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HIGHLIGHTS:

- general account of traditional lifestyle.  
Informant: migwan -- "feather." Real name is tipisko-  
tigitisikgo-awasis -- "Child of the Sky Right Above"

Feather is a nickname given to him in his youth because of his  
fleetness. He is of the Pihpikisis "Little Hawk" band.  
Little Hawk was the nephew of kana-hatca-peu -- "Bow Fixer",  
who was ukimau at the time of the first treaty. Before him his  
brother and Little Hawk's father (his other name was  
kahmaxgoge-t -- "Big Tipi") tcima-skos -- "Short (as a stick is  
short)" was chief. The father of "Short" was chief before him,  
his name was kamikisiwistigho-u -- "Eagle Head." The father of  
Eagle Head was chief before him, otcipo-mosis" (a kind of small  
grey bird)." He lived at the time when they first saw a white  
man.

According to Feather's testimony the Pipihkisis band is  
descended from a people called Opwosimu -- "Stony Sioux" who  
are known in Cree as the Asinipwatuk. These are undoubtedly  
Assiniboine. Feather said that Bow Fixer had a Cree mother and

at about this time the whole band swung over to the Cree and became allied with the Calling River people. This was the only band of Opwasimauk that did thusly. Feather himself descends from the Assiniboine through his mother, as do all the other living old men in the band except one. Feather's father was a Soto "naxkawiuiuu", from beyond Winnipeg who came west because he was orphaned. His mother's people were Sotos from the west (i.e. Feather's grandmother's people), and he joined them.

Before the days of Feather's grandfather (Feather is about 85), in the time of the chief otcipo-mosis, the band used to roam around Winnipeg. They worked westward in quest of the buffalo and ousted the Blackfeet.

Feather himself was born at Wood Mountain. His people hunted mostly at Poplar Creek and at Wood Mountain. They sometimes got to Touchwood Hills and over to Cypress Hills.

The Opwasimauk roamed between Wood Mountain and Moose Mountain. They fought both Sioux and Cree and were originally outcasts from the Sioux. They finally landed in Canada because of their malicious exploits in the States.

In the days of the chief otcipo-mosis they had a kind of crossbow only and made fires by rubbing a buffalo rib on touchwood. Even then the band was mixed Cree-Ojibwa-Assiniboine.

In the days of Feather's father, Indians from Winnipeg hunted as far west as the Muddy River (Missouri?).

Tcima-skos was a great chief who was known from Ft. Ellice to Edmonton. In winter many people would flock to him because he was a noted pound maker and was very successful in enticing the buffalo. Whole bands would come with their chiefs. These ukimau would be subordinate to tcima-skos and become his councillors, cimaganis higau. From every band several ogihtcitau would meet together and get tcima-skos's orders and then carry them out. Feather has seen him but he died before the treaty.

Feather distinguished between ogihtcitau and cimaganishigau by saying that the former wore their title on the battlefield only, while the latter could attain their rank by virtue of other notable qualities. Later evidence, however, leads me to believe that the latter term was not in use before treaty times and was originally applied to the Mounted Police.

As to the chieftainship succession, if a chief's son was not fit, his next nearest relative would be elevated. A man need not necessarily be a warrior but might be capable in other ways and just. Later, as in pipihkisis's time, it was he who could adapt himself to the ways of the white man who made a good ukimau.

Feather told a tale about four chiefs, which wasn't very clear.

It seems that Mextse-tchkihiwup -- "Many Sitting Eagles" once got into a dispute with a trader in Winnipeg and won out. This gave him so much prestige that he became chief. Itawuskijik -- "Janus Eye," was one who brought much fur in to the trader and he became chief among the Rabbit Skin people. These two decided to give up their territory which was east of the Red River and move westward. When kiwisca, "Boy", a Soto chief heard of this, he, too, decided to move west. Mahkiesis, "Fox", another Rabbit Skin chief, was also involved in the westward move somehow, perhaps attracted by treaty payments. Anyway, the point of the story seemed to be that for these four chiefs a fort was put up at the juncture of the Muddy River (Missouri), Poplar Creek, and Little Creek.

