

CHIEF CROWFOOT 1830 - 1880.

by Teddy Yellow Sky,

The life of Chief Crowfoot brings forward to the reader an outstanding example of how Honesty, Integrity and Prudence existed even in a time before a person could be trained to know the Fundamentals which make up great statesmen. It is also fitting here to mention the fact that Chief Crowfoot (E SAH PO MA KSI KA) did not acquire the role of Chief because of his war-deeds or scalps. He never was a great warrior, neither can he claim a family tree of great warriors. But as he possessed all the former mentioned good qualities, along with his fidelity to his friends, his calm acceptance of the inevitable, his great understanding and adaptation to things as they came along, gained for him the respect of, not only the Blackfoot Nation but also of all the other tribes he came in contact with. The following concluding entreaty of all Blackfoot speeches was originated by him: "MOKAKIT KI AEKAKIMAT". (Be wise and persevere).

He was largely responsible for the fact that the Blackfoot nation is one of the few who accepted Treaty with the Great White Mother without much persuasion and can rightfully claim that they assimilated themselves with their white brother most readily without any ill-feeling or suspicion.

The Blackfoot proper are amongst themselves subdivided into Gens or Clans. We mean by Blackfoot proper, the tribe who have the above name by which they are distinguished from their closely related brother tribes, the Bloods, the Peigans and South Peigans which make up the Blackfoot Confederacy. There are numerous Gens or Clans but as we are dealing with one individual, his clan alone is given. Crowfoot's early manhood name was KA YE STAR OH, or Bear Ghost. Bear Ghost came from parents who were highly respected in their day, although his father before him was like himself, not a famous warrior. Many Names, father of Crowfoot belonged to the Gens or Clans originally called SESE KSIS TSI MAX meaning the "Clan with the marked arrows". This Clan made designs on their bows and arrows by heating some object and using it to burn the design on their bows and arrows. Later this Clan were more popular under another name which was more widely used. It was TSI KE NAKS or the "Mocassin Clan". This name was given to them by some other Clan with which some rivalry existed such as athletic sports etc.

Crowfoot was born as far as the Indian records show in the year 1830. How the years are traced back to the year he was born will be given later. These are also the official records kept and used by prominent wise old Indians. It may be truthfully called the "Blackfoot Calendar" to that period.

Crowfoot's boyhood days were uneventful only for one incident when he had a vision while in a trance. A supernatural being called the "Buffalo Man" appeared and told him, along with other things that he was to become Father of all his tribesmen. He at once understood that this did not mean he would become War Chief, but by maintaining peace and order and teaching brotherly love, returning justice for evil. He would become Grand Sachem of the Blackfoot Confederacy. A pair of calfskin leggings usually worn by Crowfoot were given to him by the "Buffalo Man" as token of the vision he had.

In Crowfoot's early manhood days he was the only competent Scout in any War Party he happened to be with. Being a man of fine physique and fearless but most important trustworthy. Very rarely Crowfoot was not picked to do the duties in which the very lives of the war-party depended on. Later, so strong was Crowfoot in the confidence of his elders they even let him plan preliminary actions in some of their warfare.

Then came the time when Crowfoot led his own War-parties. Although not many, it was quickly and widely known how strong he was for fair and square warfare. The following is most typical of his other warfares. Crowfoot, while in the leadership of a party came to a Band of Crees who were sound asleep. Crowfoot smelling the aroma of tobacco smoke in the air called out to them "Come on you plain smokers, let's have a smoke". When the Cree party awoke, war started, being actually started by the sleepers themselves. But Crowfoot's party soon overpowered them. After much reprimand, Crowfoot released them, much to the disgust of his followers who would have killed every one of them without awakening them. Another incident which shows his fearlessness was when Crowfoot chased his man into the bush where the main body of the enemy were in ambush. Because with the knowledge that the main body of the enemy being in that bush did not stop him from following his man into their midst. He killed his man and returned to his party unscathed.

