

WE ARE COMING HOME



# WE ARE COMING HOME

*Repatriation and the Restoration of  
Blackfoot Cultural Confidence*

EDITED BY GERALD T. CONATY



AU PRESS

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To all who have come before us and who made great sacrifices to keep  
Blackfoot culture and sacred traditions alive.

To all who will come after us and who will carry on those traditions.



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The impetus for this project began during a conversation among Allan Pard, Narcisse Blood, and me in a restaurant in Fort Macleod, Alberta, in the summer of 2009. We realized that repatriation had been ongoing for almost two decades, but no one was documenting this important undertaking. Ryan Heavy Head later joined the discussions and, when Allan secured funding for a publication, Ryan brought the funds to Red Crow Community College, where they were held until the project was complete. Allan, Ryan, and Narcisse have continued to offer advice, encouragement, and direction.

The repatriation of sacred material requires considerable financial and moral support. The chiefs and councils from the Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika nations have been generous with their assistance in the efforts to bring sacred bundles home. They continue to play important roles. The repatriation of those sacred objects that were dispersed to museums in the United States required special help from the Blackfeet Council in Montana. Earl Old Person, Joyce

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Finally, I would like to thank all those who contributed their stories. This is a significant record of cultural survival and persistence. It also demonstrates the capacity of individuals to achieve important things when they work together and when they believe in the importance of their goals. These are profound lessons for all of us.

*Gerald T. Conaty*  
*January 2013*

WE ARE COMING HOME



## *Prologue*

ROBERT R. JANES

*People have to realize we are human beings. Our different lifestyle doesn't make us less human. We have our own way of dealing with nature.*

— Allan Pard

This book is the legacy of Gerald (Gerry) T. Conaty, an exceptional Canadian museum curator who died on 25 August 2013. Gerry rejected the usual descriptors of cancer as a battle, fight, or struggle; he preferred to call it a process or a journey. That journey did not allow Gerry to see this book through to publication, as he died while the manuscript was undergoing review at Athabasca University Press. Understanding that he might not live to finish what he had begun, Gerry asked me to assume stewardship of this book in the event of his

death. Hence this prologue. This book is about relinquishing power and authority and about learning to listen. There is a salutary message herein for all museums and all museum workers, a message that stems from Gerry's integrity, his vision of a better world, and his belief that museums can, and should, work to achieve this vision.

I met Gerry in 1989, when Hugh Dempsey, then chief curator of the Glenbow Museum, and I, as the museum's director, set out to find the best curator of ethnology in Canada. By "best," we meant a person who had the commitment and the skills to forge relationships with First Nations peoples founded on mutual respect. We had heard about Gerry's work at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, in Regina, and we convinced him to come to the Glenbow. Thus began my nearly twenty-five-year association with Gerry, which continued until his death.

Gerry had, I discovered, a quirky sense of humour that was appreciated by all. It was continually refined and refreshed by his Blackfoot friends, whose sense of humour is boundless. He was also a private person—paradoxically expressing a serious and reflective side along with his joking and teasing. These were traits that shaped and smoothed his interactions with all First Nations peoples, not only the Blackfoot. Gerry was deliberate, reflective, self-critical, disciplined, and humble. All of these are the traits of a scholar, which Gerry was by nature, by training (he earned a BA and MA in anthropology and a PhD in archaeology), and by practice. Scholarship was our first bond.

Our second bond was, and remains, the Blackfoot people who became our friends and colleagues and who welcomed us into their lives. At the outset of our relationship at the Glenbow, Gerry and I decided that the Blackfoot must be our priority, given that we lived in their homeland and the Glenbow owned much of their cultural patrimony. Our approach was two-pronged: I played the backroom politics with the provincial government and the Glenbow's Board of Governors while Gerry visited the reserves and Blackfoot communities to develop personal relationships—both of us driven by our belief that a museum could actually become a force for social good and community well-being. Although this division of labour was a conscious strategy, it was not absolute, as we also shared the politics of governance and attended ceremonies together on the reserves.

There was a standing joke among staff that the Glenbow should have purchased the motel in Fort Macleod, Alberta, where Gerry and other Glenbow staff members spent innumerable nights during their visits among the Blackfoot.

Hidden in this observation is the fundamental fact that our relationship with the Blackfoot would never have materialized without this commitment of time and money by the Glenbow, Gerry, and various other members of the staff.

In an email message written to me in January 2014, Gwyn Langemann, Gerry's spouse, further described these relationships:

These friendships were important on a professional level, not only for the understanding they gave Gerry of the Blackfoot world view and cultural practices, but also because they were profoundly important to him on a personal level. Gerry greatly valued these friendships; he liked and respected them as people, and they liked and respected him. Like any evolving friendship, they contributed to making Gerry the whole person he was.

No friendship evolves or persists on its own, and all that has been accomplished by the Blackfoot and the Glenbow Museum is ultimately a result of the trust and respect that emerged from sustained, face-to-face encounters. This is a truism, but achieving enduring relationships is an immense challenge for most museums, whether they claim a lack of time, resources, or institutional focus as the obstacle.

As the Glenbow's senior curator of ethnology and, later, as the director of Indigenous studies, Gerry was in charge of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit collections. Under his guidance, the Glenbow initiated the return of sacred objects to First Nations peoples for ceremonial purposes. Between 1990 and 2000—the decade leading up to the formal repatriation discussed in this book—Gerry thus oversaw all of the complexities associated with the return of over fifty Medicine Pipe Bundles to Blackfoot and Cree communities. Animating these activities was his persistent drive to create a more inclusive museum, where Aboriginal peoples could have a voice in the portrayal of their cultures and their histories. To this end, Gerry and the ethnology staff made every effort to employ Blackfoot individuals in a variety of positions. Sometimes this worked, and sometimes it didn't. I recall the internal turmoil that Gerry ignited when he sought to have a Blackfoot employee paid at the level of a curator on the strength of the traditional knowledge and storytelling skills that this individual possessed. This caused consternation among staff and within the employees' union because the individual in question did not have an advanced

degree—or any other degree, for that matter. Gerry succeeded in achieving the appropriate pay level. I mention this example to illustrate that Grey Bull (Sikapiistomik—Gerry’s Blackfoot name) was routinely engaged with First Nations in ways that had nothing to do with repatriation.

From the beginning, for example, Gerry worked to develop closer connections between the museum and local First Nations communities. The result was numerous informal initiatives that enabled Aboriginal people to explore the collections and to see and touch items from a variety of cultures. Among the community groups who took advantage of such opportunities were Just Say YES (an employment program), the Nursing Professional Development System, and the Calgary Drop-In Centre. Gerry also provided a component of the cultural sensitivity training program for the Calgary Police Service. The Glenbow has not charged an admission fee to Aboriginal people since 2001—yet another example of Gerry’s broad sense of social justice.

In addition to these outreach activities, whenever possible, Gerry included Aboriginal individuals on exhibition teams to ensure that their voices and perspectives were an integral part of the work. Examples of such collaborative efforts include the First Nations Gallery at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum; “Powerful Images: Portrayals of Native America,” developed in partnership with six major American museums as part of the Museums West Consortium; “Inusivut: Our Way of Life,” developed with the Inuvialuit of Canada’s western Arctic; “Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life,” a permanent gallery at the Glenbow created in partnership with the Blackfoot Confederacy; and “Honouring Tradition,” which examined the meaning embedded in items of Subarctic and Plains material culture in the Glenbow’s collections. Gerry was also working with Cree Elders to develop a website that would highlight their interpretation of the Glenbow’s Cree collection.

In 1992, the Glenbow also began developing temporary exhibitions with Aboriginal high school students in southern Alberta. Initially, we worked with the Plains Indians Cultural Survival School, in Calgary, to create four exhibitions. These were followed by other collaborations with Jack James High School (also in Calgary), Morley Community School (on the Stoney reserve, west of Calgary, near Canmore), and Kainai High School (in Standoff, on the Kainai reserve, southwest of Lethbridge). The students, teachers, and school administrators all remarked on the value of these projects in encouraging self-esteem among the students. Gerry

also participated in “Doctors, Lawyers, and Indian Chiefs,” a series of Kainai children’s culture and career camps sponsored by the Red Cross, speaking to the children about museums and the repatriation work. In addition, he regularly told Blackfoot stories to children at the W. H. Cushing Workplace School and worked with staff members there to include visits to the Glenbow as a regular part of their curriculum (Gwyn Langemann, pers. comm., 14 January 2014).

At the museum itself, Gerry mentored interns and graduate students from Europe and North America. For over a decade, students came to the Glenbow in a steady stream to learn from Gerry and the ethnology staff, including Beth Carter, the curator of ethnology and a key player in the Glenbow’s involvement with First Nations. This resulted in numerous theses and dissertations devoted to the Glenbow’s efforts to build relationships with First Nations. Among the other Glenbow colleagues who worked closely with Gerry on the Blackfoot repatriation were Patricia Ainslie, Daryl Betenia, Christine Chin, Gwenyth Claughton, Nancy Cope, Clifford Crane Bear, Camille Owens, and Evy Werner.

Over the course of his career, Gerry published nearly sixty papers, book chapters, and reviews, edited or collaborated on four books, and gave numerous public presentations. Many of these publications and presentations concerned Aboriginal culture and history. He served as the associate editor of *Museum Management and Curatorship* and was an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Calgary. In addition to his scholarly work, Gerry was generous with his time to a variety of related activities and organizations. He was a member of Mount Royal University’s Ethics Review Board, a member of the Board of Directors of the Mookaakin Society of the Kainai First Nation, and a board member of the Mikai’sto Foundation, an affiliate of Red Crow Community College (which, in 1995, became the first tribal college in Canada). He was also honoured by membership in the Kainai Chieftainship, an organization that works on behalf of the Kainai Nation, of which he served for a time as president.

From every perspective, Gerry’s career was rich and exemplary, and it stands as eloquent testimony to his commitment to traditional scholarly values, on the one hand, and to pushing the boundaries of innovative and mindful museum practice, on the other.

\* \* \*



Figure 1. Blackfoot ceremonialist Pete Standing Alone painting the face of Gerald Conaty in preparation for his induction into the Kainai Chieftanship in recognition of his contributions to the well-being of the Kainai Nation. Photograph by Robert R. Janes.

The term “Blackfoot” is commonly used to refer to the four nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy: Siksika, Kainai, Apatohsiipiikani, and Ammskaapipiikani. Today, the Siksika Nation is headquartered on a reserve located roughly 90 kilometres to the east of Calgary, at Siksika, near the towns of Gleichen and Cluny.<sup>1</sup> The Kainai—often called by their English name, the Blood—are based in Standoff, roughly halfway between Fort Macleod and Cardston, some 200 kilometres south of Calgary. The Kainai reserve, the largest in Canada, stretches west and south of the city of Lethbridge. The Apatohsiipiikani, or Peigan, occupy territory to the west of the Kainai and are based in Brocket, not far from the town of Pincher Creek. The drawing of the border between Canada and the United States separated the Apatohsiipiikani (the Northern Piikani) from the Ammskaapipiikani (the Southern Piikani). The latter now reside in Montana, in the vicinity of Browning, and have come to be called the Blackfeet, although they are also known as the Piegan (as distinct from the Peigan). The four nations call themselves the Niitsitapi, the Real People.

The idea for the present book emerged in the summer of 2009, during a conversation among Allan Pard, Narcisse Blood, and Gerry in a restaurant in Fort Macleod, Alberta. They realized that, although their repatriation work had been ongoing for nearly two decades, no one was documenting this unprecedented initiative. From this modest beginning, the book grew in scope and purpose to include the essays that follow, five of them written by Blackfoot ceremonialists. Gerry authored the introduction, “Beginnings,” in which he shares his first experiences with Blackfoot ceremonial life.

As he explains, Gerry was simultaneously moved and alarmed at his first bundle opening, when Daniel Weasel Moccasin removed the sacred pipe from the bundle and began to dance with it. Such behaviour challenged all of Gerry’s curatorial propensities and assumptions: “Was this the proper way to treat a precious artifact?” It was here that Gerry’s learning began in earnest. He was becoming aware of a different way of seeing the world, trading his traditional museum assumptions for an appreciation of how sacred objects affect the social structure of a community. In commenting on his reactions to his first bundle opening, Gerry observes that “people were welcoming home a long-lost relative.” This was the beginning of Gerry’s apprenticeship, during which he embraced the sensitivity and humility that would become his hallmarks. His

introduction recounts the origins of his value-driven work, as well as of the conviction with which he concludes, namely, that “repatriation is a vital component in the creation of an equitable, diverse, and respectful society.” Full stop.

Chapter 1, “The Development of Museums and Their Effects on First Nations,” situates repatriation in its historical and institutional context. In it, Gerry offers an analysis of the evolving relationship between museums and First Nations, both globally and in Canada, as well as assessing seminal events such as the advent of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), in the US, and the Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Association Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, in Canada. With thoroughness and clarity, Gerry lays the groundwork for two fundamental truths that underlie this book. First, museums have always been biased in their outlook and activities. Museums have never existed in a social or political vacuum, despite conventional claims of neutrality. Second, repatriation is a highly complex affair, especially when it involves sacred objects. Gerry discusses the concept of ownership, the commodification of the sacred, and mainstream cultural values, as well as the inevitable confusion and paradoxes that result when two very different world views collide.

The heart of this book lies, however, in chapters 2 through 7. In “Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life,” Gerry presents a capsule history of the Niitsitapi—the way they lived in the world and, most importantly, their cosmology. In so doing, he does not shy away from considering the innumerable changes to the Niitsitapi’s political, social, economic, and spiritual life over the past three centuries. Some of these changes were slow and incremental; others—such as smallpox epidemics—destroyed individuals and families and threatened the entire culture. Overall, Gerry’s assessment is sobering, ranging from the consequences of residential schools, to alcohol abuse, to land appropriation by the dominant society—the last perhaps more catastrophic for the Niitsitapi than the ravages of epidemic disease. By the late 1960s, Blackfoot traditional spiritual practices had reached a low point. Fewer people were joining the sacred societies and attending ceremonies, and sacred bundles were continuing to be sold to museums and private collectors. A revival of interest in ceremonial life has since taken place among the Blackfoot, however, and the repatriation movement has been one important consequence of this renaissance.

Chapters 3 through 7 are the work of Allan Pard, Jerry Potts, Frank Weasel Head, Herman Yellow Old Woman, and Chris McHugh, respectively. These individuals are among the most prominent ceremonial leaders, teachers, historians, and role models of the Blackfoot Confederacy. They are usually referred to as “Elders” by museums and others in the non-Blackfoot world, but (as Gerry notes) this term does not encompass all that it means to be regarded as a *mokaki*, a wise person. The authors of these essays are the wise persons to whom he refers, and their essays are a gift to the future. Their writing constitutes the definitive historical record of Blackfoot repatriation efforts, not only in Canada and the United States but also in Great Britain, complete with the personalities, tribulations, and personal journeys of learning and discovery.

The repatriation work described here, and the knowledge required for it, is as complex, demanding, and sophisticated as any research conducted by museum curators with advanced degrees. For example, writing in chapter 3 about objects that are eligible for repatriation, Allan Pard notes that “the most important part of repatriation is successfully identifying the bundles.” As he goes on to explain:

There is a lot of confusion about bundles. For example, some people don’t distinguish between a split-horn headdress and a Iitskinaiksi [Horn Society] headdress. We also have to be aware that some of the material in museum collections was duplicated. When we are attending those institutions, we have to examine the material carefully to determine whether it is a replica or the real thing. If it is a Natoas bundle, was it used in an O’kaan [Sun Dance ceremony]? You can see the telltale signs, such as the paint. People have to know what they are doing, what they are looking for.