The four chiefs that Feather told of roamed in the File Hills region in the summer and worked their way back east in the winter because they had to trade there. At that time Winnipeg was the nearest trading post. All four chiefs died back in the east country. Only mahkiesis lived to see posts at Fort Qu'ppelle and Long Lake.

In Feather's day and in his father's day, the people did not range that far east. Feather himself had been south to the Missouri.

He did not know of Wild Rice. Said Star Blankets were Calling River people -- Okanis, Rabbit Skins.

Feather's house was one of those built by the government. It was about 15 feet by 30 feet, had a door, four windows, two stoves. There was a bed in one corner, a table, another table on which was lying a tipi cover folded up. On the wall was hanging the feathers and hide of an eagle which someone at Crooked Lake had given to Feather. Another gift he had brought back was an unfinished tobacco pouch, a bag four inches by four inches, of leather decorated with a star on one side and with a compass flower design on the other, done in quillwork. It had been done, he said, by old kenewustahims's daughter.

Hanging on the wall was an old brown bag, similar in shape to my little one, to which was tied a pipe stem. This was probably Feather's medicine bundle. Two bundles of sweetgrass braids were also hanging on the wall. Other objects hanging on the wall were three feathers, duffel bags, bits of roots and twigs drying. The place was swept clean and looked tidy.

The Rabbit Skin, Calling River, Prairie, and Assiniboine people were always pretty thick and became even more closely allied, especially as when attracted by the leadership of tcima-skos.

They all -- Cree, Assiniboine, Soto -- would gather for the Sundance at one of the several favorite places, "Medicine Lodge," "Clearest Bluff," "Where the Pinto Lies," or "Dog Camp," all of which are near Wood Mountain.

The people would travel about under one ukimau in large bands,

never in family groups. In tcima-skos's camp there was not under 300 tents.

Before the days of the white man, the chief of the Calling River people was ka-nahap, "Sitter", whose other name was tcatce-mika-tcis, "Short Legs". He was the father of Loud Voice. In Loud Voice's day (contemporary with Big Tipi) his people lived at Long Lake. The Rabbit Skins lived then at Kakwatsi "Porcupine," Dixdipauahe-wicipi, Rolling River. These places now are near Birtle and Elephant Stone. They border on the Calling River people.

The Opwasimauk fought with Pwatun -- Sioux. Pawistiko-iuiwuk Rapids people, Peigan, Blackfeet, Blood, Sioux, Flat Head, even with the Cree. Feather himself never saw a fight.

In the days of Feather's father it was only an odd Cree who had a horse; they used dogs. Later they acquired horses from the Blackfeet. Then a man ordinarily would have three or four horses, occasionally nine or twelve. After a successful raid, a man would give away the horses that had been stolen, to his friends and relatives and to those who had accompanied him. The Cree, said Feather, were able to push the Blackfeet back because they were more numerous and better commanders.

I asked him about the foodstuffs in the old days. Buffalo, of course, was the staple, antelope, deer, occasionally a goat or a moose. The dog used for food in ceremonies. Wild turnips, wild potatoes and horses of all kinds were also eaten.

Pemmican, pemixka-u, was made of buffalo meat which had been sliced and smoked, then pounded and mixed with fat. Berries were also added at times. Pemmican was stored in hide containers called pemixka-niwus.

The process of butchering a buffalo was this. The carcass was laid on its back and the head turned to prop it up. It was skinned and then each limb was taken off. These came off easily without much cutting. Then a cut was made along the backbone and the ribs cut away. The brisket was cut off by itself and then the sinews were taken out. These were scraped and saved for sewing, etc. The steaks were cut out and dried. The rib part smoked and kept for ready eating. The tongue and heart were often kept for feasts.

Ducks were eaten, but they did not form a very important part of the food supply.

Feather remembers a barrier being made to catch fish which he saw on the Arm River where Regina Beach now is. It was made by driving willow stakes in V-shape where the water was shallow and the current was swift. The stakes were interlaced with boughs and branches. At the apex a wall of stones was built up so that the water just shot over and on the other side of it was a box-shaped enclosure of willow stakes that held the fish. The men sometimes went upstream and proceeded down throwing stones in the water to scare out the fish. Fish were seldom

eaten but he could give no explanation. The barrier trap is still used in the West Reserves.

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