Then came the time when he learned from the Hudson's Bay and other Traders that the future was to be different and that the country would be settled by the whites who would show them a different mode of living. And also told him that living would be made by tilling the soil and planting in it a certain kind of seed, meaning wheat. This seed would then grow into a plant which will bear the fruit which was to be made into the principal food that would make up the daily meal. He also was told that the buffalo would be so scarce that living could not be depended on by hunting them. Crowfoot quickly absorbed all this information. He at once started to tell his fellow tribesmen about it. But it would now seem that the incapacity of the Blackfeet to understand this at the time, was not due to mental disability but must be set down to the untamed spirit of the aborigine who would not then submit to a situation which, at the time, seemed to him a humiliation. He felt himself a warrior, not a drudge, and with the prairies and forest at hand. He was not prepared to give up the Bow & Arrow for the spade. But Crowfoot determined to make his people understand. He told his people that the old free life of the Prairie and hunting grounds would soon only be a memory in the tribal minds of the Indian.

It was during this period that a party of Blackfeet brought back with them a number of horses they had stolen from the Stoneys. Crowfoot hearing about it, proceeded to gather every animal and then he commissioned a party of Blackfeet under the leadership of Running Rabbit and other Chiefs, to take the horses and return them to their rightful owners, which they did. Another party of Blackfeet under the leadership of Eagle Ribs brought another bunch of horses taken from half-breeds. Crowfoot again gathered these horses, all except one, a Red Roan, gotten by Eagle Ribs. Crowfoot returned all the other horses to the owners and explained that he could not return the roan horse because it would create serious disturbance at home; Eagle Ribs having challenged Crowfoot to come and get the horse. Crowfoot knowing that this meant Clan warfare, compensated the owner of the roan horse himself, because, rather than create trouble, it was the only way to maintain peace. This was followed by more but in each case Crowfoot returned everything they took, including food and articles taken from white settlers.

More than once, Crowfoot was threatened with death by his own people. Some even attempted to kill him but he would just speak to them kindly and persuaded them by good words to calm themselves. In the more desperate cases, he would even give them something to calm them in order to retain peace. But in any case, where the guilty deserved punishment, he would severely reprimand them and would not hesitate to threaten them if they did not behave.

In the year 1877 the Blackfoot Confederacy encamped at the Blackfoot Crossing. All the Chiefs and prominent men of the Confederacy were invited to attend a Council wherein the Terms of the Treaty would be given. It was announced that a party of whites, headed by "Tall White Man" - Governor Laird, had arrived and had proposed a Treaty with the Great White Mother, who would if they signed the Treaty, take care of them. After hearing the proposals and the terms of the Treaty, some of the Chiefs declared that they would not sign the Treaty. Crowfoot only, asked for a few days to think it over, the rest of the Chiefs supported Crowfoot's decision. It was then really a matter of who would be the first Chief bold enough to sign, in view of the growing suspicion of the terms of the Treaty, by a large portion of the people of the Confederacy. After the second day, Crowfoot still in a state of partial indecision, was approached by Calf Eagle, who told Crowfoot that if he did not sign the Treaty, he would be the first one to sign. The second after this Crowfoot consented to sign the Treaty, whereupon the Governor's cannon was fired. This was a signal to the Confederacy that Crowfoot had signed the now famous Treaty No 7 in 1877. Crowfoot was Forty Seven years old when he signed the Treaty which made him famous.