I will not attempt to give an overview of each essay: their substance and value defy brevity. Instead, I will mention two critical outcomes of the work described here that museums ignore at their own peril. These outcomes both justify repatriation and validate its enduring value. Early on in their quest for the return of sacred objects, the Blackfoot (and the Glenbow) were advised by Alberta government officials to replicate the bundles using contemporary materials—thereby allowing the original bundles to be preserved in museum

collections. It is patently clear from these essays that replication is not a replacement for repatriation and that this alternative should be discarded, once and for all, as a museum's avoidance strategy. Second, I note the overwhelming consensus among the Blackfoot essayists on the importance of repatriation to enhancing community well-being. I leave it to the reader to discover the manifold, salutary, and sometimes mysterious benefits that the return of ceremonial bundles has had for Blackfoot society.

Chapters 8 and 9 confront the psycho-politics that result when two strong-willed organizations and their leaders cannot agree on a common course of action. In this instance, the Government of Alberta owned the Blackfoot objects that the Glenbow wished to repatriate, and provincial officials were staunchly opposed to repatriation. In chapter 8, John Ives—at the time, the director of the Archaeological Survey of Alberta—provides an inside view of the government's perspective and describes the events that culminated in Alberta's First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (FNSCORA). In a judicious manner, he recounts the discussions that ultimately prompted the Glenbow to seek a political solution to the government's opposition to the proposed Blackfoot repatriation, rather than continue to rely on bureaucratic procedures. Ives is generous of spirit when he notes the hope, understanding, and respect that are emerging from this repatriation—despite the province's long-standing resistance to the idea.

In the following chapter, I recount the events leading to the repatriation, including the personal and organizational readiness that underlay the Glenbow's work with the Blackfoot. I discuss our persistent conflict with provincial officials openly and frankly, making no effort to downplay the dysfunctional nature of the relationship that existed between our museum and the Alberta government. I believe it is necessary to leave a record of what actually transpired. The goal of repatriation was not a collective aspiration from the beginning, and, while concealing difficulties in retrospect may be politically convenient, no purpose is served by minimizing the degree of opposition that was directed at the Glenbow's proposal. The entire repatriation process was a fundamental learning experience—the lesson being that anything is possible if the commitment is strong enough.

The book concludes with Gerry's essay "Moving Forward," which reaffirms, with examples, that the repatriation in January 2000 is not only a story of

hope and perseverance but has been a source of renewed pride, self-confidence, and well-being among the Blackfoot. As Gerry observes, hope, pride, and self-confidence are the fundamental ingredients of cultural survival and prosperity, neither of which is possible without these qualities. He goes on to assess the inherent value of repatriation in a world beset by urbanization, industrialization, and globalization. Diversity, including our ability to cope with change, is crucial to the well-being of both ecosystems and civilization. The preservation of cultural diversity through the repatriation of sacred objects ensures the survival of different ways of understanding and living in the world. Ever the realist, though, Gerry also acknowledges the persistent conservatism of museum culture and the continuing challenges this presents to Aboriginal communities seeking the return of their cultural property. The question thus remains: Why is so much of the museum community still largely resistant to fostering diversity in living cultures rather than just in collection vaults?

\* \* \*

Gerry's concluding message is clear: despite the success that he, the Glenbow, and museums elsewhere have had in demonstrating the value of repatriation for the preservation of cultural diversity, the task is far from finished. Countless items currently languish in museum collections worldwide, bereft of their cultural context and their human creators. Many of these objects are ordinary, of the sort in everyday use; many others, however, are charged with cosmological and spiritual meaning. It was the sacred that preoccupied Gerry, and it is the sacred objects that require the attention of any museum that claims to be culturally relevant and responsible. Although the ways in which the museum community is currently addressing these responsibilities give us some cause for hope, the legacy of colonialism is proving to be remarkably stubborn.

In the United States, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) continues to unfold, bringing Native peoples into museums for the first time and resulting in the repatriation of thousands of objects and human remains. While NAGPRA has fundamentally altered the relationship between Native communities and American museums, it is also apparent that it is only part of a genuine relationship. A survey of sixty-three American museums revealed that they are not making the structural

adjustments necessary to ensure that their relationships with Native communities are secure, healthy, and long-lasting (Scott and Luby 2007, 277). The opportunity to develop a mutual, long-term vision continues to escape the museum hierarchy in these organizations.

In Canada, the museum community awaits a national follow-up discussion to the groundbreaking work of the Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Association Task Force on Museums and First Peoples. Despite the profoundly important recommendations of the task force, ranging from repatriation to museum training for First Nations, the response among Canadian museums remains variously unknown, nonexistent, or uneven. In contrast to NAGPRA in the United States, which is federal legislation, each Canadian museum has been left to the dictates of its own conscience and its own devices. There is no doubt that the extensive consultation and reflection spawned by the task force were capable of changing the Canadian museum landscape forever, but, as in the United States, the Canadian museum hierarchy has been unwilling or unable to organize a thorough examination of the task force's legacy. We still do not know to what extent the task force succeeded in its work.

In a world beset by the marketplace, one recent development in the repatriation saga is worthy of note. In December 2013, the Annenberg Foundation, which provides funding and support to nonprofit organizations in the United States and globally, announced that it had purchased twenty-four sacred Native American artifacts from an auction house in Paris—at a cost totalling US\$530,000. This purchase was made solely for the purpose of restoring these objects to their rightful owners. Twenty-one of these items will be returned to the Hopi Nation in Arizona, and the remaining three, which belong to the San Carlos Apache, will be returned to the Apache tribe.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this unprecedented move will shame museums into acting with similar innovation and courage. Then again, it may have the opposite effect, relieving museums of any further responsibility for their colonial legacy and allowing them to default to the auction houses and private philanthropists to undertake the transfer of unconditional ownership. While this is impossible to predict, choosing inaction in order to limit change and risk is a pervasive museum pattern.

The most insidious obstacle to repatriation was, in fact, invented by global museum leaders themselves. It is embodied in the Declaration on the

Importance and Value of Universal Museums, which Gerry discusses briefly in his closing chapter.<sup>3</sup> Signed in December 2002 by such luminaries as the Louvre, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Rijksmuseum, the Guggenheim Museum and the British Museum, the declaration rejects repatriation on the grounds that “universal museums,” with their encyclopaedic collections, are best positioned to act on behalf of the world. By claiming to know what is in humanity’s best interests, the signatories have violated a cardinal tenet of anthropology—namely, to avoid deciding what is in other people’s best interests (Hinshaw 1971, vii). Who is advising these omniscient directors in such an undertaking, and what is responsible for their lack of intellectual and moral rigour?

Both the idea and the practice of repatriation enjoy a far more progressive climate in North America than they do in Europe, as is clear from what the Blackfoot contributors to this book have to say about their ongoing efforts to repatriate key sacred objects held in European museum collections, notably in the United Kingdom. These museums stand to lose some significant objects if they relax their preoccupation with keeping collections on behalf of the world—the ethnocentric logic of the universal museum declaration. As a means of pre-empting this threat, the declaration is either a post hoc rationalization that sustains a colonial past or a new chapter in colonial history dressed up in contemporary parlance.

Whichever it is, there is a fundamental flaw in both the intellectual and moral dimensions of the universal museum declaration. Recall the tale of the camel’s nose. Once you compassionately let the camel stick his nose inside the tent, how can you refuse him further entrance? The inference is that returning any sacred objects to their source communities would cause a run on museum collections, and everything would eventually be lost to a variety of special-interest groups. But this sort of thinking is inappropriate and ill advised, especially when one is dealing with the inherent complexities of repatriation. Individuals and organizations that use the camel’s nose argument seem to believe that human beings are devoid of practical judgment and are bound to act unreasonably (Hardin 1985, 64). There is, however, one simple refutation to camel’s nose reasoning when applied to repatriation, one that is grounded in both ethics and morality—namely, that “the abuse of a thing does not bar its use” (Fletcher in Hardin 1985, 63).

Despite the deeply rooted paternalism that still reigns in British and European museums, a few of them have made an effort to respond to repatriation efforts in a socially conscious manner. In 1992, Glasgow Museums received a request from the Wounded Knee Survivors Association for the return of a Lakota Ghost Dance shirt and four other ceremonial items, which had been sold to Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum in 1892. The request was initially rejected, but after an appeal and further review, including consultation with the Glasgow public, the original decision was overturned, and arrangements were made to return the shirt. The Lakota had to guarantee, however, that the shirt would be preserved in perpetuity—it is currently in the care of the South Dakota State Historical Society—and remain on public display. In exchange for the return, the Lakota also created a replica of the shirt for Glasgow Museums. As Kathryn Whitby-Last (2010, 41) points out, such conditions, which are by no means uncommon, can have the effect of discouraging Indigenous groups from pursuing repatriation claims, and, “if the object is currently held in a museum, there is often a presumption of return being to an alternative museum rather than to the group making the claim for continuing use.”

In chapter 5, Frank Weasel Head discusses another repatriation from a British museum, this one involving a Iitskinaiksi headdress that the University of Aberdeen's Marischal Museum had acquired in 1934 from a collector in the United States. After two trips to Aberdeen, in 2002 and 2003, a Kainai delegation succeeded in negotiating the return of the headdress. As Weasel Head indicates, the Kainai refused the museum's request for a replica of the headdress, as well as a proposal that the museum be allowed to photograph the headdress, as this would violate its sacred status. Nor, in this instance, were conditions imposed of the sort that surrounded the Ghost Dance shirt. Rather, once the bundle was brought home to Kainai, in the summer of 2003, it was immediately restored to ceremonial use.<sup>4</sup>

Museums have also been exploring options other than deaccessioning ceremonial objects and restoring them to their original owners. Gerry discusses one such example in the introduction to this book. The Pitt Rivers Museum, at the University of Oxford, has undertaken to share various objects from its collections with the Haida First Nation in Canada (Krpmotich and Peers 2013). In this instance, sharing means having a group of Haida travel to England to visit the Pitt Rivers Museum. Nika Collison, curator of the Haida Gwaii Museum

at Kay Llnagaay, notes that “there is still so much collective knowledge in our community that spending time with a piece sees all sorts of information and memories come out, knowledge shared and inspiration born” (pers. comm., 16 December 2014). One tends to doubt, however, that the Haida will be at peace until a broad sample of their cultural treasures has “come home,” as have Blackfoot sacred bundles.

The idea of sharing, as opposed to repatriating or loaning, is also discussed by Frank Weasel Head in chapter 5. This instance involved five traditional Blackfoot shirts of known provenance and exceptional cultural meaning for the Blackfoot. In 2010, the shirts, also owned by the Pitt Rivers Museum, were transported to Alberta and shared with the Blackfoot and with the Glenbow and Galt Museums, both located in traditional Blackfoot territory. The sharing consisted of public exhibitions and “handling sessions for Blackfoot people.”<sup>5</sup> In a clear demonstration of commitment and tenacity, the Blackfoot had worked for six years to arrange for these shirts to come home, at least temporarily.

As is the case with the Haida, spending time with these shirts is certainly better than not doing so. Frank Weasel Head and his colleagues remain ever hopeful that these shirts will also come home (Frank Weasel Head, pers. comm., 4 December 2013). But what with the universal museum declaration and the prevalence of camel’s nose thinking, it would seem that sharing now defines the comfort limit for much of the museum community. In considering the contents of this book, it is difficult to be patient with the reframing of museum hegemony in the form of sharing, as compared to repatriation or long-term loans—especially in light of the demonstrated value that sacred objects have for nurturing individual and community well-being. It is disingenuous to act as if similar value flows from these objects while they reside in storage, whether at the Pitt Rivers Museum or somewhere else. I, of course, defer to the wisdom of Haida and Blackfoot Elders, and I have no doubt that they will persist in their quest to realize their legitimate aspirations.

\* \* \*

Regardless of the difficulties and obstacles surrounding repatriation, Gerry Conaty’s work as a curator, scholar, and humanitarian models the behaviour required for a more desirable future—for the biosphere and for museums and

the communities they serve. Gerry seems to have known from the beginning of his career that bundles and other sacred objects were fundamental ingredients in the well-being of First Nations peoples. Given the opportunity, Gerry acted on his prescience, and the results are a matter of record. The enduring value of his contributions, and those of his Blackfoot colleagues in this book, is best summed up by Betty Bastien, the author of the landmark book *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*:

Our knowledge and knowing process are not lost, nor are they irrelevant for a highly industrialized and technological society. They are a way that can begin to generate renewal and balance on a planet that the human species is destroying. They are a way of being that can produce knowledge to reunite and strengthen our interdependence as a community of kinship alliances. The healing power of tribal wisdom, Indigenous ways of knowing, and our ability as human beings to renew and strengthen the alliances of a cosmic universe can reverse the path of destruction on which we find ourselves. (2004, 180–181)

Is there a timelier message for our species than this?

According to one Blackfoot grandfather, the Creator said, “We have one more chance to be Indian” (Bastien 2004, 181). Gerald T. Conaty did all he could to assist the Creator with that task.

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NOTES

- 1 Because “Siksika” literally means “black foot,” the term “Blackfoot” has often been used to refer only to the Siksika. In this volume, however, “Blackfoot” is used as a collective term.
- 2 For details on the Annenberg Foundation’s repatriation initiative, see “Annenberg Foundation and Hopi Nation Announce Return of Sacred Artifacts to Native American Hopi Tribe,” 10 December 2013, <http://www.annenbergfoundation.org/node/51351>.
- 3 The full text of the Declaration of the Importance and Value of Universal Museums is contained in the International Council of Museums Thematic Files. See [http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/icom\\_News/2004-1/ENG/p4\\_2004-1.pdf](http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/icom_News/2004-1/ENG/p4_2004-1.pdf).
- 4 For further discussion, see MacLachlan (2012); on the Ghost Dance shirt, see also Maddra (1996). The official position of British museums on repatriation is laid out in the Museums Association’s “Policy Statement on Repatriation of Cultural Property,” September 2006, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/policy/01092006-policy-statement-on-repatriation-of-cultural-property>.
- 5 Full details on the Blackfoot shirts project are available at “Reconnections with Historic Blackfoot Shirts,” <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/blackfootshirts/>.

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## *Beginnings*

GERALD T. CONATY

*These bundles are our children. We have to look after them and care for them. But they are also powerful. If we treat them properly and show them respect, they can really help us. — Daniel Weasel Moccasin*

I was sitting at Daniel Weasel Moccasin's kitchen table on a cold January morning in 1991. Daniel and his father, Dan, were explaining to me the meaning of Blackfoot sacred bundles, especially the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle that the Glenbow Museum had recently loaned to them (fig. 2). I had been with the Glenbow Museum for only a few months, and my knowledge of Blackfoot culture was woefully lacking. Although we were all in good spirits, the conversation proceeded slowly. I did not want to give offence by either asking intrusive

questions or making inquiries in a way that could be interpreted as impolite. Dan spoke only Blackfoot, and Daniel was not always sure how to translate words and concepts into English. They did make it clear that sacred bundles are very important and that they were anxious to tell me as much about them as they could without divulging information that was the sole prerogative of people who had had ceremonial rights transferred to them.

