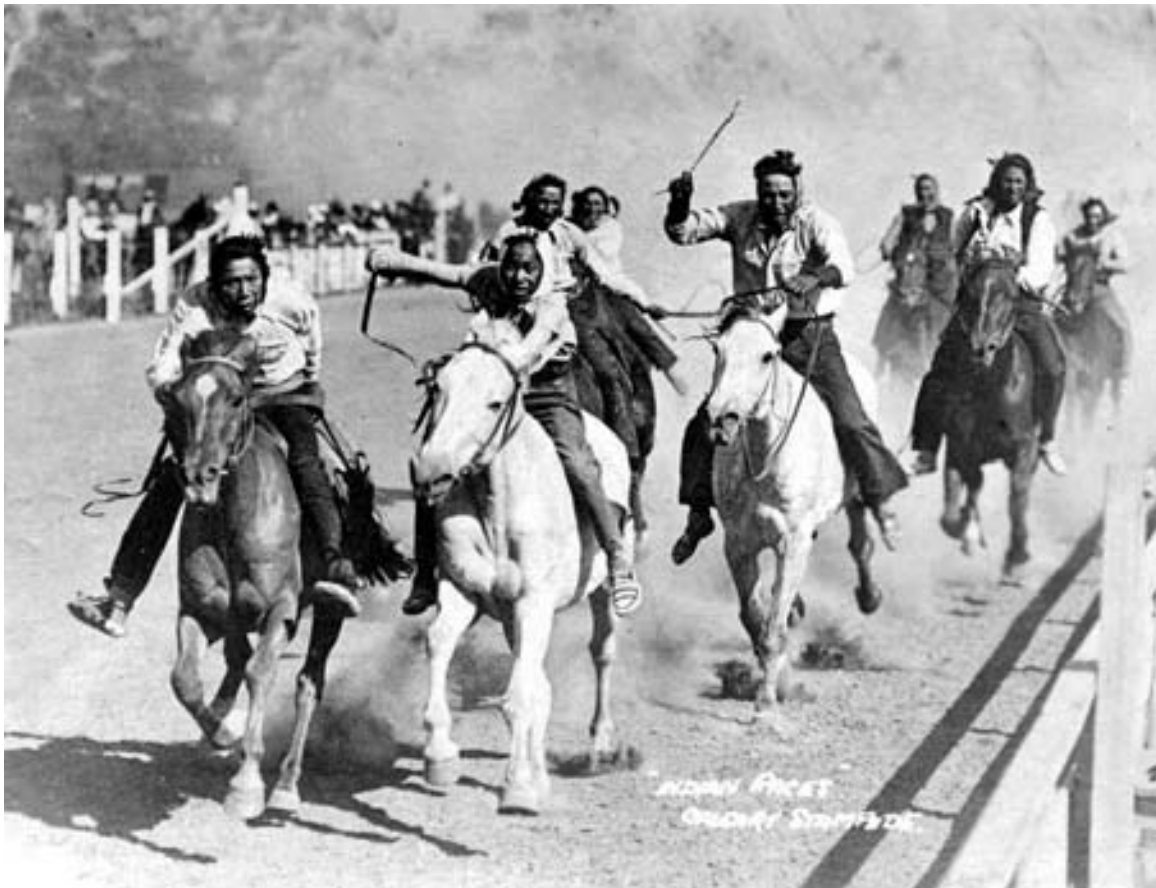


CHAPTER 3

The Indians and the Stampede

Hugh A. Dempsey



Indian races were a highlight of early Stampedes.

Indians¹ have been a part of Calgary's entertainment life ever since the town began in 1883. As soon as the first shops were opened on Stephen and Atlantic avenues, some of the merchants began to sponsor dances in front of their stores to attract customers. Indians gathered in a circle and performed various types of dances, commonly called "grub dances" or "tea dances." Afterwards they were given food by the store owner. In 1885, when eastern troops were stationed in the town during the Riel Rebellion, at least one dance was held. According to a reporter, "There was a grand pow-wow of thirty Sarcees to-day in front of the fort. The 9th battalion and Col. Smith's men of the Winnipeg Light Infantry were drawn up in front to enable the men to see the war dance."²

The relationship between the Indians and townspeople during the 1880s was one that was kept at arms' length. The Indians – particularly the Sarcees – were welcome at treaty time when they came to spend their money or at any time when they had legitimate business to conduct. Those who simply camped near town were periodically warned away by the police and sent back to their reserves. The result was that communication was limited.

The only exceptions were in the fields of sports and showmanship. Not only did the Sarcees and Blackfoot swarm into town if there was some holiday, but a few also competed actively in such events as foot and horse racing. For example, a Blackfoot named Little Plume began winning foot races in Calgary in 1883 and was sent as far as Winnipeg by local gamblers. In 1886 another Blackfoot runner named Deerfoot started his impressive career in Calgary, which gave him everlasting fame.³

In 1884 the idea of holding an annual fall fair resulted in the formation of the Calgary and District Agricultural Society. In 1886 the first fair was held and included "a few Indian and cowboy horse races thrown in for good measure."⁴ Over the next several years, Indian races were part of the program, although these were considered simply as a form of amusement for the crowd rather than a sport. For example, in 1894 the *Calgary Herald* commented, "An Indian pony race was the next and as usual set the occupants of the grand stand into a fit of laughter. The race was to the half mile post then turn and come back, and it furnished lots of fun for the sports loving people."⁵ And a few years later, "This race was well contested and brightened up the crowd. The best horse won. The owner's name was not furnished in the papers. If translated perhaps it would not have sounded parliamentary."⁶

By the end of the 1890s the role of the Indians began to change due to an increasing town population and a desire to broaden the fair's program

beyond horse racing and agricultural exhibits. In 1899 the Calgary Agricultural Society became the Inter-Western Pacific Exhibition and the date of the fair was moved from autumn to mid-summer. In 1900 a large parade of mounted Indians took place in front of the grandstand in honour of a visit by Territorial Lieutenant-Governor A.E. Forget. A year later a public parade was held at the opening of the exhibition. The *Albertan* reported the presence of Stoney, Blackfoot, and Sarcee Indians.

They were there in tens and hundreds in every conceivable description of raiment and combination of colors, except those who were color blind, and they developed their eccentricity by appearing with as little clothing as was conducive to their liberty in a civilized community. Truly the exhibition company is to be congratulated for their round up of these natives of the plains. Why not offer prizes for the best dressed Indian, the handsomest squaw, the fattest papoose, and the largest family of papooses? This would further increase the interest the Indians take in affairs of this kind.⁷

While the exhibitions were organized for the entertainment of the townspeople, the Indians thoroughly enjoyed the chance to participate. They performed social dances and war dances; had tug-of-war contests, races, and other athletic events; showed off their finery; and visited friends from other reserves. The trip to the fair gave them an opportunity to relieve the monotony of reservation life, to get away from the boredom of farming and gardening, and to relive some of the exciting days of the past.