In 1879 or 1880 or the second or third year after the signing of the Treaty, Crowfoot now Grand Sachem of the Blackfoot Confederacy proceeded on a goodwill tour of the Blackfoot Confederacy Nations. This tour extended to other tribes not in the Confederacy. After visiting the Blackfoot tribes, he first visited the Gros Ventres in Montana. Everywhere he went, he was met with great respect and hospitality until he visited the Assinibolia tribe of the Crees who were always hostile to the Blackfoot Confederacy. Crowfoot had with him in this party three Headmen - Lynx Shield, Calf Bull, and Three Bulls also a number of Blackfoot braves. Among the young braves a mention is made of one called Heavy Shoe, because he figures conspicuously when the party met the Assinibolians. Crowfoot and his headmen rode in carts while the rest rode horseback. When the party approached the Assinibolians' encampment, a party of Assinibolians came out to meet them. Every man in the Assinibolia party shook hands with Crowfoot and his party. But one Assinibolia on a buckskin horse stood apart from his tribesmen and would not come forward to meet Crowfoot until one of his tribesmen spoke to him in his own language. He then came forward and shook hands with Crowfoot. He had his head turned the other way while he shook hands with Crowfoot. Then he suddenly withdrew his hands and started to lash Crowfoot and Lynx Shield with his quirt. Lynx Shield's little finger was severed from his hand in the lashing. Heavy Shoe, the young Blackfoot brave, immediately rode forward and just as he was about to shoot the Assinibolian, Crowfoot jumped in front and put the palm of his hand on the muzzle of Heavy Shoe's rifle, and persuaded Heavy Shoe not to shoot. Crowfoot's party then proceeded into the Assinibolian encampment. It was here Crowfoot submitted himself to most of the worst humiliations that can be thrust upon a Chief. In spite of all this Crowfoot remained until he could establish peace and goodwill. In the mean time, Black Horse or Black Bear an Assinibolian Chief who was away came back and heard of the abuse of Crowfoot by the Assinibolian, Black Horse, and at once proceeded to punish all those responsible for the outrage. But this did not stop the growing dissension among the Blackfoot braves, where upon Crowfoot and Blackhorse announced that if anybody wanted war, they would have to fight them first. Then Blackhorse apologized to Crowfoot for the wrongs that he had suffered. Crowfoot then left and went back to his people. It was learned afterwards that the Gros Ventres attacked the Assinibolians in revenge for their treatment of Crowfoot.

Some time after Crowfoot arrived home, word was received from the North that a very grave situation existed up there for the Crees were fighting with the Great White Mother's soldiers. This was the outbreak known as the Riel Rebellion. Crowfoot immediately proceeded to find out the cause of the outbreak. He did not have far to go for refugees from the Crees were passing daily on their way to various destinations in the United States. From these he received various stories about the cause of the outbreak, each band of refugees having their own story. But Crowfoot noticed that the story from one band of refugees always contradicted the story of the previous band.

From these stories he gathered the information that the half-breeds had spread the rumor among the Crees that the White Mother's men were here to take away their land and would never fulfil the promises made to the Indians in their Treaty with them and that the white were here just to cheat them. It is now known that the object of these half-breeds was to stir the Indians into war with the white people and after much damage was done, they would demand the white people to come to terms with them instead of with the Indians. The Crees being ignorant of this were easily led to believe the stories told them by the half-breeds. The outcome of this Rebellion is well known as it appears in other books which deal with North Western History.

Crowfoot then went to the few white people who were near his Reserve. From these he learned a different story. He was told that the half breeds were responsible for the outbreak because the the Great White Mother would not recognize their claims to the land which she knew rightfully belonged to the Indians. In the meantime great excitement existed among the young Blackfoot braves who were equally divided in their opinions of the fighting in the North. Crowfoot calmly went around telling them about the real cause of the fighting. He did not have much difficulty in maintaining peace among his people for the general attitude of the Blackfeet towards the Crees in those days was one of bitter hostility. While travelling through his Reserve, Crowfoot received a message from his friend General Strange (AH PO PI) In this message AH PO PI wanted to know what attitude the Blackfeet had towards the fighting in the North and also wished to know if his friend Crowfoot were able to maintain peace and order. If he could not do so, He AH PO PI would come down and do so instead of proceeding North with his troops. Crowfoot replied to his friend AH PO PI not to be afraid and rest assured that the Blackfeet would not take sides with any party but would remain neutral. It may be said here that during the whole time of the Riel Rebellion the Detachment of the Royal North West Mounted Police at Gleichen were never called upon to do anything towards maintaining peace and order on the Reserve. The Remaining years of Crowfoot were uneventful but were spent in maintaining peace and order among his people until he died in the year 1890 being then sixty years of age.

As mentioned before, Crowfoot was born in 1830 . The following is the official Blackfoot Indian record of the years from 1830 to 1877, Treaty being signed in 1877. It is the official record used by the Blackfoot proper in tracing their years back to any certain year wanted. Important incidents are recorded and kept year after year. These will be briefly explained some cannot be explained briefly as they are very complicated and require a long story to explain them fully. In a case like this, the name only of the years will be given.