The following summer, I was invited to a ceremony in which the bundle would be used for the first time in more than thirty years. I prepared for the event by reading everything I could find about Blackfoot culture and about this ceremony, in particular. As things were about to get underway, Dan, who would lead the ceremony, invited me inside the tipi where the ceremony was taking place. Usually, only bundle keepers are allowed inside the ceremonial tipi; other observers and supporters sit outside. I was being afforded a great privilege. Dan also asked the person sitting next to me to explain what was happening, but, again, it proved difficult to convey what was occurring. My own research, while useful, had not prepared me for the atmosphere of the ceremony, which, even today, is difficult for me to express. During one long ritual, the bundle was unwrapped and a long pipe stem with eagle feathers, beaded loops, and other “decorations” was taken out. When Dan stood, shook the pipe stem, and began to dance with it, I was taken aback. Was this the proper way to treat a precious artifact? I was not entirely ready, at that point, to see something from the museum actually used. At the same time, the pipe seemed to wake up and come alive. Was a museum the proper place for it? As people thanked me at the end of the ceremony, I began to understand what the Weasel Moccasins had been trying to tell me about the nature and spirit of sacred bundles. On this occasion, people were welcoming home a long-lost relative.

Trying to understand and balance the duality in the perception and understanding of sacred objects has continued to be an important part of my curatorial practice. A few years after the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle returned home, I brought a sacred headdress to an *aawaaahsskataiksi* (ceremonial grandparent) of the Buffalo Women’s Society, the Maoto’kiiksi. Before leaving the museum, I had stuffed the headpiece with acid-free tissue, carefully folded the trailer around more tissue, and placed the entire piece in an acid-free archival box, padding out space with yet more tissue. When I brought the package into the Elder’s home, she gasped with horror. The tissue was rapidly discarded and



Figure 2. The Weasel Moccasin family accepting the loan of a Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Glenbow Museum, November 1990. Left to right: Percy Old Shoes, Daniel Weasel Moccasin, Dan Weasel Moccasin, Gerry Conaty, Florence Scout.

the headdress was rolled tightly, wrapped in a cloth, and secured with twine. It was, in fact, swaddled, much as a newborn baby is enclosed for care and protection. Here, again, was an alternative way of understanding what these sacred objects are and how they should be cared for. Over time, I have also come to

appreciate that using these items is not detrimental to their well-being. In fact, their participation in ceremonies keeps them alive and vibrant.

As I participated in more ceremonies, I came to appreciate other aspects of sacred objects, especially the effects they have on the social structure of a community. Traditionally, a Blackfoot person would belong to a number of sacred societies, most of them age-graded, and each of these societies had its own ceremonial observances, in which specific sacred bundles played an essential role. As Reg Crowshoe and Sybille Mannes Schmidt (2002, 16) explain, "Because of these memberships in different societies, new ties to members outside of one's own biological ties and social circles were established." In the wake of contact, however, these ceremonial relationships gradually eroded, as the population was decimated by disease, spiritual practices were outlawed, and children were taught to be ashamed of their culture. By the middle of the twentieth centuries, relatively few sacred societies were still active. Yet it is abundantly clear that the people who are involved with ceremonies become linked in a support network. When sacred bundles are transferred, the families of the bundle holders assume special, sacred relationships with each other, becoming parents and grandparents to future generations of bundle keepers. Similarly, members of a sacred society become brothers and sisters with their cohorts. All of this is in addition to the kinship relationships that develop through marriages and births.

It has thus become apparent to me that understanding the meaning of sacred bundles requires understanding Blackfoot history, society, culture, and contemporary life. The historical and anthropological literature on these topics is bountiful, but it usually presents analyses from an etic, or outsider's, viewpoint. Moreover, much of the writing has been done by academics, who are usually concerned with developing an argument to support a particular point of view. For example, Clark Wissler was interested in comparing cultural traits among all Plains First Nations in a search for the origins of various aspects of a generalized Plains culture. Walter McClintock, Edward Curtis, George Bird Grinnell, and others wanted to capture a romantic picture of a way of life that had disappeared when people were confined to reserves and reservations. As I became friends with Blackfoot people, I began to hear their explanations of their own culture and their own history. Sometimes the emic and the etic accounts agreed. More often, there were considerable discrepancies, leading me

to look more closely at the non-Native accounts. How far did they reflect colonial assumptions and objectives? As, for example, Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh (2005) points out, the lacunae that are created when the two perspectives do not overlap are both thought provoking and indicative of the distances between First Nations and the dominant society. These are also the spaces in which museums and First Nations negotiate the repatriation of sacred material.

As the Glenbow entered into more agreements to loan sacred material, I became more involved with Blackfoot ceremonies in an effort to better understand the implications of these loans for the museum and the community and to become acquainted with the community. I had been hired in 1990 as senior curator of ethnology with a mandate to improve the Glenbow's relationship with Aboriginal people and with the freedom to develop my own strategies for accomplishing this goal. While I had the full support of the Glenbow's then president and CEO, Robert R. Janes, some other members of staff were not convinced that developing a closer working relationship with the Aboriginal community was a productive direction for the museum to be heading. At the time, it was uncommon for Glenbow curators to undertake fieldwork, and some of my peers in the museum assumed that contemporary Aboriginal people would have nothing relevant to say about our collections, which are mostly historical in nature. In their eyes, I was wasting my time. Others were more concerned that our loans of sacred material threatened our identity as a museum and felt that any discussion of repatriation was inappropriate; after all, this was "our stuff," and non-professionals would have no idea of how to care for it properly. I was also cautioned not to become too involved with the community lest I lose my objectivity and become an advocate for Aboriginal peoples' causes. While this all sounds very reactionary today, in the early 1990s museums were just beginning to explore their roles as socially responsible institutions, to work directly with communities, and to redefine their goals and objectives and the nature of their existence.

The Glenbow's first tentative steps toward repatriation also received harsh criticism from senior bureaucrats in the provincial government. They felt that it was the museum's primary legal, ethical, and fiduciary responsibility to ensure the physical preservation of the collections for all Albertans. The ceremonial use of a bundle would, inevitably, alter the piece and diminish its historical worth and its value to the larger society. In addition, there had been

unfortunate confrontations between the provincial museum and a group of Kainai in the 1970s that might have left lingering suspicions among government officials. The authorities seemed to feel that access to sacred bundles for ceremonial purposes would lead either to their permanent removal from the museum's collections or to their deterioration through repeated use—and, hence, to their loss to society as a whole. There was no legal precedent for repatriation in Canada, and although the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) had recently been enacted in the United States, no one in the museum community or the government could imagine what the full implications of repatriation would be (see Luby and Nelson 2008). The debate between the Glenbow and the provincial bureaucrats was protracted and, at times, heated. Twenty years ago, these were vital issues in the museum community, and while attitudes toward repatriation have shifted in North America, these debates continue to frame discussions between Aboriginal people and many European museums.

Through all of this, I continued to visit with Blackfoot people, participate in ceremonies, and invite ceremonial leaders to the museum to advise us on the appropriate ways to care for and interpret sacred and other material in our collection. There was an emerging body of literature that was concerned with issues of inclusion, voice, and representation in museums (see Clifford 1988; Karp and Lavine 1991), while anthropological writings were probing the nature of cultural knowledge (see, for example, DeMaille 1993; Gable et al. 1992; Keesing 1987; Marcus and Fischer 1986). I began to explore ways of using the knowledge I was acquiring to interpret the material in the Glenbow's collection and the cultures from which they came (see Conaty 1995). The more I understood the Blackfoot perspective, the more I understood how much information could be missing from a Western-focused interpretation and analysis. I grew cautious about interpreting material culture from other parts of the world and suspicious of the nature of the Glenbow's collections documentation.

#### SACRED BUNDLES, THEIR LOSS, AND THEIR REPATRIATION

The stories in this book are about the return of Blackfoot sacred material from museums to their homes. Most of these present the experiences of Kainai,

Piikani, and Siksika who have approached museums with repatriation requests. One account provides a former government official's perspective on the machinations required to develop repatriation legislation and the far-reaching positive effects that have followed from these actions. Finally, the Glenbow's open-handed attitude toward repatriation is discussed, along with the motivations of the staff who tried to minimize bureaucratic roadblocks to returning sacred material. In many ways, the difference between the Blackfoot perspective on repatriation and that of the museum community is a microcosm of the gap in understanding between First Nations and the dominant Canadian and American societies regarding larger issues concerning Aboriginal rights and treaty obligations. While these stories do not purport to offer a panacea for these larger issues, they do underscore where some of the disjunction lies and suggest ways in which accommodation and understanding can be achieved.

The stories presented here are historically and culturally important. Historically, repatriation represents an assertion of the human right to freedom of religious expression and cultural identity after more than one hundred years of concerted efforts to acculturate First Nations people into mainstream society. The success of the repatriation effort lies in an affirmation of cultural identity and an immense pride in that identity. The contributors all feel that people—both Native and non-Native—need to understand how important repatriation has been, and continues to be, in the ongoing effort to maintain a distinct cultural identity in the midst of overwhelming pressures to assimilate into the dominant society. But repatriation has not been an easy process. It takes time to locate bundles, research their histories, develop connections with museums, learn the procedures for requesting repatriation, and construct arguments that will convince institutional bureaucracies that it is appropriate to return the sacred material. Sometimes those seeking to repatriate such material also meet with resistance from community members who feel that “the old ways” have nothing to offer in a modern world and may even be harmful. Working through all of these issues requires a great deal of spiritual, mental, and physical effort. It is important that people understand that it has not always been easy to have sacred items returned from museums and that it is therefore very important that they not leave again.

When sacred materials return home, they have far-reaching positive effects. People who have worked hard to bring them home are adamant

that these consequences be discussed so that both community members and museum professionals understand that repatriation is for all of society, not just for those who care for the sacred items. Some of these effects include changes in the relationships among the people who are associated with the items: new relationships develop, and old support networks are strengthened. Sometimes, as is the case with many museums, these connections evolve from positions of mistrust and even antagonism to partnerships based on mutual respect. This, too, is a testament to the importance of sacred items as active community members and reinforces the importance of their return home from institutions.

The collection of stories in this book was done in the spirit of collaboration with the Blackfoot people who have been involved with repatriation. As Ridington (1998, 344) observes: "An ethnography that places the ethnographer's monologue above the voices of the people being represented risks sacrificing effective engagement with its subjects. Monologic ethnography is likely to be bad (and ethnocentric) ethnography because its claim to objectivity may actually disguise the subjectivity of its singular isolated author." However, discussions of theoretical models that may help us understand the museum-First Nations interactions on repatriation issues often involve relatively little participation from Native people, given that

most American anthropologists and literary critics view theorizing as their business, not that of the Native Americans whose lives generate the theorizing. . . . Even when theorizing reflects "the other" rather than attempting to manage without it, the language of the theory continues to be culturally monologic. It also invariably replicates the genre conventions of Western academic expression rather than those of Native Americans. (Ridington 1998, 344)

Ridington goes on to suggest that, for First Nations, storytelling is the "key to their way of theorizing" (1998, 346) and that creation stories, in particular, are connected in ways that help explain the nature of existence. For museum professionals, who may already be uncomfortable with the prospect of relinquishing control over their collections, the proposition of adopting such a very different approach to understanding the process may be untenable. A more normative approach to theory building may be more acceptable.

While repatriation is not normally considered to be a research project, it shares many characteristics with scholarly inquiries. First, the research question is formulated, usually regarding the legitimacy of a repatriation request. Then, information is provided by a First Nation regarding its culture, history, and ceremonial practices. This is compared with information gathered by members of the museum staff as they examine museum records, archival fonds, and published material. The two sets of data are scrutinized and evaluated for accuracy and used to determine if the request should be approved by the museum. The principles of interaction described in the following projects form the basic structure of ways in which museums and First Nations can interact with one another in mutually respectful ways. Many of the repatriation stories that follow describe positive experiences that are based on these principles.

In 2005, Julia Harrison compared two exhibits that she found to be exemplary models of museum–First Nations relationships. The temporary exhibit “Out of the Mist” saw Nuu-chah-nulth communities on Vancouver Island, through the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, working with the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM), while “Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life” presents Blackfoot culture and history in a permanent exhibit at the Glenbow Museum. Harrison (2005, 198) argues that the organizational culture of each museum parallels the traditional social and political structure of the First Nation with whom they worked and that “parallels at a structural level between institutional culture and that of the source community fostered a certain compatible resonance as to how a collaboration project may proceed.” The Nuu-chah-nulth are always aware of the “structural hierarchies based around the identification of families” (2005, 207), so that the identification of artifacts, the composition of text, and the selection of an exhibit title required that those with the proper cultural authority be consulted or, when such individuals could not be identified, that other avenues for decision making be explored. While the RBCM, founded as a provincial museum, now operates as a quasi-autonomous institution, it retains the levels of bureaucracy that one might expect of a government organization. This structural hierarchy was well understood by the Nuu-chah-nulth, and, rather than hindering the process, it may have expedited the project by enabling people on each side to discuss directly with others of similar rank. It was key that the RBCM understood the importance of these protocols and respected them.

Harrison (2005, 198) sees the Glenbow Museum as situated “firmly in the cultural milieu in which [it] developed,” that is, as a brash institution that is willing to “try something new, ignoring any warning that it may have been tried elsewhere, and failed” (203). The museum had been structurally reorganized in the 1990s, and a hierarchical structure was replaced with a “shamrock” model of overlapping spheres of influence, a model that promoted enhanced collaboration among all staff members, regardless of their substantive functional roles. This, according to Harrison, matches in a general way the fluid clan membership, situational leadership, and consensual decision making of traditional Blackfoot culture. She goes on to suggest that the Blackfoot individuals who worked with the Glenbow “were not drawn together through any formal structure” (208). This is not completely accurate, since almost all were recognized as traditional leaders who cared for sacred bundles, who had transferred these to others, and who, according to Blackfoot protocol, have the rights to teach about sacred matters and the authority to speak about cultural affairs (see Conaty 2003). To the Western eye, the structure may seem less rigid than that among the Nuu-chah-nulth. To the Blackfoot, the protocol is just as strict.

Harrison correctly cautions that her conclusions do not mean that institutions and First Nations with dissimilar organizational structures cannot work together. She credits individual staff personalities and a respect for First Nations protocols, which vary among nations, with ensuring the success of these projects. The message for all museums, I would add, is that it is very important to understand the cultural protocols and structures of the society that are embedded within all endeavours with First Nations. This helps us to understand the nature of discussions and the nuances of behaviour and can go a long way to creating a successful working environment.

Krmpotich and Peers (2011) describe a “community of practice” in which a group of twenty-one Haida artists, educators, and other members of the community travelled to the United Kingdom, in September 2009, and joined with museum scholar-practitioners to explore the meaning behind Haida artifacts kept by the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford and by the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> Communities of practice, they argue, facilitate “reciprocal and intercultural learning that takes place when museum staff, academics and community researchers come together on respectful terms and with common goals” (423). Oral and written traditions are valued equally, and people move from the

periphery to the centre and back to the periphery as various topics emerge or as one person's particular expertise becomes important to a situation. In addition, community members come to feel comfortable within museum settings, just as museum and academic personnel feel more at home in the community.