A few years later, a reporter recalled these visits:

The [Indians] used to camp on what was then the outskirts of the town. The favorite camping place of the Sarcee Indians was the plateau above Twentieth or Royal avenue, where some of the finest residences of the city now stand. The Stoney tribe used to occupy a vast empty space between Shaganappi and Fourteenth street west. Others were to be found camped on the outskirts of the town in other directions. They came in thousands and ranged their tented towns in more or less systematic order.

Small, very dirty children and thousands of dogs seemed to be the chief inhabitants of these Indian encampments....Calgary's white population used to visit these encampments in the evenings by the hundreds. Many were the hard bargains driven by the untutored redskin with a white brother newly arrived from the east for some trifling souvenir. It is the echo of this past that the Stampede brings to Calgary.⁸

One of the first to publicly complain about Indian participation in the Calgary fair was Sarcee missionary Henry Gibbon Stocken. In 1903 the Anglican clergyman railed against the "baneful...influence of such exhibitions upon their morals"⁹ and wanted the fair boycotted. His letter to the editor was responded to by Crispin E. Smith, one of the parade marshals. "Why should the poor red man have all the amusement taken out of his life?" he asked. "Is a tug of war demoralizing? Is a foot race wicked? Is a horse race as ridden by Indians not as moral as other races?"¹⁰

After that exchange of letters, matters settled down for the next five years, even though Indians appeared to be visiting or participating in the fair in increasing numbers. This was apparent in 1908 when Calgary became the one city in Canada chosen as the site for the Dominion Exhibition. As a result, the Exhibition Board went all out in planning the biggest celebration yet. The parade and Indian participation were organized by the Rev. John McDougall and Crispin Smith. As stated by the *Herald*, the Indians were the hit of the parade:

Indians from every tribe in Alberta were out in the old trappings of their bygone life on the open prairies and hills. Clad in skins, tanned with the fur on and off, with their old rifles thrown over their shoulders and powder horn and bullet pouch slung by their sides, leading their huskies packed for the trail. Following the Indians on foot came a war party under two chiefs arrayed in their great war bonnets, hung with feathers and beads and buckskin fringe, painted into hideous nightmare and riding after the most approved Indian fashion, on a pad or bareback, guiding their horses by the thong through the mouth.

Following the chiefs came the braves stripped to the waist, their bodies covered with red and yellow ochre and their hands holding spears, bows and rifles.

In the rear of the war party came the camp following of squaws and paposes on horseback and with travois and following these came four old trail-worn braves, clad in a smothering heap of furs, carrying the full paraphernalia of the Indian chase and bent with years.

Rev. John and Mrs. McDougall rode on horseback behind their dusky charges.¹¹

In the 1890s pressure had been applied to suppress the Sun Dance and other religious activities and attempts were made to replace them with local sports events. After the turn of the century, no distinction was made between religious and secular events. If they harkened to the past, they were to be discouraged. In 1900 Blackfoot Indian Agent G.H. Wheatley had complained that fairs exposed his wards to temptation and degradation.

Until 1908, the involvement of Indians in fairs and parades had been only a minor irritation to officers of the Indian Department, but the Dominion Exhibition spectacular emphasized all those features that the Indian agents were trying to discourage. There was nothing in the Indian Act that specifically prevented Indians from going to fairs, but the “feathers and war paint” presentation contrasted sharply with the government’s attempt to promote farming and to encourage Indians to give up their relics and practices of the past.

One of the men who launched a long and aggressive campaign against Indian participation in fairs was J.A. Markle, inspector of Indian Agencies for Alberta. As far as he was concerned, the fairs occurred when the government wanted the Indians to be busy haying or working in their fields. He also saw the events as an encouragement for Indians to retain old customs which, in his opinion, had no place in the new world which the government had laid out for them. His negative remarks brought support from some churches and moral reform leagues that sided with the Indian Department, while local boards of trade, newspapers, and local promoters resented the interference. Public opinion was divided; some saw Indian participation in parades and fairs as an embarrassing reminder that these people still existed, while others were impressed by their costumes, horsemanship, and unique culture.

One of the strongest supporters of Indian participation in fairs was the Rev. John McDougall, Methodist missionary on the Stoney Reserve. In 1908 he not only endorsed the idea of Indians going to Calgary, but also visited the various reserves to encourage them to go. However, he had no support from Methodist headquarters in Toronto, where the Committee on Temperance and Moral Reform went on record as being “unalterably opposed to taking Indians from reservations and giving exhibitions at Western fairs and introducing the practices formerly associated with pagan customs.”¹²

The Calgary Exhibition ignored complaints and in 1909 another six hundred Indians joined in “The Greatest Spectacle in the History of the West.”¹³ Inspector Markle was angry about their participation and the fact that some newspapers were now describing Indians as “degenerate remnants of a noble race” and painting them as beggars and people without dignity.¹⁴

Even the 1908 “spectacle” was overshadowed by events of 1910, when the fair included a re-enactment of the signing of Treaty Seven, organized as a five-act play and including some two thousand Indians. Inspector Markle lodged an official complaint with Ottawa, charging that the Calgary Exhibition was doing irreparable harm to the Indians. He said that the Peigans had abandoned their fields, predicted a crop failure, and said that women were being demeaned by being referred to as “squaws.”¹⁵

As the dispute between Markle and McDougall hit the southern Alberta press, public attitudes gradually shifted to the government’s viewpoint. Even the *Calgary Albertan*, which had taken a strong stand on Indian participation, changed its tune. “The attraction is a good one,” it stated, “but if it is harmful, or if the people mostly in active charge of the Indians believe that it is harmful it would not do to take such a risk.”¹⁶ McDougall responded sadly, “I do not want to see with the eyes of Mr. Markle or the Indian Commissioner on this question. I would not use the lenses of their thought on this matter, not by any means. They view the Indian not as a fellow man, a being just as capable as themselves in distinguishing between right and wrong, but as an inferior to be treated as a child.”¹⁷

After getting reports from Indian agents and hearing Markle’s complaints, Indian Department Secretary J.D. McLean sent a letter to the Calgary Exhibition early in 1911, asking it to stop using Indians as its featured attraction. E.L. Richardson of the Exhibition company disagreed with the implications of the letter, saying that Indians “are not slaves and have the same right to attend an exhibition as anyone else.”¹⁸ However, the adverse publicity must have taken effect, for in the summer of 1912, the only native event featured was Indian pony races.¹⁹