BLACKFOOT CALENDAR.

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1831. The year when "White Direct Head" famous warrior trailed his enemy and killed him. Crowfoot one year old.
1832. The Wolf Peace Treaty year. A Treaty made with an enemy tribe
1833. The year "Hunch Back" a warrior was killed.
1834. The year of the Sun Dance massacre.
1835. The year the Stars fell.
1836. The year "Sacred Messenger" warrior was killed.
1837. "White Direct year Head " year.
1838. The year of the Crow Victory Dances.
1839. The year of the Kootenay War.
1840. The Big Epidemic year.
1841. The year a Crow Indian Chief without a nose was killed.
1842. The year of the Big Denial. This concerned the whole tribe.
1843. Black Pis Kun year or Big Buffalo Trap year.
1844. When the Whites first shot the Indians.
1845. When the first generous white men arrived.
1846. The year "Did Not Run" warrior was killed.
1847. The year "Many Plumes" killed the man who was going to steal from him.
1848. The year "Wolf's Direction" warrior was scalped alive.
1849. The year "Big Crow Eagle" fainted.
1850. The year of the Sarcee war.
1851. The year of the war with the Crow "Gem".
1852. The year of the victory of the Snake Indians.
1853. The year "Prairie Chicken Old Man" warrior was killed.
1854. The year two tepees were conquered and taken.
1855. The year we ate dogs.
1856. ~~First White Treaty at Yellowstone river in Montana.~~ *Ann 1855*
at the junction of the Mussouri and Judith Rivers. J.W.S.
1857. The Slippery year - there being ice all over the prairies.
1858. The year of three Pis-kuns in one place. Pis-Kun meaning Buffalo or antelope traps.
1859. The year when the Pis-kuns were made out of rotten poles.
1860. The year "Pe Kai Ka" was killed. "Pe Kai Ka" Long foot warrior.
1861. "Old"Sun" senior died. Really pronounced "Sun Old Man.
1862. The year when the Crees attacked the Blackfeet at Elk Water.
1863. The year "old Man" a Cree half Blackfoot was killed.

1864. The year "Sleep on High" warrior was died.
1865. The year of the Black Epidemic.
1866. The year of the Three Pis Kuns or Buffalo traps.
1867. The year when the Crees trapped the Blackfeet in deep snow
and massacred them.
1868. The year "Many Shots" died.
1869. The year "Four Bears" white trader arrived.
1870. Another epidemic year.
1871. The year the Blackfeet moved over the Rockies.
1872. The year "Weasel Child" died from over-drinking rum.
1873. The year "Old Man Child" was stabbed by "White Pup".
1874. The year "Little Coyote" was killed by Running Rabbit.
1875. The year the Royal North West Mounted Police arrived. *It was 1873*
1876. Pe noo War killed a Cree Indian. The last incident of this
nature.
1877. The year of the Blackfoot Crossing Treaty.

In counting these years this would make "Crowfoot" 47 years
old at the time of the Treaty. He died 13 years later or
at the age of sixty.

ADDENDUM

There is no "Cold Band" tribe of the Blackfeet although for a time after the first white ~~settlers~~ traders arrived the Blackfeet drifted apart usually by Gens or Clans. Some drifted as far South as the Yellowstone River in Montana and some as far North as the Peace River. But even then they gathered for their annual Sun Lodge festival which was usually held along the Bow Valley and sometimes in the Red Deer valley. But they never remained apart long enough to be distinguished as individual tribes.

As for the earthen pots, it is understood that directly following the period called the "Dog Age" when they had stoneware that utensils hewn out of rock, there is frequent mention of earthenware pots although the old Indians now alive seem to have lost the formulae of how they were made. Some mention is made of Carboniferous age pots which were either found or kept from one generation to the next much like the Religious and Good Kuck symbols still in use by the old Indians today.

Many a well meaning writer of history of Indian life has done more harm than good by not knowing the real history and significance of these objects. He mentions them as Sacred objects made by the holder or owner.