Haida, like Nuu-chah-nulth, have a strongly hierarchical organization. The RBCM found that the willingness to acknowledge and adhere to Nuu-chah-nulth protocols was essential to the success of "Out of the Mist." Yet the community of practice formed among Haida and Pitt Rivers staff included relatively few Elders and was dominated instead by artists and educators. As Krmpotich and Peers (2011, 434) point out, artists "often have an intimate knowledge of materials and processes of manufacture," but, as they also acknowledge, Elders and those of special rank "tend to have had personal encounters with the kinds of historic objects held in museums or have knowledge of related oral histories referencing such objects." By way of explaining why the Haida delegation included so few Elders, they indicate that travel was risky for older members of the Haida communities at the time, owing to the H1N1 influenza pandemic (435). There is, however, no indication whether Pitt Rivers staff followed proper Haida ranking protocols when they travelled to Haida Gwaii. While it is true that Elders can be valuable to museums as sources of information and insight, more to the point is the special status held by such people within their own culture and communities. Including them as primary partners indicates an institution's acknowledgement of Aboriginal practices. Doing so also requires that the museum take some time to meet with communities and learn who the most appropriate people to speak with are and how those interactions should proceed. The benefits that accrue from this investment of time and effort can be significant in terms of an enhanced facilitation of the process and an incremental amount of knowledge that is shared; museums may learn more than they expected. In the end, it rests with communities to identify who should engage with museums and how information will be exchanged.

These projects, as progressive as they are within the world of museums, still retain the trappings of traditional research that is carried on within a neocolonial context. The research was initiated by the institutions, which also defined the parameters of the project. While boundaries may have shifted and blurred, the museums remained the primary drivers. The knowledge generated by the projects remained housed in the museums, as an exhibit, a database, or

other manifestation. Although digital access is available (through the Glenbow's Web exhibit and Pitt Rivers's database), access is ultimately controlled by the institution, not by the community. Finally, the artifacts themselves remain in the possession of the museums and are not readily accessible to community members. Repatriation can move the idea of collaboration further toward a truly equal partnership. To do so, however, requires a different paradigm, one that enables First Nations to define the frame of reference in their own terms and to be assured that the results will benefit the community.

#### POSTCOLONIAL INDIGENOUS THEORY

The problems that First Nations encounter in having their cultures recognized and understood by the dominant society are most obvious when the issues involved require consideration by the judicial system. Bruce Miller (1998, 88–91), in a discussion of efforts to protect a petroglyph and associated sacred land, observes five types of judicial responses to claims of sacredness:

- The cultural grounds for the claim are taken literally.
- The discourse is considered to be part of a “faked” culture, and contemporary Native people are considered to be culturally contaminated rather than the genuine spiritual heirs of their ancestors.
- Fear and animosity are directed toward those who see themselves as fundamentally different from, and yet connected to, the dominant society.
- There is a search for uniformity among First Nations rather than an acknowledgement of cultural diversity.
- Legal strategies are adopted that create texts written and rewritten by non-Natives, resulting in a legally defined concept of Native culture that reaffirms modernist discourse.

Moving beyond these strictures can be difficult, especially when seeking legal status for the claims. When the Gitksan sought a legal recognition of their traditional lands and practices, the trial judge ruled that oral tradition held less weight than the written documentation of Europeans at the time of first

contact. The former was biased; the latter was not (Kasmo 1996, 82). Within museum–First Nations contexts, an approach that privileges Western sources of knowledge and diminishes the value of traditional knowledge quickly leads to an impasse in which no one benefits.

Postcolonial theory recognizes the biases inherent in the accounts provided in many written records and leads us toward a history in which the disenfranchised and the illiterate are recognized as important components of society. This remains problematic for many First Nations people, who see their own issues and concerns compromised by the researcher's agenda. Postcolonial Indigenous theory underlies research that is directed by Indigenous people. It is the community members who determine the research questions that are meaningful. The data that are collected will include information that the people themselves define as relevant to the research question. Sometimes this can be very different from that which the non-Indigenous researcher recognizes as important. The results that are presented must be acceptable to the Indigenous community, and the practical implications of these results must benefit the community. This research process is inherently political, since Indigenous people invariably define such research as a way of asserting their identity.

A postcolonial Indigenous hermeneutic requires

(1) affirmation of the autonomy and continuing relevance of indigenous religious traditions, (2) recognition of the integrity of the cultural-spiritual bond between indigenous people and their lands, (3) respect for communal processes as the proper location for determining all meanings and commitments, and (4) a rejection of all “us” versus “them” dichotomies and an embrace of kinship with “the entire created order.” (Stover 2002, 177)<sup>2</sup>

Through these requirements, research moves from Western concerns to Indigenous issues, and from an emphasis on written evidence to a recognition that oral tradition is equally valuable. The perspective of the community is less likely to be filtered through the lens of the researcher, ensuring that a truly Indigenous point of view emerges and is valued.

Postcolonial Indigenous theory provides a valuable framework within which to discuss and understand Blackfoot sacred materials and their

repatriation from museums to their home communities. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the issue was defined by Blackfoot ceremonial leaders as important to their cultural well-being. These people have been involved in repatriation for over four decades, and while the process is now relatively straightforward in North America, it has not always been so; indeed, discussions with European museums can still be problematic. The Blackfoot hope that, by making their stories public, other Blackfoot and museum personnel will avoid the problems that occurred in the past, while creating positive relationships such as those that are discussed here. Second, those who have been involved in repatriation understand the intimate connections between traditional Blackfoot knowledge and world view, on the one hand, and particular places on the landscape, on the other. Narcisse Blood and Cynthia Chambers captured some aspects of this relationship in their video project, *Kááahsinnooniksi: If the Land Could Speak . . . and We Would Listen* (2006). Some of this traditional knowledge was renewed as bundles were returned and ceremonies revived and as people began to consider what other understandings might have been lost or forgotten. Visiting these special places has been an important process for both Elders and younger people, one through which they reconnect with their heritage and renew their personal and cultural identity.

Although the stories presented here are individual accounts, they reflect endeavours that were undertaken only after a great deal of consultation and discussion among many people who are involved in ceremonies. The actions of one person were supported by many. Similarly, we began the project to record these stories only after consulting with a number of people and gaining their support. In this way, the communal process was respected.

Repatriation is important for many reasons, and its meaning to Blackfoot people has evolved over the years. Initially, the concern was solely with retrieving sacred material from museums as part of an assertion of their culture, identity, and rights. Over the past twenty years, the process has become more cooperative, although Blackfoot people will argue that they have made many more compromises than museums or government authorities have. So far, repatriation has generally been considered to be an issue that is primarily important to First Nations. In fact, it is a process that affects us all, for it is a route by which some of the failings of our colonial past can be acknowledged

and addressed. Repatriation is a vital component in the creation of an equitable, diverse, and respectful society.

#### NOTES

- 1 About the project, see “Haida Material Culture in UK Museums: Generating New Forms of Knowledge,” <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/haida.html>, according to which “delegates handled nearly 800 Haida treasures, and also gave carving and weaving demonstrations, public talks, and public dance performances.” For an in-depth discussion, see Krmpotich and Peers (2013).
- 2 Stover is summarizing the interpretive framework proposed by Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver in “From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics” (1998). As Stover goes on to argue (2002, 182–83), postcolonial discourse must seek to “avoid the colonial legacy of a scholarship that objectifies and reifies indigenous realities from the distant vantage point of the ‘knowing’ outsider.” See also the discussion in Crop Eared Wolf (2007), 31–35.

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## *The Development of Museums and Their Effects on First Nations*

GERALD T. CONATY

The Alberta legislature began the new millennium by passing the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (FNSCORA).<sup>1</sup> In doing so, the Province became the only jurisdiction in Canada that recognizes, through law, the right of First Nations people to retrieve sacred material from public collections in order to continue their traditional spiritual practices. The return of this material does occur elsewhere in the country, and most Canadian museums willingly repatriate sacred items and human remains. However, the process often relies on the development of a good relationship between a museum and a First Nation. Regardless of the good intentions and attitudes of museum personnel, this places the museum in the position of benefactor, a role that perpetuates the neocolonial relationship that exists between First Nations and the dominant Canadian society. The Alberta legislation ensures that repatriation is

not dependent upon the personalities of staff who work in museums and that requests for the return of sacred material cannot be declined simply because a curator or museum director thinks that the process is not a good idea or that the applicant is unworthy. Alberta's repatriation act affirms the right of First Nations people to conduct ceremonies that are integral to their spiritual beliefs and well-being and to use items from their culture to do so.

The quest to repatriate sacred material has led the Blackfoot to museums in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The Blackfoot have had to learn the institutional processes that will gain them access to collections, the protocols necessary for the handling of artifacts, and the procedures for requesting the return of artifacts. To complicate matters, museums operate in accordance with principles and policies that can be very different from one another. Some have responded to Blackfoot requests promptly and positively, while others have been more suspicious and reluctant. These interactions reflect the culture and history of museums, the culture and history of the Blackfoot, and the personalities of the individuals who are engaged in the process of repatriation. In this chapter and the next, I consider the culture and history of museums and the Blackfoot, respectively. In the subsequent chapters, the individual stories of those who have been involved with repatriation provide personal reflections and insights about the process and outcomes.

## THE IDEA OF MUSEUMS

Museums are complex institutions that vary greatly in their structures, purposes, and philosophical foundations. No single description can do justice to this diversity, and any attempt will undoubtedly lead to some crucial omissions.<sup>2</sup> The following outline of museums focuses on particular developments that will help us to understand the museum culture that the Blackfoot people encountered when they began to repatriate their sacred bundles, first in the 1970s and, later, in the 1990s. The examples of museum development found in the literature tend to highlight the larger museums where these evolutionary changes originated. While not all museums are grand, national temples of learning, they do share a common museum heritage and culture of collecting.

Museums are very much an invention of Western civilization. They have changed greatly over the centuries and continue to evolve and redefine themselves. While the name was first applied to temples that were dedicated by the ancient Greeks to the muses and their works of art (Alexander 1996, 6), the modern museum had its beginnings during the Age of Discovery, from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. It was during this period that sailors, explorers, missionaries, and the military who sailed from Europe to the far reaches of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas returned with stories of the wonders they had seen and with treasures of gold, silver, and other strange and remarkable things that verified the truth of their tales. At first, the European world must have been overwhelmed with the new sights and smells:

Obviously the mathematical and navigational sophistication necessary for Columbus to have been able to mount an expedition to America—and then make it back, and not once, but four times!—was of a considerable level, and was indicative of a steadily rising curve of such certain, positive knowledge. . . . But the stuff he found in America, and the stuff he brought back, was so strange and so new as to seem to sanction belief in all manner of wondrous prospects and phantasms for years thereafter. (Weschler 1995, 81)

These exotic objects from the far corners of the world became an important source of pride and prestige for the wealthy patrons of the voyages of discovery. In exchange for underwriting an expedition, patrons would expect a financial recompense through a share in any profits from trade of the imports. They also looked forward to gifts of exotica brought back from afar. These collections, along with anomalies collected closer to home, were often assembled in special rooms reserved for their display. Thomas Platter, a Swiss visitor to England, described the collection he observed in 1599 at the Kensington castle of Thomas Cope, a politician and member of the Elizabethan College of Antiquarians. The cabinets contained holy relics from a Spanish ship that Cope had helped to capture; earthen pitchers and porcelain from China; a Madonna made of feathers; a chair made of monkey teeth; stone shears, a back-scratcher, and a canoe with a paddle, all from India; a Javanese costume; Arabian coats; the horn and tail of a rhinoceros; the horn of a bull seal; a round horn that had grown on an

Englishwoman's forehead; a unicorn's tail; the baubles and bells of Henry VIII's fool; and the Turkish emperor's gold seal (Weschler 1995, 76–77). These “cabinets of curiosities” were the physical representations of the extent of Europe's exploration, and the objects symbolized the advance of Western knowledge, for without this knowledge, the ability to travel and collect treasures would have been greatly curtailed.

As Weschler (1995, 81) remarks, the wonders that came from afar challenged Europeans' conceptions of the order of the universe. As these collections became more numerous and grew in size, they became the focus of study by both their owners and a growing body of scientists—philosophers and naturalists who concerned themselves with understanding how the world worked. Yet within the prevailing theistic paradigm, which credited divine intervention for all of Creation, it was difficult to arrive at a meaningful, cohesive ordering of these fantastic objects. By the late eighteenth century, the scientists and philosophers of the Enlightenment had rejected deistic explanations of the natural order in favour of a science that was based on rational and intellectual analysis of observable phenomena. A set of criteria and principles emerged that gave scientists of the time a frame of reference within which they could arrange the objects of their study. These arrangements generated theories that explained similarities and differences between individual objects and among groups of objects and laid the foundation for the field of biology (Mayr 1982, 107–111). Eventually, these studies of life forms led to a recognition that evolution provides the most robust and parsimonious explanation for the diversity of life on earth.

These scientists primarily studied the natural world and were not overly concerned with materials made by humans. Nevertheless, the allure of the scientific method, with its reliance on observed facts and verifiable theories, drew some researchers to apply this process to the study of human cultures. After Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, his ideas were adapted by Herbert Spencer, who is often credited as the author of the theory of cultural evolution, according to which societies, like living organisms, progress from simple to complex. “Primitive” societies were assumed to be homogenous, and evolutionary change (adaptation) was the basis by which cultures gradually grew more complex and became differentiated from one another (see Harris 1968, 126–131). Scholars gathered reports about Indigenous cultures,

usually second-hand from missionaries, colonial administrators, and military officers. Key cultural traits were selected and compared across cultures, and these comparisons became the foundation for determining which cultures were “more advanced” and which were more “primitive.” Of course, these traits were taken out of context: researchers were unconcerned with how a culture functioned, changed, or interacted with other cultures. Moreover, the traits they chose reflected the culture and interests of the non-Native researcher more often than they did those of the Indigenous peoples (Hernandez 2007). This was, and remains, particularly problematic with regard to the concept of the sacred, since Western epistemology had gone to great lengths to ensure that the spiritual aspect was removed from any analysis of what was considered to be a purely mechanistic world (Herman 2008, 74).

It was within this intellectual milieu of the late 1800s that A. H. L. Pitt Rivers began to amass his encyclopaedic collection of tools and weapons (Chapman 1985). As a young military officer, he was assigned to test newly developed rifles for the British army and was impressed with what he imagined to be a slow, but systematic, progress in the development of weaponry. At the same time, he had an abiding interest in the archaeological relics that he uncovered at various sites in the United Kingdom. As his military career took him abroad, he was able to collect examples of material culture from outposts of the British Empire, and his friendships with fellow officers and government staff ensured that his collection represented places that Pitt Rivers could not visit himself. This assemblage was organized so as to support a Spencerian evolutionary model of cultural progression, one that applied both across cultures and through time. In this scenario, vibrant, modern cultures in Africa could—on the basis of their perceived degree of technological sophistication—be equated with cultures found, for example, in Stone Age England. And if the technological sophistication of living people was equivalent to that of the Stone Age, this implied that the rest of their culture was similarly undeveloped. Pitt Rivers bequeathed his collection to the University of Oxford with the stipulation that the arrangement of the material in displays be retained during his lifetime “and beyond—except for such changes in detail that might be ‘necessitated by the advance of knowledge’” (Chapman 1985, 15–16). At the university’s Pitt Rivers Museum, items were grouped together by type—watercraft, cooking containers, smoking equipment, and so on—and arranged from the simplest (least

advanced) to the more complex (most advanced), irrespective of the culture that had produced the objects or their context within that culture.

