pipe to me." The elderly man said, "Okay, it will be as you say." The elderly man stayed home and the man that stole the Medicine Pipe stayed home. He was in his full Indian regalia and so's his wife. The two horses that he stole were fine horses. The people of the past don't pay much for a sacred bundle because they were not very rich in those times.

When the Medicine Pipe owner got up, his wife wanted to burn the incense before the sun rises. So she burned the incense and when she went for the pipe to take it out the Medicine Pipe was gone. The woman told her husband that the pipe is gone. The man got up and found out that his pipe was gone. The man

invited the older men to his tipi. When the older men were all seated, he told them, "My wife was going to take the pipe out, but it was gone."

In the past, they never used to steal Medicine Pipes. It was the owl that gave the people the habit of stealing Medicine Pipes and there was no owl skin amongst the contents of a Medicine Pipe Bundle.

The older men said, "This is not a small thing for a man to hide. We will just enquire about the Medicine Pipe. We don't know what became of the pipe." The men all went out and announced the missing of the Medicine Pipe. They told the people to get the truth from their sons if they took the pipe. The name of the owner of the Medicine Pipe was not mentioned. When the men went around the camps questioning people to get the truth from their sons, if they took the pipe, the name of the owner of the Medicine Pipe was not mentioned. When the man went around the camps questioning people about the Medicine Pipe the elderly man went out and sang a song of praise for the man that stole the Medicine Pipe. The man that stole the Medicine Pipe was prepared. So a song of praise was sung for the man. The man that was going around questioning people heard the elderly man singing a song of praise.

The Medicine Pipe owner was not told that a certain man took his pipe; a song of praise was just sung for the man that stole the Medicine Pipe. The old man went to the pipe owner and told

him, "Why is someone singing a song of praise for that man?" The pipe owner said, "I think he is the one that took the pipe." The old men went and questioned the elderly man, "What is this all about?" The man answered, "Yes, this man took the pipe. He admires the pipe." The old men said, "Yes, it will be transferred to him." The former Medicine Pipe owners got together immediately and the Medicine Pipe was transferred to the man. As the man brought forward his payments for the Medicine Pipe, the second best horse out of the two that he stole was brought in front of the tipi. He held back the livelier horse.

The Medicine Pipe owner picked up the pipe and danced with it. Then he went out to look at the horses. He looked at the horses but the livelier horse was not amongst them; the other horse was brought forward. The pipe owner danced back and put the pipe where it was before. He put the pipe back in its place. He went to the drummer and told them to sing. The names of the recipient and the owner of the Medicine Pipe were not mentioned. The pipe owner told the drummer, "You will sing about the other horse." The words in the song are, "Why don't I see that horse?" The drummers sang and the words in the song

were, "Why don't I see that lively horse?" The man that stole the pipe told one of the men, "Go and bring that horse. But turn the other one loose. I'll keep him for my horse and bring the other horse." Then the drummers sang a different song. The words in the song are, "That is what I want." The pipe owner picked up the pipe and danced with it once more and as he looked at the horses, there was the horse that he wanted. Then he danced back performing for the recipient. He held the stone and the mouth piece. He held the stem sideways in front of him holding it with his left hand at the other end where the pipe bowl is. He didn't hold it upright. Then he performed for the recipient; he was satisfied at this point.

The owner gave the pipe to the recipient. The acceptant took the stem just the way the owner held the stem and he prayed with it. The pipe is given to him. Nowadays the Medicine Pipes are handled in the same original way. When Medicine Pipe owners smoke they will hand the pipe to the next person in the same manner with the left hand near to where the pipe bowl is and the right hand near to the mouthpiece. The person that is given the pipe will take it with both hands. That is how the Medicine Pipe owners pass on a pipe to the other person.

After the the man had owned the Medicine Pipe he then added the owl skin to the contents of the Medicine Pipe bundle. It is the owl that gave the rule for people to steal Medicine Pipes, that is why the owl is added to the contents of the Medicine Pipes. If the owl was not amongst the contents of a Medicine Pipe, a person will just go and ask for a Medicine Pipe and if the owner of the pipe does not like the person he will not transfer his pipe to him. There are no objections to a person that stole a pipe. The man is accepted and when he was accepted he gave his best horse for the Medicine Pipe and he

will keep his favorite horse. The owl was not in the contents of the Medicine Pipe before. The reason why Medicine Pipes are stolen it is on account of the man that heard the owl that sang and that gave him its powers. It's the owl that sang and the words in its song are, "I love that tree." The man got his horses by the supernatural powers that were given to him by the owl. Nobody noticed him when he stole the horses; he brought the horses home safely. The man stole the Medicine Pipe and he gave away the second best horse for the pipe. He thought, "I'll keep the other horse. I'll use him for hunting." The Medicine Pipe owner was onerous, he said, "If he gives me that good horse then I will give him the pipe." The drummers sang about the horse. The horse was brought forward to the tipi. The drummers sang a different song. The words in the song are, "That is what I want." Then the owner of the pipe gave the recipient the pipe in the way of giving a Medicine Pipe,