This would seem to be an inopportune time for Guy Weadick and his local promoter, H.C. McMullen, to plan a huge one-time-only Stampede that would be quite separate from the annual Calgary fair. They already had received word that the Duke and Duchess of Connaught would attend the show, and they wanted the Indians there as well. Accordingly, in May 1912 Calgary Mayor J.W. Mitchell wrote to the Indian Department asking for permission to invite Indians to participate. "I am...aware of the fact," he said, "that the Department of Indian Affairs does not look with any degree of favour upon cities encouraging them to leave their reserves and come to the cities for celebrations [but] I can safely assure you that no unseemly entertainment will be indulged in which would have a tendency to excite or degrade the Indians."²⁰

Calgary officials believed they had a good argument in that a Royal Visit would coincide with the Stampede. Mayor Mitchell pointed out that Indians had been a main feature during the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York in 1901.

The immediate response from the bureaucrats was negative. Western Chief Inspector Glen Campbell repeated the stand that it was hard to keep the Indian farmers at work with haying and harvest, and that the fairs themselves were demoralizing. He suggested to Ottawa that the Duke of Connaught, who was Canada's governor general, be encouraged to tell the Indians to stay on their reserves. However, the viceregal monarch would not be drawn into the fray. In fact, his aide was quite sarcastic when he observed that,

...the chief objection to the Indian display is that it stultifies the work of the Emigration Department who spend much time in [telling] settlers that there is no such thing as an Indian in Canada. The crops and hay-fields will not take much hurt from a few days neglect in mid-October, and if the missionaries have not got better hold on the Indians by now, then...I do not suppose they ever will.²¹

Thwarted by the governor-general, the Indian Department nevertheless sent a notice to all its agents in southern Alberta, informing them that "it has been decided that it will not be advisable to allow Indians of your Agency to take part in the Frontier Days celebration...."²² However, when the Blackfoot Indian agent passed the information along to the Mounted Police, any hope of any co-operation from them was quashed. "Some Indians will inevitably leave the Reserve," commented R. Burton Deane, Mounted Police

superintendent in Calgary. “They cannot lawfully be prevented by force from doing so, nor when they have left the Reserve, can they be lawfully coerced to return.”²³

When Weadick learned that the Indians would be discouraged from attending the Stampede, he turned to political influences. First, Sir James Lougheed, a Calgarian and member of the federal cabinet, appealed directly to the Hon. Robert Rogers, who was the superintendent-general of Indian Affairs, asking him to overrule his civil servants. This was followed by a note from R.B. Bennett, member of Parliament and later the prime minister of Canada, and a telegram from the Hon. Francis Cochrane, minister of Railways and Canals. The pressure was too great for Rogers to ignore. On August 8, less than a month before the Stampede, he announced that not only would the government withdraw any objections, but it also would actively assist in bringing Indians to the Calgary Stampede. Chief Inspector Glen Campbell was placed in charge of the task and toured each reserve to gain the co-operation of reluctant Indian agents.



Four members of the Treaty 7 First Nations at the 1912 Stampede.

Indian scouts were engaged to be in Calgary to patrol the camps; chiefs and councils were invited to meet the governor general; and Indians were told they could take part in the parade, sign up for the rodeo events, or simply go as spectators. It was a complete about-face for the federal authorities.

The Methodist Church was appalled at the decision. Writing from Toronto, its general secretary complained:

I am informed that...permitting these Indians to take part in the Stampede at Calgary will result in hundreds of acres of grain being neglected. Besides, there is all the degrading, disgusting immorality which is so openly practised upon these Indians, who are wards of the Government, by immoral and vicious white men. Many of the Indians...are ruined by these parades that they are never restored to the position and character they formerly held.²⁴

But the decision was made, and there was no turning back. The delighted Indians flocked to Calgary by the hundreds on September 2. Dozens of men and women brought their finest costumes and horse gear for the parade and put on a delightful show. The Toronto *Globe* commented that the “gorgeous display of paint, beads and colored blankets was made by the six tribes of Indians who formed the bulk of the parade, and lent a historic picturesqueness to the modern city street with its thousands of thronging spectators.”²⁵

During the six-day event, the Indians were everywhere. Their teepees were located next to replicas of a Hudson’s Bay Company post and a whiskey fort, and they offered daily dances and joined in parades. At the first grandstand performance, they put on a spectacular show.

Yelling and brandishing rifles, lances and shields, the red men galloped into the arena. Time and time again they circled the fence at the gallop, crossing and recrossing, twisting, turning and shooting in all directions, finally pulling up their war ponies with a flourish directly in front of the three tom tom players in the centre of the area. Then they dismounted and to the steady beat of the tom tom and the weird chant of the squaws, a regular war dance was indulged in.²⁶

In rodeo, the most outstanding competitor was Tom Three Persons, from the Blood Reserve, who won the bucking horse championship and became the only Canadian to reach the finals. Others took part in the Indian races, relay races, and special events. For example, winning the one-mile bareback wild horse race was a Stoney named David, while in the half-mile, Philip Big Swan, Joe Three Suns, and Tom Spotted Bull were the top three.

Officials estimated that an impressive eighteen hundred Indians had attended the six-day Stampede, yet there had only been seven arrests under the Indian Act – all for liquor offenses – during the entire period. This caused an Indian Department official to comment that “if the white men who were in Calgary during that week had been under the same [liquor] regulation... there would not have been jails enough in Canada to hold them.”²⁷

When it was over, the Indians went home happy and encouraged by the government’s apparent willingness to co-operate, but the 1912 decision had been politically influenced and in no way affected the intransigence of the bureaucrats. In fact, right after the Stampede, Inspector Markle unleashed a diatribe against the fair. “Somebody made about \$50,000 out of the Calgary Stampede,” he said. “Yes, somebody made a pretty big thing out of that, and it was we who supplied material for the show. It is futile to attempt to raise Indians and to lower them at the same time.”²⁸ His attitude was obvious a year later when the Indian Department refused to assist Guy Weadick when he wanted to take some southern Alberta Indians to the Winnipeg Stampede. Not only did it refuse, but in 1914 Ottawa officials revised the Indian Act to make such participation in fairs and parades illegal unless permission was given by the local Indian agent. The Act stated,