Pitt Rivers's and Spencer's interpretations of social Darwinism were not the only frameworks for museum collections and exhibits. When the German anthropologist Franz Boas became the assistant curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in 1896, he brought with him a very different perspective (Jacknis 1985). Boas was not convinced that a linear, evolutionary model offered an accurate explanation of the variety of cultural expressions. Rather, he believed that, in order to understand a culture, we needed to understand how all of the parts contribute to the complex whole—a perspective that came to dominate anthropology early in the twentieth century. Within the museum context, this meant that objects should be interpreted only within their cultural milieu. The approach that Boas developed accordingly “focused on how objects are used and included cultural context (for example, through dioramas) to access the meaning of the objects according to the people from whom they originated” (Shannon 2009, 224). It was important, then, to record the details of how people behaved and to collect a wide variety of material culture that helped to describe and explain the behaviour.

At the AMNH, with the financial support of key benefactors, Boas began a period of intense fieldwork and collecting on the Northwest Coast and in the Arctic. As tensions developed between Boas's insistence on the importance of research and publications and the museum administration's need for documentation of the collections and label writing for the exhibits, Boas resigned and joined Columbia University, where he developed a program that was instrumental in shaping anthropology in North America for many generations. His students went on to populate universities and museums, where they developed research programs that followed Boas's prescriptions. Clark Wissler's publications on Blackfoot culture exemplify the process in which a series of cultural traits, such as ceremony, material culture, and mythology, are described in detail and artifacts are collected that exemplify these traits—ceremonial bundles, clothing, tools and utensils, and so on (see Wissler 1911, 1913, 1918, 1975a, 1975b).

Boas and his students were less interested in contemporary Aboriginal life than they were in these cultures as they had existed before the arrival of Europeans in the hemisphere. They were largely concerned with recording lists

of cultural traits and understanding the cultural context that articulated human interaction with the physical environment. Relatively scant attention was given to the connections between cultures that created nuanced contexts. However, because many Aboriginal people had already been greatly influenced by interactions with Europeans, Boas and his students were faced with the monumental task of retrieving and preserving as much as they could of these “traditional” cultures, prior to their presumed contamination as a result of contact. If a practice or object had already fallen into disuse, people would be asked to recreate a “remembered culture” that could be captured for the anthropological record.

As a result, collections in many museums came to represent cultures that were “frozen in time” in a fictionalized “ethnographic present.” In essence, this process involved recording the accounts of Aboriginal people as they recalled how life had been in the past. Within museums, this was translated into the arrangement of artifacts in “life studies,” or dioramas, that portrayed Aboriginal people in abstracted, fictionalized settings that were oddly nostalgic, summoning up a way of life and a time that, in many cases, had long since disappeared. It was often implied that, just as the lifeways had disappeared, so too had the people. While this inference may or may not have been intentional, the impact was far reaching: if Aboriginal people had disappeared, there was no need to develop social, economic, or political programs that would address their ongoing concerns. Moreover, if traditional cultures were lost (or were about to be), it was only right that the material expressions of those cultures be collected and preserved in the artifact collections of museums. Museum curators were challenged with “salvaging” the objects and any knowledge about them.

In spite of the influence of Boas and others, museums remained eclectic in their approach to collecting and exhibiting cultures. George Heye’s Museum of the American Indian in New York is an important counterpoint to the contextual approach that was emerging in North American museums in the early years of the twentieth century. The scion of a wealthy New York family, Heye abandoned the world of finance to devote his time, energy, and resources to collecting Indigenous material culture from throughout the Americas. Variouslly portrayed as a “buccaneer,” a “rapacious” collector, and a “crazy white man” (see McMullen 2009, 65–66), he amassed a private collection of some 800,000 items by buying individual pieces and large assemblages from museums and collectors. With the support of influential businessmen, he also funded

archaeological and anthropological expeditions and a great many publications reporting the results of these undertakings.<sup>3</sup> Heye's underlying quest was to uncover and understand the origins of Aboriginal people in the New World.

While many portray Heye only as a collector, McMullen (2009) probes the motives that led him to found the Museum of the American Indian in 1916. This was a time when many large American museums were turning away from archaeological studies of North America in favour of investigating ancient civilizations in other parts of the world. In addition, public education was becoming a greater focus of museums, with collecting increasingly oriented toward "exhibits rather than pure science" (McMullen 2009, 76). Heye was dedicated to providing a site in New York City where adults could find serious, research-based information about the Aboriginal people of the western hemisphere. He was particularly interested in early material and often refused to purchase more recently made material. Furthermore, while dressed mannequins and dioramas were gaining popularity, Heye chose to exhibit his material in closely packed display cases with minimal commentary. When Heye lost financial support for his museum in 1928, he dismissed most of his professional staff but continued to collect material and compile catalogue documentation himself. Eventually, the Heye Foundation collection became the core of the National Museum of the American Indian.

The repatriation initiatives of the Blackfoot have, so far, been largely directed toward the Royal Alberta Museum (formerly the Provincial Museum of Alberta) and the Glenbow Museum. Both have extensive collections of Blackfoot material and, as Alberta institutions, are readily accessible to the Blackfoot people. Although the histories and philosophies of these institutions generally reflect the history of museum development outlined above, these museums are also unusual in some very important aspects. The interactions that Blackfoot people have had with the Alberta museums have influenced how the Blackfoot approach other institutions; in turn, the responses of the provincial museum and the Glenbow have influenced how other museums react to Blackfoot repatriation requests. It is therefore worth considering the contexts within which these two museums developed.

The project to create the Provincial Museum of Alberta (PMA) was initiated in 1962 as a celebration to commemorate Canada's 1967 centennial.<sup>4</sup> Matching federal and provincial funds provided the resources to hire staff,

develop collections, construct the building, and create exhibits. Raymond O. Harrison was hired as the inaugural director in 1964, with a mandate to complete the project within three years. As Alberta's economy boomed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the museum continued to expand, adding staff, artifacts, and exhibits. It was during this time that much of the sacred material in its collection was acquired. The early exhibits reflected a Boasian perspective, with artifacts grouped together by culture in ways that illustrated various aspects of those cultures. Occasionally, there were also exhibits that compared some items among Aboriginal cultures: for example, groupings of snowshoes or canoes. Staff members seem to have understood and appreciated the significance of the items that were being gathered. On at least one occasion, a sacred bundle, upon its addition to the collection, was ceremonially transferred to a museum employee, although it is not clear whether the staff fully understood the responsibilities that this implied. The provincial museum was clearly meant to be an institution that celebrated the history and achievement of the people of Alberta. Although not as grand as the Louvre or the British Museum, it was intended to serve much the same purpose by highlighting the unique features and the importance of Alberta's cultural heritage. Significantly, the collections are not owned by the Province of Alberta (which implies a bureaucratic prerogative) but by the people of Alberta, signifying a collective attachment.

The Glenbow Museum originated in much the same way as the Museum of the American Indian (Dempsey 1991). Eric L. Harvie, a Calgary lawyer, had invested in property near Leduc and Redwater, Alberta, during the 1930s. In the late 1940s, when oil was discovered at both locales, he became one of the wealthiest people in Canada. He used some of his new wealth to pursue his passion for collecting, and although his interests were eclectic, there were three overarching themes. First, he acquired art and artifacts about the West, especially as they pertained to the pre- and early settlement period of southern Alberta. Second, he was interested in the military, collecting arms and armour from around the world. Third, he acquired materials that were exotic in the eyes of southern Albertans. Harvie travelled extensively at a time when few people had the opportunity to do so, and he felt that it was important that other parts of the world be brought to Calgary. For many years, he displayed portions of his collection of art, artifacts, books, and archival material in a network of spaces throughout the city, where they were available to both school groups

and the general public. In honour of Canada's centennial, Harvie donated his collection to the Province in 1966 and, with a matching grant from the Province, created an endowment fund for the museum. During the 1970s, he negotiated an agreement with the City of Calgary and the Province of Alberta that led to the construction of the current building, which the Province owns and the City maintains (fig. 3). The Glenbow Museum, however, is a not-for-profit organization that manages the collection for the Province, in exchange for an annual fee-for-service. It is a unique museum model in Canada.

The Glenbow's approach to the interpretation of its ethnographic collection has, in general, tended to be closer to that of Pitt Rivers and Heye than that of Boas. When the present museum opened in 1976, collections were grouped according to geographic area and, within that, according to culture of origin. The display techniques emphasized the pieces as *objets d'art*, with text that provided little context (fig. 4). While the main exhibits featured material from the Great Plains and other parts of Canada, the collections from Oceania, Africa, and Latin America were held in reserve for special occasions. There was a sense that the museum and its artifacts reflected both the brashness of Calgarians (and Albertans) and their growing sophistication. The brashness derived from bringing "world class" material to Calgary and exhibiting it in a "state of the art" facility. The sophistication stemmed from the scope of material presented. At the time, the city was often disparaged as a "cowtown" lacking the knowledge to produce such a facility, let alone an audience to appreciate it.

The provincial museum and the Glenbow began their collecting programs relatively late. If the museum anthropologists of the early twentieth century felt that Aboriginal cultures were beginning to disappear, the continuation of traditional practices seemed even more tenuous by the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Collecting expeditions from both institutions travelled throughout southern Alberta in search of items that had historic importance or that were associated with important individuals. Often, museum representatives developed close personal relationships with First Nations people. The museums came to be regarded by some as suitable repositories for items that seemed no longer to have either purpose or meaning.

The collection records at the Glenbow suggest that the items were collected as commodities, as representations of disappearing cultures, and as a source of celebration and pride in the province. The commodification is



Figure 3. Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta, 2010. Photograph by Owen Melenka, courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.



Figure 4. Glenbow ethnographic exhibits, ca. 1976. Photograph by Ron Marsh, courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

reflected in the focus on the prices paid for items and, in some cases, the protracted negotiations over the appropriate price. In one rare instance, a bundle was sold to the Glenbow with the stipulation that it could be bought back within a year if the seller changed his mind. By the time the seller requested the bundle's return, the year had passed and the request was denied. In many cases, the sacred material that came to the Glenbow was accompanied by extensive notes about its role in sacred societies and ceremonies. A series of ceremonial songs were recorded, and some ceremonies were even photographed. One film, *Okan, Sun Dance of the Blackfoot*, followed the events of the annual Aako'ka'tssin, or summer gathering, held by the Siksika in the mid-1960s.<sup>6</sup> These were all undertaken with the full cooperation of the Aboriginal people involved. These individuals were highly respected ceremonial leaders, and there is no doubt that they supported these projects. However, their motives were not recorded, so it is not clear whether they, like their museum colleagues, felt that they were participating in an effort to salvage fading traditions.

#### THE POLITICS OF MUSEUMS

Until the 1980s, few people in the museum community were accustomed to thinking about museums as either instruments of state political agendas or as moulders of public opinion. The perceived objectivity with which museums carried out their work added immense credibility to anything presented by these institutions; the veracity of museum interpretation was rarely challenged, and those who did so were rarely heeded. Yet the motives that underlie the development of collections reflect prevalent attitudes toward both objects and the people who made and used them. The ways in which artifacts have been (and continue to be) exhibited and interpreted are determined by a matrix of influences that includes a museum's corporate organization, funder relationships, special audiences, the "general" audience, academic and museological epistemological trends that influence how curators (and other museum staff) approach their work, and, increasingly, the people whose culture and history are represented in the collections and portrayed in the exhibits. Museums, of course, have never existed in a social or political vacuum. European museums may have originated as cabinets of curiosity, but the concept of the museum

was soon embraced by the ruling elite as a valuable means of defining and promoting national ideals and values. Social and natural scientists studied and categorized artifacts and specimens in an effort to understand a world that seemed to be ever expanding. The ruling elite found messages embedded in these same objects that reinforced the social order and drew upon the loyalty and support of the population.

In France, for example, the collections of the Crown, the Church, and the aristocracy became the property of the state once the Republic was established (Grasset 1996, 190). The decree of 17 July 1793 transformed the royal palace into the Louvre, a public museum that guaranteed access to its collections for all of the people of France and a place where the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity were realized in a very tangible way. A decade later, as Napoleon I (r. 1804–1815) conquered most of Europe and North Africa, the plunder that his troops brought back from afar was housed in museums that were built not only in Paris but throughout the country. The collections included many antiquities and initially served as mementos of the past and as evidence of the growing national prosperity as the French empire expanded. At the same time, as the objects became a subject for study by scientists, they became a useful tool for social and political propaganda. The citizens developed a strong sense of ownership—and pride in that ownership—toward the collections. Concomitantly, the state converted this pride of ownership into a pride in the nation and, by association, in the nation's leaders. The strength of the nation, and therefore the resoluteness and foresight of its leaders, was exemplified by the marvelous objects that became the property of France. These collections were housed in publicly accessible museums throughout the country for everyone to enjoy.

In the United Kingdom, the strong conservative reaction to the revolutionary attitudes that were emerging in France, Prussia, and elsewhere on the Continent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries inhibited the democratization of museums. Rather than transfer private collections to the public trust, the aristocracy retained ownership and controlled access to those who were deemed to be suitable (usually, other aristocratic males). However, by the late 1850s, industrialization had transformed British demographics as people had migrated from the countryside to the burgeoning cities that were the sites of manufacturing and commerce. This growing population of urban poor was considered by the ruling class to be the source of innumerable social

ills. Some believed that museums and similar institutions could assume a new, socially responsible role that would draw the lower classes away from the taverns and toward the art, artifacts, and literature of Western civilization. Character reformation and a general improvement in the nature of the working class was sure to follow, as this passage from the opening of the Sheepshank Gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1858 suggests: "The anxious wife will no longer have to visit the different taprooms to drag her poor besotted husband home. She will seek for him in the nearest museum, where she will have to exercise all the persuasion of her affection to tear him away from the rapt contemplation of a Raphael" (quoted in Bennett 1996, 5).

At the same time, Spencer's social Darwinism and Pitt Rivers's model of material culture evolution reinforced Britain's imperialistic strategy, not only for the population at home but also for the military who conquered other peoples and for the bureaucrats in the Foreign Service who administered the colonies. The unidirectionality of these theories implied that the dominance of European culture was inevitable; the development of a quasi-scientific model brought credence to the theories. The museum displays transformed the intangible (the theory) into the tangible (the arrangement of artifacts) and provided the verification of theory through observable results that is so crucial to the scientific method. The displays also made these theories more understandable to the general population.

As private collections were transformed into public museums, the meaning embedded within the objects was profoundly affected. As Ames (1992, 21) observes, "The public . . . came to believe that they had the right to expect that the collections would present and interpret the world in some way consistent with the values they held to be good, with the collective representations they held to be appropriate, and with the view of social reality they held to be true." So, while objects may have been used initially to reinforce certain values, over time the public grew to expect that the interpretation of collections would reflect the now commonly held world view. Museums became the temple for society (Cameron 1971, 17), reifying the principles and beliefs expounded by the educated classes. They were sites where one could compare private, individualistic perceptions of reality with those held by society at large. Voices of minorities were conspicuously absent, thus excluding Indigenous perspectives from the "reality" that was created in museum displays.

More recently, the philosophy of education systems in general has evolved toward a student-centred pedagogy that acknowledges that different individuals may have distinct learning styles and that a single, monolithic education program is unlikely to be effective for everyone. As the public has come to expect more diverse ways of receiving information, museums have realized the importance of developing programs and exhibit techniques that consider the needs of the visitor. The recognition of the visitor-centred museum experience (see Falk and Dierking 1992) as a vital prerequisite for success has led to what some professionals see as a declining role for curators: “The authority of curators has steadily diminished relative to that of other museum professionals and there is some concern over the effects of popularization on exhibit content” (Jones 1993, 202). Museums have also become financially vulnerable. As they struggle to find ways to remain viable by staying relevant to a public that has increasing access to an expanding variety of media, curators seem to “be losing power . . . to those who raise and manage money and those who design exhibitions and activities for the public” (202–203). In fact, the work culture of museums has become more collaborative and team based (Janes 2013).