holding the stem with both hands. The recipient took the pipe in the same manner. It's the owl that gave the people the habit of stealing Medicine Pipes and now I wonder that if anybody will know the reason why the owl is added to the contents of the Medicine Pipe and who will the person be that know why we steal Medicine Pipes. It is a rule to steal Medicine Pipes but the person that stole a pipe must have the price; then the owner of the Medicine Pipe will give him the pipe.

So now the owl is the most important thing in a Medicine Pipe Bundle. The man that dreamed was told by the owl, "I am not a real bird. I was a human being and when I died I turned into a bird. That is why I am involved in stealing." Before the owl became so useful the horses were turned loose with the owl feathers that they had for headpieces. The eagle's tail feathers are useful. They are used for making medicine hats and headpieces; the eagle tail feathers are precious. The owl is not as good as the eagle. The owl became important when it was added to the contents of a Medicine Pipe by the man that heard the song with the words in the song, "I love that tree." Nowadays the owl feathers are not useless; they are used for decorations by chiefs. It is said that when a Medicine Pipe owner dies he turns into an owl. A nonqualified person is not supposed to go to a Medicine Pipe opening and a Medicine Pipe transferal. A nonqualified person will not dance with any of the artifacts in a Medicine Pipe Bundle. Only a former Medicine Pipe owner will dance with any of the artifacts in a Medicine Pipe Bundle. A former Medicine Pipe owner will dance to the song that he always dances to.

If a non-Medicine Pipe owner goes to a Medicine Pipe transferal or a Medicine Pipe opening he will have to figure out a way so that he can dance with the pipe. But if the nonqualified person gets aggressive he will get up and say, "I will dance with the pipe and I will purchase the pipe." He doesn't have to steal the Medicine Pipe. It's just like making a vow to have the Medicine Pipe transferred to him.

The nonqualified person will be initiated into picking up the

pipe. After the initiation he will pick up the pipe and he will dance with it but he will not dance in the same style as the Medicine Pipe owners dance. He will dance in the same place where he stood in a bouncing-like manner. The reason why he will not dance like the others, it's because he hasn't owned the Medicine Pipe yet. He will pay a fortune for dancing with the pipe. I (First Rider) danced with the Long Time Pipe and I paid a lot to dance with it. A person cannot go to a Medicine Pipe dance and to join in the dance with the Medicine Pipe owners. It is said that if a non-Medicine Pipe owner sits where the Medicine Pipe owner sits, he will have tumor in his

rectum. That is why people are afraid to sit. If they do they'll have tumor in their rectums. Now if a nonqualified person goes to a Medicine Pipe Bundle it is dangerous for him to have tumor in his rectum. Those are the taboos. Nobody cannot abuse the rules of a Medicine Pipe. If a tipi is already full with people and a Medicine Pipe owner will enter the tipi, he will be seated at the back; that is, he belongs. A Medicine Pipe owner never sits by the doorway. And if a non-Medicine Pipe owner enters a Medicine Pipe ceremony and if he does walk up to the bundle and picks up the pipe it's just like sitting on where the Medicine Pipe owner sits and he will have a tumor in his rectum. That is why they are tabooed like that.

Now a person will know not to abuse a Medicine Pipe. That is why the owl is in the Medicine Pipe Bundle. The reason why Medicine Pipes are stolen, it's on account of the owls. An owl is skinned and it is put in the Medicine Pipe Bundle and we will dance with the owl. If the owl wasn't amongst the contents of a Medicine Pipe there will be no rule to steal Medicine Pipes and now we claim that when a Medicine Pipe owner dies, he will turn into an owl. Now all the owls are ghosts; that is why people don't eat owls. If they do they will eat a ghost. We are afraid to eat an owl.

As soon as we hear an owl hooting, we'll know that it's a ghost, a Medicine Pipe owner. This is an Indian belief. This is the subject that I was questioned about. Why is the owl added to the contents of a Medicine Pipe? Why is the owl so important? Owls perch on trees so a recipient of a Medicine Pipe will be initiated into riding a horse with the owl. That is why they have Medicine Pipe saddles. The saddle is the owl's nest. We also have Medicine Pipe ropes and Medicine Pipe whips. There is a reason why all these items are attached to the Medicine Pipe. Now this is where I conclude my story about the Medicine Pipe. So this is where I conclude my story.

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