Any Indian in the province of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, or British Columbia, or in the Territories who participates in any Indian dance outside the bounds of his own reserve, or who participates in any show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant without the consent of the Superintendent General [Minister] or his authorized agent, and any person who induces or employs any Indian to take part in such dance, show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant, or induces any Indian to leave his reserve or employs any Indian for such a purpose, whether the dance, show, exhibition, stampede or pageant has taken place or not, shall on summary conviction be liable to a penalty not exceeding twenty-five dollars, or to imprisonment for one month, or to both penalty and imprisonment.²⁹

The impact on the Calgary Exhibition was immediate and absolute. Indians no longer figured in the parades, and if they attended as spectators, the fact went unnoticed in the Calgary press. The only significant reference to

Indians between 1914 and 1919 was an account of Indian horse races at the fair in 1916.³⁰

In 1919 promoter Guy Weadick was back in Calgary, this time to put on a Victory Stampede marking the end of the First World War. Like the 1912 extravaganza, it was not a part of the Calgary Exhibition but was a one-time celebration. Weadick's plans included inviting the continent's best cowboys as well as the Indians from southern Alberta. When confronted with federal regulations banning Indian participation, he did not simply acquiesce, as the Calgary Exhibition authorities had done, but looked for ways to get around the law or, if necessary, to merely ignore it. Presumably he assumed that if a thousand Indians showed up, the government would be hard pressed to fine them all, and if Weadick himself was charged, the penalty was only twenty-five dollars.

In the end, Weadick's plan was a simple one. Indians would not be officially invited, but if they showed up they would be free to participate. At the same time, the Stampede would make a concession to the Indian Department by praising the advancement of native people. As Weadick explained to the press, "The Indians will not be allowed as a tribe or tribes to take part in the Stampede, but individually they wish to be present, as it will be a spectacle that which there is none dearer to them."³¹ In another press release, the Stampede stated, "Although they will not officially take part in the Stampede, yet their appearance in the coming celebration is necessary to make the event a complete success, as no showing where the wild life of the west is depicted would be complete unless they were present."³²

To mollify the Indian Department, the Stampede added a few comments about the Sarcees who, "under Big Belly's leadership and the competent direction of federal government's officials, including the agent for the Sarcees, William Gordon, have taken to agriculture of late years and are doing very well. They have been fitted out with implements, work horses and all the other requisites to modern farming and their progress has been very satisfactory." Yet Weadick could not resist adding a dig, saying that "they will one day be in position to solve their own problems fairly well without extraneous assistance."³³

However, all pretence of the Stampede's passive involvement was discarded once the Indians were on the scene. "The encampment of Indians which has been organized by the Stampede management at Victoria park," said the *Herald*, "lends to the atmosphere of the western festivities. Here we have some of the best known chiefs in western Canada, living under their own canvas, with their wives, children, horses, dogs and other odd members of the retinue in attendance."³⁴ Among those identified from the Blackfoot were

head chief Yellow Horse, interpreter Joe Calf Child, Boy Chief, Three Suns, Duck Chief, and White Headed Chief. From the Sarcees came head chief Big Belly, Jim Starlight, Big Crow, Big Knife, and Fox Tail. From the Bloods came One Spot and Black Plume. No reference was made to either Stoneys or Peigans being in attendance, but virtually all leaders of the Blackfoot and Sarcee were on hand.

In the opening parade, Guy Weadick was at the front, with Yellow Horse at his side. Following them was the large contingent of Indians, some on horseback and some afoot. After them rode the Mounted Police, old timers, cowboys, and floats. "The Indians were the feature which attracted the greatest attention during the march through the city," said a reporter. "The chiefs were attired in their best regalia, and all carried their various badges of office." The reporter added that "without them it would have been pretty tame."³⁵

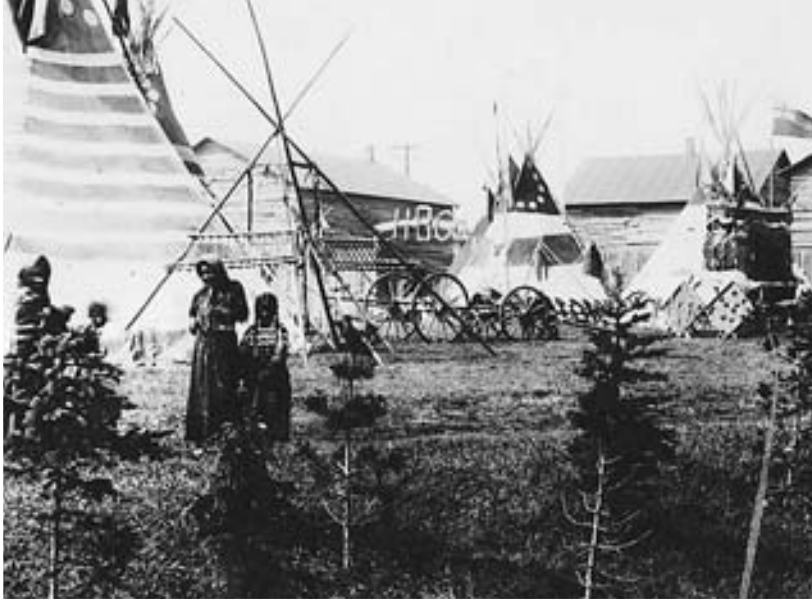
The Victory Stampede drew tremendous crowds, but this had no apparent effect upon the Calgary Exhibition's decision to abide by the government regulations and not to press for Indian participation. Instead, the fairs of 1920, 1921, and 1922 continued to feature horse racing and agricultural displays. The attendance was dismal.

Seeking a solution to the lagging interest in the fair, the Exhibition Board decided to add the highly successful Stampede to the program. Organized under the direction of Guy Weadick, it immediately added cowboys, rodeo events, a buffalo barbeque, and Indians to the 1923 show. E.L. Richardson contacted Minister of the Interior Charles Stewart, who "provided 5 buffalo [for the barbeque] and 3 buffalo hides, and granted permission for the Indians to take part in the celebration."³⁶

The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede went all out to promote the show. For days prior to the event, tipis were pitched on the lawn beside the CPR station and Indians in full regalia posed for photographs on the station platform. Inside the fairgrounds, some sixty tipis were pitched beside the replica of a Hudson's Bay Company store, and more than seven hundred Indians were part of the show. On parade day, "Stoney, Sarcees, Peigans and Blackfeet...made the air resound with their weird and wonderful war songs."³⁷

With apparent approval from the Indian Department, the Stampede continued its Indian and cowboy theme into 1924 in a presentation that was even larger than that of the previous year. Exhibits of beadwork were on display under the grandstand, prizes were given for best-dressed Indians, and the evenings featured "Indian pony, teepee Travois, and squaw races."³⁸

But the problems with the Indian Department were not over. While its former nemesis, James Markle, was now arranging land surrenders, the



A view of the Indian Village during the 1912 Stampede.