At the same time, anthropology curators have been faced with a change in the framework within which they interpret their collections. While museums may have become “marginal to intellectual life” (McMullen 2009, 83), the theoretical frames of reference developed in academia continue to influence how curators work with collections and how critics evaluate exhibits and publications. By the 1980s, postmodernism and postcolonialism had focused attention on the processes by which collections had been amassed and the contexts within which they were exhibited. The formalist approach—which isolates objects from their cultural context and values them solely for their intrinsic, artistic value—was challenged as a perpetuation of the colonial (and usually racist) norm separating Us from the Other (see Price 1989; Torgovnick 1990). Similar concerns were raised by anthropologists who decried the objectification of Aboriginal people (see Trigger 1980, 1986; Wolf 1982).

Although much of the discussion has been phrased in language of academic discourse and has taken place in scholarly publications and at professional conferences, these are not just academic concerns. Museums are very public institutions, and they have found themselves accountable to those whose culture, history, and art they portray. When the Royal Ontario Museum opened

the exhibit “Into the Heart of Africa” in 1989 (Cannizzo 1989), the museum was not prepared for the vehemence of the negative reaction. A collection of African material, mostly gathered by Canadian missionaries, was displayed in such a way as to seemingly reinforce the negative racial stereotypes of the Victorian age. The curator had thought that the message underlying these stereotypes was being conveyed with an irony that would prompt visitors question their own lingering cultural and racial stereotypes. Was the approach too sophisticated for the public? Or was it inappropriate to use irony to address the racism of colonial powers? The African community in Toronto greatly disapproved of the exhibit’s content and approach, leading to public protests, a great deal of negative publicity for the museum, professional criticism of the curator, and personal threats to museum staff. As Ruth Phillips (2011, 60) notes, it can be dangerous to assume that the public will understand the use of “postmodern historicism and quotations to critique museums”; they may, instead, take the irony at face value.

A year earlier, the Glenbow Museum had faced public demonstrations as it hosted “The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples.” Developed as a cultural highlight for the 1988 Winter Olympic Games, this exhibit brought together items from Canada’s Aboriginal peoples that had been dispersed around the globe over the past three or four centuries. The initial issue arose when the Lubicon Cree, a non-treaty band from northern Alberta, targeted the exhibit as a means of drawing attention to the lack of progress in their treaty negotiations with the Government of Canada. Although the Glenbow had no role in those discussions, Shell Canada Ltd., the exhibit’s primary sponsor, was exploring for oil and gas in the contested area. This connection made the museum vulnerable to criticism for acting in collusion with an industry portrayed as more interested in profits than social justice. The Lubicon asked institutions to boycott the exhibit by refusing to lend artifacts. Some complied with the boycott; others agreed to loans. After the exhibit opened, other issues arose. Mohawk representatives requested that an Onkwewhonwe (Iroquois) *ga:goh:sah* (false face mask) be removed from display since it is considered a sacred object. Although the museum initially complied with the request, the matter was taken to court, where the right to exhibit the piece was upheld. The issues raised much discussion (see, for example, Ames 1989, 1992; Glenbow Museum 1988; Harrison 1988; Phillips 2011; Trigger 1989), and in the

end, the Glenbow was criticized for developing a high-profile exhibit about Aboriginal people without including them in the planning or curatorial process. Elsewhere, changes had already begun in museum-Aboriginal relationships that signalled a new era.

By the mid-1980s, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) had begun to work its way through the US legislative system. The impetus for NAGPRA arose over Native American concerns about the excavation and removal for study of their ancestral human remains. The issue may have been long-standing, but it was the political radicalism of the 1970s that empowered Aboriginal people to bring it to the fore and confront archaeologists, physical anthropologists, and legislators. Many archaeologists and physical anthropologists expressed great concern that limiting their ability to work with human remains would mean the loss of a great deal of important information (see Buikstra and Beck 2006; Rose et al. 1996; Thomas 2000). Museums, faced with the prospect of deaccessioning human remains and sacred material and returning them to situations that seldom conformed to museum standards of care and handling, wondered about the fate of this material and the changing values of society (Conaty and Janes 1997; Feest 1995).

NAGPRA does not, however, enable the wholesale removal of human remains and sacred material from museums. Before human remains can be returned, it must be demonstrated that they are affiliated with a formally recognized tribe as defined by the US government. Unaffiliated remains can be returned, but that requires consultation and agreement among all tribes who might have an interest.<sup>7</sup> For cultural reasons, some may choose not to have the remains of their ancestors returned, in which case agreements are developed that define how and where the remains are to be kept.

The return of sacred material is similarly constrained by protocols and processes. NAGPRA recognizes that this kind of material can be personal, almost private, and may have come to an individual through a dream or vision. Other sacred material may be considered to be held in common by an entire nation but cared for by an individual or group of individuals. On the one hand, the law deems that personal material was owned by individuals and that those people had the legal right to sell, give away, or otherwise dispose of those objects. Communal material, on the other hand, could not have been legitimately alienated from the collective, and such materials are thus eligible

for repatriation. Determining whether a sacred item is personal or collective property can, however, be contentious (Bell, Statt, and Mookakin Cultural Society 2008; Conaty 2004; Echo-Hawk 2002). NAGPRA applies only to material in museums that receive funding from the US government (except for the Smithsonian Institution, which is governed by its own repatriation legislation) and only to Aboriginal people living in the United States—although since the 1990s, some Canadian First Nations have brought sacred material home through associated tribes in the United States. Nevertheless, the act raised expectations among Canadian First Nations people, and as requests for the return of material became more common, museums began to consider how best to react.

It was within this context that the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association formed the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples in 1989. Over the next three years, representatives of various First Nations communities and organizations and representatives of select museums met nationally and in regional working groups as they endeavoured to find a way of bridging what seemed to be an expanding chasm between museums and First Nations. While the task force's final report (Hill and Nicks 1992) makes several general recommendations for ways in which museums and First Nations can work together, it was left to each institution to develop its own repatriation protocols and processes. Since most large museum collections in Canada are held by either provincial or federal institutions, overarching regulations might have required intergovernmental agreements that would have raised a great number of jurisdictional issues. Efforts to develop a national archaeological policy had been encumbered by similar problems.<sup>8</sup> In fact, there is still no federal archaeological legislation or policy in Canada. The museum community felt that local solutions, rather than overarching bureaucratic directives, were more likely to result in meaningful projects and programs. The preference of museums for developing their own idiosyncratic repatriation processes was reaffirmed during a repatriation workshop sponsored by the Glenbow Museum in 1999.

The Task Force on Museums and First Peoples is considered by many in the Canadian museum community to have been a watershed in museum-First Nations relations in Canada, one that changed how museums viewed their collections, conducted research, and developed exhibits (Phillips 2011, 156). In fact, many projects had been undertaken in previous decades that had brought First

Nations people into the museum context. Both the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now the Royal British Columbia Museum) and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia had long-established programs that focused on coastal peoples. While these may not have given First Nations people a real voice in determining the content and expression of exhibits and programming, they did connect the audience with living First Nations people who were not frozen in time. On the prairies, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in southwestern Alberta (Brink 1992, 2010), the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History (now the Royal Saskatchewan Museum; Conaty 1989), and the Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon, all included First Nations people as part of their exhibition development team. The Glenbow Museum established a First Nations Advisory Council to provide guidance throughout the museum on Aboriginal matters (see appendix 1) and began returning sacred objects in 1990. At the Manitoba Museum, Katherine Pettipas developed a tradition of working respectfully with First Nations people to understand the collections. All of these projects contributed to a changing perspective in Canadian museums, one in which First Nations people were more integrally involved in exhibit and program development. This involvement, in turn, led to a greater openness in discussions about repatriation.

In Alberta, repatriation issues began to be a concern in 1989. Apatohsiipiikani (Peigan) were looking forward to having an O'kaan, that is, a Sun Dance ceremony, and had accordingly asked the provincial museum for the loan of a Natoas bundle, which contains the headdress worn by the woman central to the ceremonies. After some discussion, the bundle was loaned, but only so that it could be replicated. The original was to be returned to the institution, while the new one would remain available for use. This was a controversial act: many people in the Piikani community were unsure whether it was proper to remake a sacred bundle, especially when the original was still intact. Nevertheless, the museum was firm that the items in the collection were to be preserved for study and not used. The bundle would remain as a reference for future generations of Piikani should the newly made bundle either fall into disrepair or be sold to a collector.

The Glenbow Museum also received repatriation requests at that time but reacted very differently. The first bundle that was requested was loaned to the Weasel Moccasin family, initially for a four-month term, but eventually on a

permanent basis. When other requests were made, we repeated the same loan process. The president and CEO, Robert Janes, and I both believed that it was important to assist in the revival and preservation of traditional ceremonial knowledge. As we understood the Blackfoot process of knowledge transfer, bundles must be physically present, and bundles with a history are more effective than newly made ones.

At some point in the 1990s, the provincial museum also began loaning bundles for ceremonial use, and, by the end of the decade, both institutions had a large number of bundles in Blackfoot communities with no expectation that they would be returned. Although, under such circumstances, the most straightforward procedure seemed to be to deaccession the material, it was not appropriate to apply the 1996 provincial "Policy on Disposition of Museum Collections and Objects" to First Nations sacred material, especially since the policy requires that material to be deaccessioned must first be offered to other Alberta institutions.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (FNSCORA) was created in recognition of the special nature of the material and of the repatriation process itself.

While NAGPRA and FNSCORA are meant to achieve the same ends, they differ from one another in some important ways. First, NAGPRA makes a clear distinction between communal and private property. FNSCORA is less concerned with this difference, but, unlike NAGPRA, it does require proof that an item is an integral part of an ongoing ceremony before it can be repatriated. Second, whereas NAGPRA requires the written support of elected tribal officials for any repatriation request, the Alberta act recognizes, at least tacitly, that an elected body does not necessarily have a right to consider sacred matters. Instead, FNSCORA requires communities to establish not-for-profit societies that are authorized, by band councils, to initiate repatriation requests and receive repatriated material. This process, in which items are returned not to individuals but to the collective, ensures that the provincial authorities are seen to be fulfilling their fiduciary responsibilities with regard to the care and disposition of the provincial collections. Both acts apply only to people residing within the jurisdiction of the respective governments. Canadian Blackfoot people must thus enlist the assistance of the Ammskaapipiikani (Blackfeet) in Montana when requesting the repatriation of sacred objects from American museums. Similarly, First Nations from outside of Alberta must find people

within the province to act on their behalf if they wish to repatriate their sacred material.

This overview of the history of museums helps us to understand the perspectives and values of the museums that Blackfoot people visited as they began repatriating sacred bundles. Of course, these museums were not uniform: each had developed in its own way. But they all held in common a respect for objects and a dedication to their preservation. Often, the Blackfoot had a very different understanding of the sacred material from that of museum personnel, and these differing views sometimes resulted in difficult discussions. It is therefore useful to consider why objects have become so important to museums and how these institutions care for and interpret their collections.

#### MUSEUMS AND OBJECTS

Objects are at the core of museum identity. As Barker (2010, 300) explains: “Of all the elements that constitute a museum (staff, buildings, donors, galleries, collections, etc.) any one could be removed without changing the fundamental character of the institution, except the collections. They define the profile and prospects of the institution in ways more profound and lasting than the mission statements and current situations.” Each museum defines itself by the content of its collections, by the kinds of objects collected by past and present staff. These collections shape the exhibits that are developed, the audiences that are attracted to the museum, and the relationships with donors. Museum personnel, perhaps especially curators, often define their professional (and sometimes personal) identity through the collections for which they care and for which they are responsible.

Concern with objects entails an obligation toward their well-being: “Conservators approach preserving the cultural significance of a heritage object by preserving its physical integrity (which they can ‘read’ through scientific evidence) and its aesthetic, historic, and conceptual integrity (which is interpreted through scholarship in related disciplines as well as ‘read’ through physical evidence)” (Clavir 2002, xvii). While this description is explicitly concerned with conservators, it may just as readily apply to curators and other museum professionals. Items that have been brought into a collection have been

chosen because of their special nature. In the discussion of the history of museums, we saw how that special nature may have changed over time, from exotica, to scientific facts, to physical records of disappearing cultures. Sometimes, the objects in collections are simultaneously all of these, and more.

What is it about objects that make them so important to us? This question has been addressed from many different perspectives (see Appadurai 1986b; Godelier 1996; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Lowenthal 1985; Pearce 1990, 1994b). Some contend that objects have embedded meanings that can be “read” objectively, much as a text is read (Hodder 1987; Pearce 1994a; Taborsky 1990; Tilley 1994). How that meaning is understood by the observer raises many questions: Is the meaning constructed by observers, on the basis of their previous knowledge and experiences (Taborsky 1990, 59)? Or does the object contain objective information that is accessible to everyone? To what extent does personal experience “cloud with misconceptions and prejudice” one’s ability to understand the meaning embedded in an object (Taborsky 1990, 60)? Curators struggle with how to understand the objects in their collections and how to convey that information to their publics. While the temptation is to provide all available information and let the observers decide for themselves, Sandell (2007, 17) warns that “by including different viewpoints but failing to arbitrate between them museums imply that they are of equal value, an implication which, in some instances, might be undesirable.”<sup>10</sup>

However one approaches the interpretation of artifacts in a museum, there is an implied common agreement on the nature and worth of the objects among museum professionals and the museum-visiting publics. These values are not necessarily inherent in an object but may instead be ascribed and may change over time.

The recognition that “things” have social lives and that their status changes at different times and in different circumstances has been an important insight for students of material culture (Appadurai 1986a; Kopytoff 1986). These researchers believe that the role of an object at any time is culturally defined: as cultures change, so too can the meaning of material items. Much of this discussion has focused on the analysis of commodities (objects that can be exchanged through economic transactions) and the commodification of objects as they transition from one state to another, as well as on the concept of ownership. This perspective helps us to understand, for example, why there is often

such a negative reaction to the deaccessioning of objects from museum collections (Davis 2011). Items collected by museums are assumed to have attributes that make them special, unique, and thus unavailable as a commodity suitable for exchange. Transferring them to a commercial category leads to questions about the values and principles of society and how these may be changing.

Of special concern is a change in status of those items that are understood to be sacred. It is generally agreed that sacred objects cannot become commodities used in exchange (Appadurai 1986a; Kopytoff 1986). “So where do sacred objects stand?” asks Godelier (1996, 122), and then offers an answer:

*Between two types of gift, but without being giveable. They hold this position because they were originally a gift from the gods to the ancestors of men. The gods therefore remain their true owners, and they have the right to repossess their gifts. But because these gifts were given by the gods to men, they can no longer be given by men to other men, except in special circumstances or for extraordinary reasons. On the other hand, what men may (and even must) give are the benefits, the positive effects emanating from the powers contained in these objects from the beginning.*

This special nature of sacred objects would seem to have been compromised when they were incorporated into museum collections. While museum artifacts are acknowledged to be “special,” they are still considered material objects. Moreover, the process of turning a sacred object into a museum object has invariably involved the commodification of the item. That is, as these objects were sold to museums or to collectors, they became part of a secular exchange. Sacredness would, therefore, seem to have been doubly violated.<sup>11</sup>

Lokensgard (2010) is concerned with how we can understand the alienation of sacred bundles from Blackfoot communities and how the meaning of those items can be very different for museums and for First Nations. He suggests that items can, and do, change their meaning as they move from one context to another. His insightful discussion and analysis of the meaning of sacred bundles illustrates their vitality and their significance within Blackfoot society. Following economic models developed by Karl Marx, Lokensgard sees the sale of sacred items to museums and other collectors as a process of

commodification during a period when Blackfoot people faced intense pressure to change their culture and adopt Western values. It is a compelling model, similar to those developed by Oscar Lewis (1942) in his examination of the impact of the horse on traditional culture, and David Nugent (1993), in his analysis of the changing modes of production following from the burgeoning growth of the bison robe trade in the late nineteenth century.