Stampede now had to cope with W.M. Graham, who had recently been appointed Indian commissioner for the prairie provinces. He was even more autocratic than Markle and wielded a greater amount of power. Throughout his career he was unalterably opposed to native religious ceremonies, dances, and other activities that he believed were a hindrance to progress. Stated his biographer, “In 1909 he emphasized to Department Secretary J.D. McLean that religious dances should not be allowed under any circumstances. Not only did he feel that such activities would ‘demoralize’ the Indians but on a practical level they would waste time better spent on agricultural pursuits.”³⁹

In 1925, according to historian James Gray, Graham denied permission for Indians to participate in the Stampede. As Gray notes,

the edict sent panic shock waves through Victoria Park. This was the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the NWMP and the future site of Calgary. That was to be the theme of the 1925 exhibition. The historical pageant which was organized in cooperation with the parade was the most ambitious ever attempted. In addition the Mounties

brought in their musical ride and the countryside was combed for surviving members of the Great Trek of 1874–75. To try to stage such a celebration without Indian involvement was unthinkable.⁴⁰

A compromise was eventually reached, as indicated by the Stampede's 1925 Annual Report: "Through the cooperation of Mr. W.M. Graham, Indian Commissioner, an arrangement was made to have a number of Indians camped on the grounds and take part in the pageant; so as to interfere as little as possible with work on the Indian reservations, Mr. Graham arranged to have only the older Indians, who as a matter of fact are most interesting from a tourist standpoint, participate in the festivities."⁴¹ Reports of the fair, however, indicate that in the parade, the Indians "were there in hundreds – a motley, whooping, crew, proudly sporting every clashing color of the spectrum."⁴²

The near-boycott continued for as long as Graham remained commissioner. For example, the 1926 Annual Report of the Stampede noted that "Mr. Graham insists that only a certain number come from each reserve to camp on the grounds and only such Indians as are unfit to work on the land are included among this number."⁴³ The press made reference to a diminished representation and a list of prize winners includes mostly elders. Awards for best dressed and best travois went to the Stoneys Hector and Mrs. George Crawler, Jonas Rider, and Mrs. Eliza Hunter; the Sarcees Big Knife, Joe Big Plume, Mrs. Eagle Plume, Mrs. Old Sarcee, and Mrs. Dick Starlight; and the Blackfoot White Headed Chief, Duck Chief, Mrs. Bear Chief, and Mrs. Spring Chief.⁴⁴

Subsequent reports from 1927 to 1932 continued to thank the Indian commissioner and agents for their cooperation. Finally, after a bitter bureaucratic fight with Deputy Superintendent-General Duncan Campbell Scott, Graham abruptly retired as commissioner late in 1932. He was replaced by Howard W. McGill, who chose to delegate responsibilities for such matters as fairs to M. Christianson, regional director for Alberta, whose office was in Calgary.

Suddenly the sun began to shine on the Calgary Stampede. Unlike Graham and Markle, Christianson had no objection to Indian participation in fairs and other events. Although the prohibitive regulations were still on the books, Christianson had full authority to grant permission, and he did so. A short time later, he joined the Exhibition and Stampede Board as a director, becoming even more intimately involved with the activities of the natives in the Stampede. By the time he left office several years later, Indian participation in the Calgary Stampede was an established tradition.

Meanwhile, Indian participation in rodeo had been an entirely different matter. There seems to have been no objection to native involvement in Indian races, or even in professional rodeo events. Apparently the lack of cultural or religious significance of rodeo superseded any government objection to young athletic men leaving their reserves during farming season. Similarly, the young men themselves usually remained outside the sphere of the Indian Village. They competed with white cowboys and usually lived with them in or around the barns. Their dress was that of cowboys, not Indians, and their identity as native was secondary to that as cowboys. Marilyn Burgess sees this separation of Indian and rodeo events at the Calgary Stampede as a division between the prehistoric past and the historical past. “These rodeo performances produce the historical past of white colonization,” she writes, “while relegating Native meanings of the land to an inaccessible pre-history, of little relevance to the modern nation.”⁴⁵

From the 1920s through to the 1950s, many Indians took top titles at the Stampede. Among them was two-time calf roping champion Pete Bruised Head, steer decorating champion Jimmy Wells, King Bearspaw, Johnny Left Hand, Bill McLean, Fred Gladstone, Jim Spotted Eagle, and others.⁴⁶



Pete Bruised Head
with trophy, 1927

During the 1930s the Stampede established routines that became part of the Indian Village program. The three tribes – Stoney, Blackfoot, and Sarcee – took the lead in opening day parades, travelling separately and sometimes interspersed with brass bands. Each day thereafter, Indians from a different

tribe paraded to the downtown area, where they performed dances and sometimes took up collections from the spectators. At the village, a volunteer group of non-Indian judges inspected each tipi and gave awards for the best. Once a day, two or three tipis were open for inspection by the public, a bowl placed at the entrance of each to receive donations. Over the years, various activities came and went – dancing; meat cutting competitions; tipi raising; children’s races; hand games; demonstrations of cooking, tanning, and beading; flag raising with honouring songs; Sunday church services; and others. Those involved in midfield events participated in buffalo riding, tug-of-war, pony racing, travois racing, rawhide racing, and various re-enactments.

The number of tipis in the village was limited to ten each from the three tribes. In 1962, during the fiftieth anniversary of the Stampede, the Bloods and Peigans were added to the encampment.⁴⁷ But this “official” camp was just a faction of the entire Indian attendance at the fair. Others came for pure entertainment, just as other Albertans enjoyed the show.

Methods of reaching the Stampede changed over the years. Although some Indians owned automobiles and trucks in the 1930s and 1940s, the preferred method of travelling for many years was by horse and wagon. For example, the *Calgary Herald* noted in 1944:

Along the Banff highway this morning, scores of wagons, saddle horses and ponies could be seen as the Stony Indian contingent headed for the Indian village at the stampede grounds. Some will arrive now, others Sunday morning.... The Sarcees were also packing up while east of Calgary hundreds of Blackfoot Indian wagons could be seen heading for Calgary.⁴⁸

A gradual change in transportation methods became evident in the post-war period, as noted by this comment in 1948: “East and west of Calgary, long lines of Indian wagons could be seen on the trails this morning as Blackfoot Indians from the Gleichen reserve and Stony from the Morley reserve made an early start for their overland haul to Calgary....Some of the wealthier braves were travelling in automobiles.”⁴⁹

By the 1950s the tide had shifted in favour of motor vehicles as the main form of transportation. In 1953 reports were that some Blackfoot “will make the 79 miles driving with horses, while some will come in cars and trucks.”⁵⁰ Ben Calf Robe preferred horses, travelling as far as Langdon the first night and reaching the Stampede grounds the following day. His distinctive tipi,

showing a wolf attacking a buffalo, was usually the first one erected in the village. By the 1980s the use of trucks was so commonplace that a number of Blackfoot led by Leo Pretty Young Man “re-enacted” the horse and wagon trip with a Stampede Trail Ride from the reserve to the village. “This ride is very important to our people,” Pretty Young Man told the press. “For me it brings back the past days, of the way things used to be. In those days our traditions and our culture were very sacred things; this ride can give other people an understanding of that.”⁵¹

When they arrived in Calgary, those who were part of the official village went to the village site at the northwest entrance to the grounds. The camp was in a low-lying area with a high fence to the north, show buildings to the west, barns to the east, and the midway to the south. The camp was split by a row of trees, with the Sarcees on one side and the Blackfoot and Stoney camps to the east. In this latter area was a stage built beneath a huge tree which was called the Sun Tree. At one time on the eastern edge of the village were a Mounted Police detachment and a replica of a trading post.

The pitching of tipis on the day before the Stampede was popular entertainment for onlookers. “Hundreds of curious Calgarians will watch the Indians raise their tipis,” said a reporter in 1949, “with old women of the tribe in charge of the proceedings. This is one of the few occasions when male members of the tribe take orders from the womenfolk.”⁵² As an example, Mrs. Maggie Gunny Crow, an 87-year-old Blackfoot, was seen “giving her grandson some pointers on setting up their tepee.”⁵³

For those who were not part of the camp, there were various places where tents could be pitched. These, of course, changed as the city grew. In the earlier period, the Stoneys were at Shaganappi, the Sarcees in the Mission district, and the Blackfoot across the Bow near the present Memorial Drive and Deerfoot Trail. One man recalled camping across the river and taking a streetcar to go to the grounds during the 1930s.⁵⁴

By the 1940s the Blackfoot tribes had moved to the valley south of the Stampede grounds to an area that extended all the way to the present Manchester district. At the north of the settlement was the Sunshine Auto Court. In 1942 artist Mildred Valley Thornton went in search of Crowfoot’s daughter, who was in one of the camps. She wrote, “A half-hour ride took me to the auto camp, but where were the Indians? I could see a tepee or two on the hill overlooking the camp so, laden with my painting kit, I started in that direction. When I reached the heights a bewildering panorama met my eyes. Far and near were tents, not tepees.”⁵⁵ Undismayed, she began walking south. Over the first hill she came to one camp, then to another, but did

not find her subject. She walked through herds of horses in a coulee and at the next hill she was given directions. After passing another camp with an overabundance of noisy dogs, she finally found her subject on a high hill at the southern extremity of the camps. As a reporter stated, "Hundreds of Indians...pitched tents on the hills flanking the Macleod Trail south of the AMA auto camp."⁵⁶ However, by 1951 the Manchester area was becoming so built up that the Indians were obliged to move back to their old location across the Bow. It was not a desirable site but remained in use until motor vehicles turned Stampede visits into day trips.

For those living on the grounds, life was a flurry of activity from the time they arrived. They were paid for bringing their camp gear, given a corral for their horses, issued rations, and expected to adhere to the rules of the village. Although these varied over the years, the list for 1961 is a good example. Owners were required to have a painted tipi and all the furnishings. If they left before the end of the show, they would not be invited back. They had to be prepared to take part in parades, downtown shows, and camp activities. Abuse of alcohol or drugs could result in dismissal from the camp. The right to be a tipi owner could be inherited.⁵⁷

The village at the entrance to the grounds had its drawbacks. It was located beside the midway, making it hard for parents to keep track of their children and even harder to sleep at night. Also, the area was wide open, so tipi owners were often pestered by drunks and troublemakers. The undesirable location was discussed on a number of occasions, but nothing was done.

Then in 1950 a heavy downpour caused flooding in the camp. James Gray noted,

The area where the Indian village was located was a notorious low spot that had once been a sunken garden. By the middle of the week some of the teepees were standing in a foot of water and their occupants had to be moved into the Arena to dry out.⁵⁸

A year later there was another flood, particularly in the low-lying area occupied by the Blackfoot. The damage again was extensive. In 1963 I noted in my diary, "there was a terrible thunderstorm which raged for most of the night. It was clear by morning but the Indians were late [for parade judging] because the rain had soaked the camps."⁵⁹ Two years later, on July 11, 1965, I wrote, "A heavy downpour in the late afternoon flooded out the Peigans and caused damage to the other lodges."⁶⁰ This downpour resulted in the loss of more

priceless costumes and artifacts. When my wife and I visited the camp that evening, soggy buffalo robes, damaged buckskin dresses, and other objects had been dragged outside the tipis in an attempt to save them. When immediate settlement was not forthcoming, some angry tipi dwellers formed the United Indian Committee to seek compensation. Leonard Crane, Daisy Crowchild's son, said damage ranged from \$150 to \$700 but implied the Stampede was offering as little as \$50. The Stampede Board claimed Crane's group had no standing and it would deal only with individuals.⁶¹ In the end, some sort of settlement was reached and the United Indian Committee dissolved.

Not until 1974 was the problem completely resolved when the village was moved to a new site at the south end of the grounds, across the Elbow River. It offered excellent drainage, and the fenced area provided security and nighttime protection for members of the camp.⁶²

Flooding was not the only problem facing the Stampede Board over the years. There were frequent complaints about the amount of money received, many tipi owners indicating that it actually cost them money to come to the Stampede. Others complained about the rations and the way they were distributed. In 1947 tipi owners submitted a petition outlining the contributions they were making to the success of the Stampede and seeking more money, but nothing came of it.⁶³

In 1950 the Board reacted to Indian complaints about drunks bothering tipi owners and tourists by cancelling free admission to all Indians other than tipi owners and their families. Until this time, Indians could enter the grounds simply by showing their treaty cards. The Stoney Indians were so angry about the ruling that they boycotted the 1950 Stampede. Coincidentally, the Stampede that year was subjected to a terrific rain and hail storm, giving rise to the story that the tribe had put on a "rain dance."⁶⁴ Late in the year, a meeting was held with the Stoneys, who denied the stories. Tom Kaquitts said the rains were not caused by the Indians, "but came from someone above, far over the blue mountains."⁶⁵ Regardless of their guilt or innocence, no change was made in the admittance ruling. The only concession was to provide the tipi owners with large blocks of day passes that they could give to their friends.