The analyses by Lewis, Nugent, and Lokensgard all suggest that Blackfoot culture changed radically at various times and that these changes altered fundamental cultural values. In fact, the Blackfoot found ways to incorporate these changes into their culture so that the core values remained strong. In the words of one Elder, “We adapted these things *into* our culture. We did not adapt our culture *outward* to them” (Frank Weasel Head, pers. comm., 2000). For example, early in the fur trade era, when guns were still a novel item, a formal transfer ceremony was developed in which a man was given the rights to load, prime, aim, and shoot a musket (Reg Crowshoe, pers. comm., 1992). This paralleled ceremonies through which men were given the rights to undertake various ceremonial duties, such as lighting a smudge. Similarly, following the introduction of horses, ceremonies were developed that served to incorporate horses into Blackfoot culture. The bison robe trade had a much more intrusive effect on Blackfoot culture, undoubtedly because of the widespread use of alcohol as an item of trade at the time. Nevertheless, Nugent’s (1993) conclusion that the need to produce hides to satisfy the demand for robes was the foundation of a polygamous system that favoured wealthy men does not take into consideration traditional Blackfoot social relationships that fostered care for extended families (see Conaty 1995). As disruptive as the robe-and-whisky trade was, the Blackfoot were able to adapt into their traditional culture and values many of the changes it brought.

Although the commodification of sacred bundles was antithetical to Blackfoot traditions, the property that is exchanged during traditional bundle transfers has been interpreted as a “payment” for the bundle and associated rights:

The transfer ceremony ends when the retiring Owner dances four times with the sacred Pipe. During the dance, he goes outside to inspect the goods offered as material payments for the Bundle. If he accepts them, he

gives the Pipe to the new Owner. If he does not, he may either sing a song specifically requesting something the new Owner should sacrifice, or he may instruct the leader to close up the Bundle and call off the transfer. He would do the latter only if the prospective Owner's lack of material sacrifice was a mockery. (Hungry Wolf 1977, 139)

As these comments imply, however, the "payment" is more properly explained as a sacrifice on the part of the new bundle keeper, an indication of his or her respect for all that the bundle symbolizes and of a commitment to caring for it with the appropriate respect. "Owner" is more correctly understood as the person who cares for the bundle on behalf of all Blackfoot people.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Aboriginal people who were working with non-Native scholars may not have fully grasped the conceptual framework underlying terms such as "payment," "purchase," and "owner." Moreover, the terms used by the Blackfoot themselves in discussing the transfer of sacred bundles may not have been accurately translated, in a way that reflected the culture's frame of reference. Words like "owner" and "purchase" nonetheless became entrenched in the literature about Blackfoot sacred bundles (McClintock 1999; Wissler 1913, 1915, 1918, 1975a, and 1975b) and, until the late 1990s, were often used by Blackfoot people themselves when discussing bundles and their transfers. Today, people who are working to repatriate bundles are very careful about the language they use. Still, when the Blackfoot point out that "ownership" and "purchase" are not the correct translations, they are sometimes met with skepticism. Some argue that these words were correct at the time of the sale since the culture had already changed to such a degree that the sacred material had indeed become a commodity.

Repatriation confronts museums with multiple paradoxes. It was inappropriate in the first place for sacred objects to leave their originating cultural realm and enter into museum collections by becoming commodities. Within the museum, however, they have once more become special, and it is now difficult to remove them from their context as part of a collection. Both NAGPRA and FNSCORP acknowledge the sacredness of certain objects and recognize the inappropriateness of keeping them outside of their originating culture, and both acts address ways in which the objects can be removed from collections held in the public trust. NAGPRA insists that objects be defined as either

personal or communal property, with only the latter eligible for repatriation, while FNSCORA specifies that, in order to be considered for repatriation, an object must be shown to be vital for the continuation of collective ceremonial practices, rather than of purely personal or familial value. The problem that remains, however, is the non-Native perception of these items as “objects” rather than “beings,” thereby obliging Blackfoot people to comply with laws that concern property when seeking the return of sacred material. The following chapter examines the Blackfoot understanding of sacred material and the history that contributed to their alienation and eventual repatriation.

#### NOTES

- 1 Presently available at <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/F14.pdf>.
- 2 For a useful overview, however, see Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (1996).
- 3 For a summary of Heye’s activities as a collector, see “George Heye’s Legacy: An Unparalleled Collection,” [www.americanindian.si.edu/exhibitions/infinityofnations/george-heye.html](http://www.americanindian.si.edu/exhibitions/infinityofnations/george-heye.html).
- 4 “A History of the Royal Alberta Museum,” [www.royalalbertamuseum.ca/general/histpma.htm](http://www.royalalbertamuseum.ca/general/histpma.htm).
- 5 In the 1960 film *Circle of the Sun*, Pete Standing Alone predicted the demise of Blackfoot ceremonial life. Within the decade, he became one of the main leaders of Iitskinaiksi and continues to be a respected Elder.
- 6 *Okan, Sun Dance of the Blackfoot* (1966) was produced by the Glenbow Foundation, under the direction of Bill Marsden. At the request of Siksika ceremonial leaders, access to this film is restricted to Blackfoot people who are involved with sacred societies. According to Betty Bastien, in *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing* (2004, 195), Aako’ka’tssin literally means “circle encampment.” Her book includes a very useful glossary of Blackfoot names and terms.
- 7 See Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Maxson, and Powell (2011) for a discussion of the complexity of this issue.
- 8 See Burley (1994) and the ensuing dialogue.
- 9 The policy, presently available at <http://www.museums.ualberta.ca/en/AdvisoryServices/~media/museums/Documents/Forms%20Cabinet/Policy-Disposition-of-Museum-Collections-and-Objects.pdf>, states: “Whenever public funds are made available by the Provincial Government to a public museum or other public trust to purchase, acquire, restore, or maintain any historic artifact, natural history specimen, work of art, sculpture, archival document or similar object deemed to be primarily of value for its historical interest, every reasonable effort shall be made by the agency or institution to

have such materials remain in the care and custody of an appropriate public body in Alberta." On deaccessioning, see p. 2.

- 10 See also Brown (2011) for an analysis of the controversy surrounding the Manchester Museum's "polyvocal" exhibit, in 2008–2009, of the two-thousand-year-old body of the Lindow Man. By combining multiple viewpoints, the exhibit sought to explore differing perspectives on the physical remains and on the violent manner of the man's death.
- 11 The violation of sacred status through commodification was one aspect of the controversy that erupted in the Blackfoot community following the sale, by Montana sculptor Robert Sriver, of his family's collection of Blackfeet artifacts to the Provincial Museum of Alberta, which Frank Weasel Head discusses later in this volume. The collection, reportedly valued at over a million dollars, included numerous sacred bundles and other ceremonial items. In addition, many of these items originated in Canada, which further complicated questions of "ownership." For a discussion of the legal issues involved, see Bell, Statt, Solowan, Jeffs, and Snyder (2008, 370–72). On the exhibit that accompanied the acquisition, see Stepney et al. (1990).

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# 2

## *Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*

GERALD T. CONATY

When Blackfoot people first began requesting the return of sacred material, they found themselves confronted by the fundamental museum assumption that artifacts must be preserved for humanity's common good and understanding by keeping them in the specialized conditions of museum institutions. Museum personnel reacted to the requests by asking a number of questions: What constitutes sacred material? Can the original items be replicated for use, with the original remaining in the care of the museum? If sacred material is so important, why was it sold in the first place? What guarantees are there that items, once returned, will not subsequently be sold to private collectors? By asking questions such as these, museum professionals were trying to determine the extent to which their collections would be affected by repatriation. They were also worried that giving up parts of their collections would be perceived

by the public, governments, and various funders as negligence in the performance of their fiduciary responsibility. This responsibility holds that collections are acquired and maintained for the benefit of society as a whole and that items cannot be removed from a collection in any way that privileges an individual or identifiable group. While such questions may have seemed straightforward to the museum community, they were very difficult for the Blackfoot: they seemed to call into question the authority and roles of Blackfoot ceremonial leaders, the nature of their knowledge of sacred material, and their understanding of their own culture and history. These questions also raised the issue of cultural domination and the place of Blackfoot people in Canadian and North American society.

The Blackfoot people who have become involved with repatriation are the ceremonial leaders, teachers, historians, and role models of their nations. They are usually referred to as “Elders” by museums and others in the non-Blackfoot world, but this term does not encompass all that it means to be regarded as a *mokaki*, a wise person. In order to have the right to speak about a bundle, ceremony, or sacred society, one must be an *aawaaahsskataiksi*, a ceremonial grandparent. A person who has kept a bundle and then transferred it to someone else becomes the ceremonial parent to the new keeper. Only after the bundle is transferred once more, however, does one become a ceremonial grandparent and assume a more active role in leading ceremonies, teaching others about the spiritual ways, and keeping the oral traditions related to both sacred and historical knowledge. The knowledge and understanding that has been transferred through the proper protocols and processes should not be challenged through the process of direct questioning that is so predominant Western scientific modes of inquiry. The direct questions posed by museum personnel are sometimes considered impolite within a Blackfoot context and often leave Blackfoot people feeling that they have been criticized without good reason and that their credibility and their integrity have been challenged, in terms of both their personal character and their knowledge. This manner of questioning has impeded communication between the Blackfoot and the museums.

The museums’ questions about the nature of sacred material led the Blackfoot to question whether such questions could even be answered. Blackfoot spiritual concepts can be conveyed accurately only through the Blackfoot language. English lexical categories and grammatical structure differ

so greatly from those of Blackfoot that when an effort is made to translate a concept from one language to another, the idea often becomes meaningless. Even in the rare instances where translation is possible, it may not be appropriate to convey certain sacred information—that is, the knowledge that is ritually transferred from one individual to another through ceremony. A person must be willing to make a personal sacrifice for the ceremony and to commit to following the teaching and protocols that come with the knowledge. Of course, it is just such knowledge that provides the most convincing answers to questions posed by museum personnel. The Blackfoot needed to consider how much information they should make available to the museums and how best to present it.

Blackfoot history includes events that occurred millennia in the past and that are most often regarded by Western scholars as myths that have little to do with actual events. Hallowell, discussing Anishinabe myths, emphasizes that these mythic events are understood as having really occurred:

The significant thing about these stories is that the characters in them are regarded as living entities who have existed from time immemorial. . . . Whether human or animal in form or name, the major characters in the myth behave like people, though many of their activities are depicted in a spatio-temporal framework of cosmic, rather than mundane, dimensions. . . . It is clear, therefore, that to the Ojibwa, their “talk” about these entities, although expressed in formal narrative, is not about fictitious characters. On the contrary, what we call myth is accepted by them as a true account of events in the past lives of living “persons.” (Hallowell 2010, 542)

These events are remembered as having occurred at specific places in the traditional territory. Sometimes the events define relationships between human and other-than-human beings, including the origin of sacred bundles and ceremonies that express these relationships. In addition, the Blackfoot understanding of more recent events in western Canadian and American history often contradicts the normative version found in popular media and most school textbooks. For decades, Aboriginal peoples had been made to feel subservient to teachers, Indian Agents, and other government officials who imposed on them the dominant society’s values and views of history as they encouraged people to give up

their traditional ways. Now, faced with questions from museums, the Blackfoot needed to make the case for the veracity of their oral traditions. This became especially important when it came to addressing the circumstances under which sacred items had left the reserves. The written accounts of collectors are not always in agreement with the oral traditions, and they almost never take into consideration the social, economic, and political pressures that brought a person to the point of selling a bundle.

Over the years, the Blackfoot have found ways of addressing these questions without revealing that which is sacred and should be kept private. In some cases, these issues were worked out through projects with non-Native researchers who helped reframe both the questions and the answers in ways that were respectful and that led to a greater understanding (see Brown and Peers 2006; Brown et al. 2010; Conaty 2003; Conaty and Carter 2005; Lokensgard 2010). At times, the Blackfoot feared that museums would reject their own understanding of their culture and history and, in so doing, would also reject requests for the return of sacred bundles. This fear was seldom realized.<sup>1</sup> This is a measure both of the sagacity with which the Blackfoot crafted their response and the willingness of most museums to understand the larger implications of repatriation.

What follows is an explanation, from a Blackfoot perspective, of the meaning that sacred objects have for the Blackfoot people as individuals and as a culture. It has been my good fortune over the past twenty years to have worked closely with Blackfoot people who have been involved in repatriation and to have learned how they wish to talk about their culture and their history. The goal here, on the advice of those who have contributed their stories, is twofold. First, they want to provide a resource for younger members of their nations who are interested in the issues surrounding repatriation. Second, they wish to present this information so that those museums that remain reluctant to repatriate sacred bundles can understand the importance of this material. In following section, I critically review academic resources and acknowledge the importance of oral tradition. My discussion of Blackfoot history extends from ancient times, when bundles were first given to human beings, through to today. This provides the context in which sacred bundles originated, the circumstances that led to their leaving, and the conditions to which they are returning. This is an important contrast to the discussion of museum

origins and growth in the previous chapter and is helpful in understanding the differing points of view held by museums and Blackfoot people. It also provides an important background for understanding the stories of repatriation that follow.

#### NIITSITAPI: THE REAL PEOPLE

In order to understand the culture and history of the Blackfoot and the role that sacred bundles play in their lives, we must begin by understanding the place that Blackfoot people call home. This is the place where their culture originated, and they have strong ties to the physical and spiritual ecology.