James Gray claims the boycott resulted in the Stampede Board finally waking up to the need for changes. He wrote,

The prize list for all Indian events was gone over and the budget doubled. Moreover the practice was abandoned of dumping the Indians' food into flour sacks, a practice that

went back to the way in which starving Indians were given famine relief in the first days of the North West Mounted Police. In its place a system was installed for providing the Indians with specially prepared and packaged hampers containing food that made for a varied and balanced diet.⁶⁶

In 1961 rations consisted of beef, tea, sugar, bread, jam, and potatoes.⁶⁷

Other problems plagued the Stampede Committee in the 1960s and 1970s as dissatisfaction over money and Indians' use of the press to publicize their concerns made these matters a public issue. Complaints over insufficient payments for coming to the Stampede had been expressed for years, but they seldom got beyond the grounds. In 1961, however, the head chief of the Blackfoot, Clarence McHugh, publicly demanded more money and threatened to form a group of tipi owners to boycott the show. He commented, "The small amount given us hardly covered the costs of moving and keeping us in supplies for the week. [The amount] worked out at 60 cents a day per person."⁶⁸ McHugh, a Second World War veteran and successful farmer, was an active leader in native provincial politics. However, he made the mistake of announcing his demands and threat of withdrawal before consulting with the tipi owners. The Stampede Board immediately lobbied to keep the other owners on side, and the demonstration failed. Only McHugh left the camp in the following year.

A more serious confrontation took place in 1972, when Dave and Daisy Crowchild, two of the most popular people in the village, were suspended for a year and their tipi site given to someone else. The problem arose when they moved out of the village before the Stampede was over. According to one report, Dave's wife was ill, so he took her home and later to hospital.⁶⁹ Another explanation is that they went to an Indian gathering at Daisy's home reserve in Manitoba.⁷⁰ Even though they left their tipi in place, they were told they had broken the rules and had lost their rights as tipi owners. There was a great outcry from the general public, for these two people were well known as leading goodwill ambassadors between the native communities and Calgary. The Crowchild Trail had been named in their honour. Finally, under intense pressure from the press, an invitation was extended for them to return, but they never did.

There also were growing complaints that the members of the Indian Events Committee and the judges, all of whom were non-Indians, were engaged in a master-servant relationship with tipi owners that was not unlike that of Indian agents. Finally, in 1970, four Indians were added to the committee as advisory

members, and in short order some prize monies were doubled and horses were provided with barns for the first time.⁷¹ A year later, these four tipi owners and another two became members of the committee itself, and by 1985 all tipi owners automatically were members of the Indian Events Committee.

In 1989 tipi owner Bruce Starlight complained publicly that events had become “dull and routine” because the Indians did not have enough input. Although they were now members of the committee, “All they’re doing is picking our brains and making decisions for us even though the activities are ours.”⁷² In 1972 City Councilman Eric Musgreave complained that Indians at the Stampede were used as a “tourist gimmick” and that they were being exploited.⁷³ His claims were immediately challenged by members of his own council. In 1991 *Calgary Herald* columnist Catherine Ford unsuccessfully suggested that Indians should reject the Stampede.⁷⁴ In 1999 Roy Little Chief, former head chief of the Blackfoot, reportedly claimed that conditions at the village were “appalling,” that elders were being forced to dance, and that tipi owners had no influence. His comments were immediately rejected by tipi owners such as Ed Calf Robe, who said, “The only thing bad about this Stampede was the weather.”⁷⁵

In spite of discomfort, adverse weather conditions, and other problems, the Indians have always loved the Stampede. When asked in 1946 why she came, Inez Hunter said, “I come to the Stampede for two reasons – my husband Judas is a chief, and I must come to put up the tent and keep it tidy for him. It is most important that he be here. Then I like the Stampede because once again I meet all my friends and we can talk over old times.”⁷⁶ “This is my summer holiday,” is the way Mrs. One Spot described her trip to the Stampede.⁷⁷

I first became involved with the Indian Village in 1962 as a judge, and over the years I have had ample opportunity to see the relationship between the Indians and the Stampede. It is, in many ways, a love affair. The tipi holders are proud of their role in the Stampede and point out they often are the third and fourth generations of families involved with the village. The prize ribbons given at the parades and the village are taken quite seriously. I can recall the elation throughout the Stoney camp when one of their tipis was chosen for the first time as the best in the whole camp. Most do not mind having their pictures taken; at one time they expected they would be paid for it, now it is optional.

I found no examples where people felt they were being “used” by the Stampede or were mere pawns for the benefit of attracting tourists. Rather, they believed it was an opportunity to show off their culture and their individual expertise in bead working or costume making. While outsiders have claimed

that native culture was being commercialized, the Stampede actually proved to be an important factor in preserving it. During the 1950s and 1960s, when native culture was at a low ebb and people were disposing off their relics, tipi owners refused to sell because they needed them for the Stampede.



A hoop dancer performs during a ceremony at the Indian Village.

There can be no doubt that attitudes towards Indian participation have changed drastically since the 1890s. Initially Indians were considered amusing sidelights to the real show, with even their pony races being held up to ridicule. The press was no better than the general population in making snide and sarcastic remarks about native participation. During government attempts to suppress Indian involvement, references were made to the demeaning way they were treated and how women were insulted.

Much of the change in attitude can be attributed to Guy Weadick. He saw the Indians as colourful and positive assets to the Wild West show. He had personal friendships with many Indians and saw their virtues extolled and publicized at the 1912 and 1919 Stampedes. When the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede was formed in 1923, Weadick continued with this positive and laudatory approach to the Indian participants. He may have had showmanship in mind when he insisted on Indian participation, but the results fostered a positive image for the Indian. Another development in favour of the Indians occurred when Ed Hall was placed in charge of Indian events.

This began a half-century dynasty with his son Tom, his son-in-law Roland Bradley, and his grandson Ron Hall successively providing continuity and intimate knowledge of the camp and its functions.

Many changes have been noted in the past forty-five years. Some people bring their campers and spend the night in them, rather than their tipis. Events such as the North American Chicken Dancing Competition have become a major part of the week. Booths have been added to sell bannock and handicrafts, and vouchers are issued instead of rations. In short, most of the changes have been made for the benefit of the tipi owners. But it is still the Stampede, and to paraphrase from a popular movie, “If you build it, they will come.”

Notes

1. To be politically correct today, one uses such terms as “First Nations,” “Native Americans,” etc. Tribal names gaining popularity include Siksika (Blackfoot), Nakoda (Stoney), Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee), Kainai (Blood), and Pikuni (Peigan). However, as this article provides a historical overview, the author has used those names and titles commonly in use at the time. This avoids the confusion of calling a tribe one name in direct quotations and another in the main text.
2. Hugh A. Dempsey, ed., “Calgary and the Riel Rebellion,” *Alberta History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 14.
3. Hugh A. Dempsey, “Deerfoot and Friends,” in *The Amazing Death of Calf Shirt and Other Blackfoot Stories* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1994), 161–85.
4. *Calgary Herald*, 5 July 1939.
5. *Calgary Tribune*, 25 July 1894.
6. *Calgary Herald*, 5 September 1902.
7. *Calgary Albertan*, 13 July 1901.
8. *Calgary Herald*, 20 August 1919.
9. *Calgary Herald*, 24 July 1903, cited in W. Keith Regular, “‘Red Backs and White Burdens’: A Study of Indian and White Relations in Southern Alberta, 1896–1911” (master’s thesis, University of Calgary, 1985), 155.
10. Regular, “‘Red Backs,’” 155.
11. *Calgary Herald*, 1 July 1908.
12. *Lethbridge Herald*, 9 June 1909. Cited in W. Keith Regular, “On Public Display,” *Alberta History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 3.
13. *Calgary Herald*, 5 July 1909.
14. *Calgary Albertan*, 5 July 1909.
15. Regular, “Public Display,” 4.
16. *Calgary Albertan*, 12 August 1910.
17. *Calgary Albertan*, 28 October 1901, cited in Regular, “‘Red Backs,’” 6–7.
18. Cited in Regular, “‘Red Backs,’” 8.
19. *Calgary Herald*, 4 July 1912.
20. J.W. Mitchell to J.A. Markle, 6 May 1912, Indian Affairs, RG-10, vol. 3826, file 60,511-3, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter cited as LAC).
21. Lieutenant Colonel H.C. Lowther to Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, 2 August 1912, Indian Affairs, RG-10, vol. 3826, file 60,511-3, LAC.
22. J.W. McLean to Blood, Blackfoot, Peigan, Sarcee, and Stoney Indian agents (circular letter), 9 July 1912, Indian Affairs, RG-10, vol. 3826, file 60,511-3, LAC.
23. R.B. Deane to Indian Agent J.H. Gooderham, 18 July 1912, Indian Affairs, RG-10, vol. 3826, file 60,511-3, LAC.
24. T. Albert Moore to J.W. McLean, 30 August 1912, Indian Affairs, RG-10, vol. 3826, file 60,511-3, LAC.

25. *Globe* (Toronto), 4 September 1912.
26. *Calgary News-Telegram*, 5 September 1912.
27. Glen Campbell to Hon. Thomas Crothers, 12 May 1913, Indian Affairs, RG-10, vol. 3826, file 60,511-3, LAC.
28. *Bow Valley Call*, Gleichen, 24 October 1912.
29. Canada, *The Indian Act Consolidated for Office Purposes* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1949), Sec.140A/2, p. 49. This regulation remained on the statute books until the passage of a new Indian Act in 1951.
30. *Calgary Herald*, 3 July 1916.
31. *Ibid.*, 21 August 1919.
32. *Ibid.*, 20 August 1919.
33. *Ibid.*, 21 August 1919.
34. *Ibid.*, 25 August 1919.
35. *Ibid.*, 27 August 1919.
36. Report of the Manager of Calgary Exhibition to the Directors, 26 September 1923, Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Papers, M 2160, Glenbow Museum Archives.
37. *Calgary Herald*, 10 July 1923.
38. *Ibid.*, 5 July 1924.
39. "Introduction," by James Dempsey, in William M. Graham, *Treaty Days: Reflections of an Indian Commissioner* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1991), x.
40. Gray, *Brand of Its Own*, 80–81.
41. Gray, *Brand of Its Own*, 80.
42. *Calgary Herald*, 6 July 1925.
43. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Annual Report, 1926, CES Papers, Glenbow Museum Archives.
44. *Calgary Herald*, 5 July 1926.
45. Marilyn Burgess, "Canadian 'Range Wars': Struggles Over Indian Cowboys," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 18, no. 3 (1993): 351–64.
46. Glen Mikkelsen, "Indians and Rodeo," *Alberta History* 35, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 15.
47. *Calgary Albertan*, 29 January 1962.
48. *Calgary Herald*, 8 July 1944.
49. *Ibid.*, 3 July 1948.
50. *Ibid.*, 4 July 1953.
51. *Ibid.*, 7 July 1989.
52. *Ibid.*, 9 July 1949.
53. *Ibid.*, 7 July 1964.
54. Jasper Many Heads, interview in *Calgary Sun*, 15 July 2004.
55. Mildred Valley Thornton, *Buffalo People: Portraits of a Vanishing Nation* (Delta,

- BC: Hancock House, 2000), 147.
56. *Calgary Albertan*, 8 July 1945.
 57. "Indian Events on the Exhibition Grounds 1961," copy in Dempsey files. See also "Tipi Holders Policy," April 26, 1989, in author's possession.
 58. Gray, *Brand of Its Own*, 128.
 59. Diary of Hugh A. Dempsey, 8 July 1963, in author's possession.
 60. Diary of Hugh A. Dempsey, 10 July 1965, in author's possession. The author was one of the judges at the Indian Village at the time.
 61. *Calgary Herald*, 18 August 1965.
 62. *Ibid.*, 5 July 1974.
 63. *Ibid.*, 5 July 1947.
 64. Gray, *Brand of Its Own*, 128.
 65. *Calgary Albertan*, 8 December 1950.
 66. Gray, *Brand of Its Own*, 128.
 67. "Indian Events on the Exhibition Grounds 1961," copy in Dempsey files.
 68. *Calgary Herald*, 14 July 1965.
 69. *Calgary Albertan*, 8 February 1973.
 70. Interview with Mrs. Pauline Dempsey, June 19, 2005. Mrs. Dempsey was a member of the Indian Events Committee at the time.
 71. *Calgary Albertan*, 20 July 1970.
 72. *Calgary Herald*, 12 July 1989. In 1991, Starlight was involved in further controversy when he ran for a seat on the Calgary Stampede Board of Directors. The custom was for people to put their names forward for two or three years before being accepted, but when Starlight was rejected on his first try, a campaign was launched through the press to have him installed. As a result of intense pressure, he was elected in the following year.
 73. *Calgary Herald*, 18 February 1972.
 74. *Ibid.*, 24 November 1991.
 75. *Ibid.*, 18 July 1999.
 76. *Ibid.*, 11 July 1946.
 77. *Ibid.*, 13 July 1956.