The Niitsitapi consist of the Kainai (Blood), Siksika (Blackfoot, Northern Blackfoot), Apatohsippiikani (Piikani, Peigan) and Ammskaapiikani (Piegan, Blackfeet). Their traditional territory encompassed a large area of the north-western plains, extending from the North Saskatchewan River southward to the Yellowstone River and from the Rocky Mountains eastward to what is now east-central Saskatchewan (fig. 5). Throughout this region, there are named landscape features that are associated with ancient stories, stories that anthropologists call “myths” but that the Blackfoot know as their history. Ninastako, Chief Mountain, is where Thunder lives and where he gave his pipe to the Niitsitapi as a sign that they would live in peace; Women’s Buffalo Jump is where men and women first agreed to live together; at a place along the Bow River, east of present-day Calgary, Iiniskim, the buffalo stone, made himself known to a woman and taught the people the ceremony for calling bison whenever they needed food; and Ksisskstaki (Beaver) gave the Beaver Bundle to the people at a lake in what is now Waterton Lakes National Park. There are also stone features—some are large circles, others are figures of animals or men—that mark locations of special significance. Medicine wheels such as those at Sundial Hill, Majorville, and Canadian Forces Base Suffield, all in southern Alberta, continue to be important places that connect humans with the spiritual aspect of their surroundings. The ecology of Blackfoot territory includes aspen parkland, fescue prairie, foothills, and subalpine meadows. While their traditional economy was focused on bison hunting, a very broad spectrum of plants and animals were important to the Blackfoot. Some species were important for food; others gave

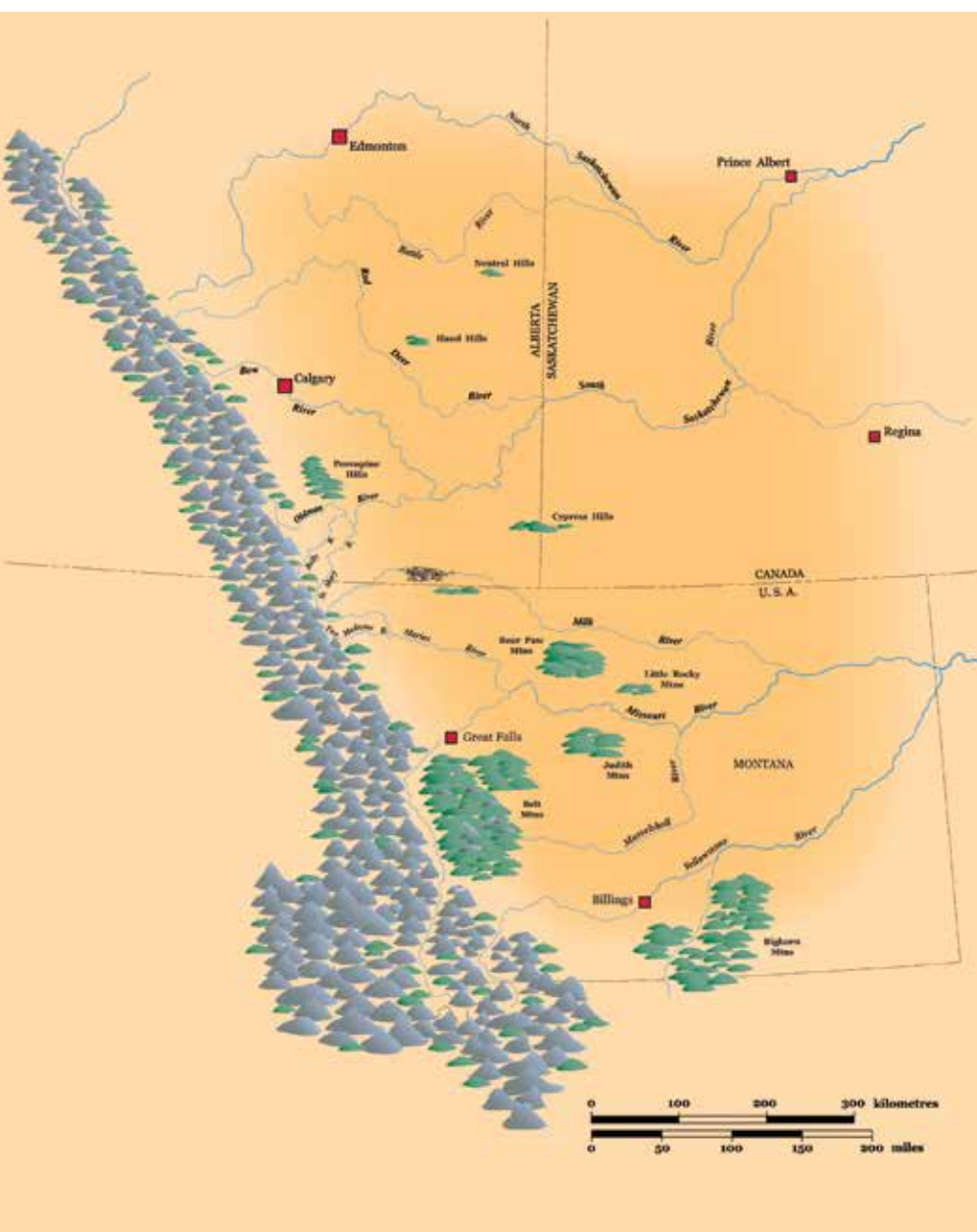


Figure 5. Traditional Niitsitapi territory. Courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

different gifts to the people. This landscape has, at once, a sacred and secular meaning, and it is important not to separate the two. In the Blackfoot world, everything is both sacred and secular at the same time.

The territory that the Blackfoot consider home is considerably larger than that which is described by many historians, anthropologists, and ethnohistorians. This, like differences in the understanding of history, can be problematic for the Blackfoot. When asserting the extent of their territory, Blackfoot people risk being contradicted by academic researchers, and, by implication, this criticism can be extended to all aspects of their oral tradition. Nevertheless, the Blackfoot disagree with many of the suggestions about their traditional territory.

Edward Curtis, the photographer who captured images of so many First Nations people in North America, recorded Tearing Lodge's account indicating that the people had migrated to the North Saskatchewan River region, in present-day Alberta, from the area to the north, around Lesser Slave Lake:

Our three tribes came southward out of the wooded country to the north of Bow river. We began to make short excursions to the south, and we kept coming farther and farther, and finally gave up altogether our old home. This happened before my grandfather's time. We call our former home *Istssóhtsi* ("in the brush"). The Piegan led this movement and were followed by the Bloods and later the Blackfeet. We all hunted in the plains between Milk river and the Yellowstone, the Piegan finally wintering on the Musselshell or the Upper Missouri, the Bloods on the Belly river, south of the site of Fort MacLeod, the Blackfeet on Bow river, or its tributary, High river. Of course, individual families and small bands of Blackfeet sometime spent the winter among the Piegan.

(Curtis 1970, 4)<sup>2</sup>

Early in the twentieth century, the American naturalist and ethnologist George Bird Grinnell visited among the Ammskaapipiikani in Montana, at roughly the same time that Curtis was there. He reiterates Curtis's account, tracing Blackfoot origins to the boreal forest, near Lesser Slave Lake, and relating how they were pushed southwestward to the North Saskatchewan River by the Dene (Grinnell 1962, 177–178). According to Grinnell, they resided there until

they acquired horses and guns in the early eighteenth century, whereupon they expanded their territory southward to Yellowstone River. In the early 1940s, anthropologist John Ewers spent a number of years living on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana as the designer and first curator of the Museum of the Plains Indian, in nearby Browning. This opportunity connected him with many old people, and he suggests that, according to their account, they were “living in the valley of the North Saskatchewan near the Eagle Hills in the early years of the eighteenth century” (Ewers 1958, 8). Dempsey (2001, 604) restricts their traditional territory to an area stretching from the North Saskatchewan River southward to the Milk River, near the US border, and from the Rocky Mountains in the west to the mouth of the Vermillion River in the east. Brian Reeves, in a study conducted for Glacier National Park in Montana, reviewed archaeological, historical, and linguistic resources for evidence that defines traditional Blackfoot territory (Reeves and Peacock 2001). He concluded that the northwestern corner of present-day Montana and the southwestern corner of present-day Alberta were the home of Piikani for thousands of years. Adolf Hungry Wolf recounts an origin story that has the first humans following Napi (the Old Man) from somewhere to the south, northward to a spot beyond which live Cree speakers:

When he awoke from his sleep, he traveled further northward and came to a fine high hill. He climbed to the top of it, and there sat down to rest. He looked over the country below him, and it pleased him. Before him the hill was steep, and he said to himself, “Well this is a fine place for sliding; I will have some fun,” and he began to slide down the hill. The marks where he slid down are to be seen yet, and the place is known to all people as the “Old Man’s Sliding Ground.”

This is as far as the Blackfeet followed Old Man. The Crees know what he did further north. (Hungry Wolf 2006, 12)

Hungry Wolf does not specify where this place might be and is, in fact, equivocal about the credibility he assigns to such accounts: “Neither the origin of the name, nor the tribe itself, can be proven beyond any doubt” (14). In this, he joins many anthropologists and historians who seem unwilling to acknowledge the veracity of oral traditions. Paul Raczka (2011) is more emphatic in declaring that

the origins of the Blackfoot can be identified. He dismisses the versions of both Grinnell and Curtis (and, by implication, Ewers), instead referring to an alternative story, one in which people journeyed from the south and the west, across the mountains, in search of food. This story locates early Blackfoot territory closer to the present-day town of Choteau, in northwestern Montana, and is substantiated by the pictographs and boulder figures that the Blackfoot people created as demarcations of their territory.

Binnema (2001) questions the entire model that attaches ethnic groups to specific territories that were defended from intruders, arguing instead that extended interactions among First Nations on the northwestern plains are better understood as networks of extended family groups who travelled over great areas and interacted with one another in complex and nuanced ways. He contends that too much emphasis has been placed on ethnicity and tribal identification and that these categories are often the result of colonial interactions. In essence, people would not have identified themselves first and foremost as Blackfoot and held all others with antagonistic disregard. Rather, extended families would have met, cooperated, or fought depending upon many different factors, including the availability of food resources and past histories among these groups. It would seem to follow that determining geographical “territories” for First Nations is moot because First Nations themselves held no such concept.

Defining “Blackfoot territory” is, however, more than an arcane discussion among historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists. Discussions of traditional territory can sometimes be the first stumbling block in repatriation negotiations. By rejecting the boundaries that have been defined by anthropologists and archaeologists, the Blackfoot are challenging everything that has been written about them (but not with them), including historical accounts that non-Native researchers have produced. Museum professionals, who may rely on the published academic research, have sometimes considered the Blackfoot understanding of their own history as revisionist and, by extension, have viewed claims regarding sacred material as motivated more by political than by spiritual concerns.

Identifying traditional Blackfoot territory is also important because of the significance of “place” in the culture. The Blackfoot understanding of themselves as a “people” and of their relationship with the rest of earthly Creation—and even the universe—emanates from their connection to their traditional landscapes and especially to particular locations within that geography. As

Oetelaar and Oetelaar (2007) indicate, in traditional Blackfoot culture, humans are perceived as part of the landscape and ecology, not separate from them. Binnema's approach, by implication, severs the intimate connections of people to the places that Oetelaar and Oetelaar identify as so important. In fact, however, it is precisely such connections to place that help us to understand the significance and meaning of sacred objects to Blackfoot people.

### *How Niitsitapi Lived in Their World*

Within the traditional world of the Blackfoot-speaking people, everything has a spirit and is considered to be animate. This is very unlike the Western world view, in which there is a well-defined dichotomy between humans, as reasoning beings who are capable of abstract thought, and everything else. A. Irving Hallowell, writing in the mid-twentieth century about the Ojibwa (Anishinabe) in northern Manitoba, defined "persons" as all classes of beings with whom the "self" interacts in culturally prescribed ways. He goes on to note that "persons" need not be confined to human beings and that Western "objective" analysis is not always adequate in helping us to understand cultures in which the category of "persons" is extended to other-than-human beings:

The more deeply we penetrate the world view of the Ojibwa the more apparent it is that "social relations" between human beings (ānīcinābek) and other-than-human "persons" are of cardinal significance. These relations are correlative with their more comprehensive categorization of "persons." Recognitions must be given to the culturally constituted meaning of "social" and "social relations" if we are to understand the nature of this Ojibwa world and the living entities in it. (Hallowell 2010, 538)

The Blackfoot, similarly, recognize the importance of social relationships among human beings and other-than-human beings. An understanding and acceptance of this world view is a necessary prerequisite for appreciating the nature of sacred material, as well as the meaning and importance that this material has for the Blackfoot people. Yet this perspective is so different from a Eurocentric world view that many museum professionals have had difficulty

accepting it and, consequently, have failed to fully appreciate the significance of sacred bundles. The following is an introduction to the world as it is understood by the Blackfoot.

Within the Blackfoot world, *Ihtsipaitapiyopa* is the Essence of All Life. More abstract and ethereal than the Christian concept of God, *Ihtsipaitapiyopa* is the source of everything, and, therefore, everything shares a connection and a relationship. For the Blackfoot, these connections extend well beyond the earth. *Sspommitapiiksi*, the Above People, live in the sky. The Blackfoot know them as *Naatosi* (the Sun, our father), *Ko'komiki'somm* (the Moon, our mother), *Ipisowaahs* (Morning Star, their son), *Ksiistsikomm* (Thunder), who share the sky with the other beings who dwell there, such as high-flying including birds and what we in the West call the stars and planets. *Ksaahkommitapiiksi*, the Earth People, include plants, animals, and rocks. Many of these were once important sources of food and material for clothing and shelter; others, such as wolves, helped human beings learn how to hunt and taught them the importance of living together in clans and of helping one another. *Soyiitapiiksi* are the Water People. Some live in the water and others, such as *Aimmoniisi* (Otter) and *Ksisskstaki* (Beaver), move easily between the land and the water.

Long ago, *Sspommitapiiksi*, *Ksaahkommitapiiksi*, and *Soyiitapiiksi* helped *Niitsitapi* (the Real People, or human beings) to live in this part of the world. Ancient stories tell of times when people were starving, were threatened, or had encountered other hardships. In each instance, they were helped by an other-than-human being, who left behind a special gift that humans could use to ask for help. These gifts include medicine pipes, *iiniskim* (buffalo stones), entire collections of skins and other material representing many animals, and the headdresses, rattles, staffs, and regalia of the sacred societies. During annual ceremonies, people use these bundles to call on the other-than-human beings to help them to create change so that their lives will be revitalized. Sometimes, an individual who needs special help will vow to dance with part of a bundle or even assume the responsibility of caring for one.

So far, I have used the words “sacred object” and “bundle” to describe the physical objects that are used in ceremonies. Indeed, both Alberta’s First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (*FNSCORA*) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (*NAGPRA*), in the United States, focus on the word “object” when defining those things that are subject

to repatriation. Yet the terms “object” and “bundle” are insufficient: they fail to capture the true essence of these “items.” By emphasizing the materiality of the sacred, such words lead to the objectification of these materials and, ultimately, to their commodification in a Western context. Considering sacred materials only, or even primarily, as objects facilitates an analysis that can ensure their redefinition outside of the sacred Blackfoot context and within the realm of global capitalism. This redefinition, in turn, allows us to understand the commodification as merely another phase in their life cycles (Godelier 1999; Kopytoff 1986) and so lets us deal with sacred materials as we would any object in our collections. This mode of analysis privileges a Western perspective, rather than Blackfoot traditional knowledge, and has sometimes become a source of tension during repatriation negotiations.

When I first began learning about Blackfoot sacred “objects,” I was always instructed to regard them as powerful living beings. I was told to care for them as one does for a child, carrying them with care and speaking to them kindly. They are powerful, I was told, and this power could manifest itself in either good or malevolent ways. I was advised that if I always approached them respectfully, they would do no harm and might even help me. Over the years, it has not been uncommon for Blackfoot people visiting the Glenbow’s collections to say that they can hear the bundles crying to go home. I do not believe that this is a clever metaphor; people really do hear them crying. It is an extraordinary experience.

A suitable analogy for the sacred beings that are kept in museums may be that of the First Nations children who were removed from their homes and confined to residential schools. They were no longer exposed to their Native languages and were, in fact, forbidden to speak anything other than English. Their world could now only be framed in terms that reflected a Western world view. In addition, the children were isolated from their families and from the people who would reinforce their identity as Aboriginal people. Instead, school staff tried to instill Western values, a Western world view, and a Christian belief system. This policy of assimilation had mixed results. Some children retained a strong Aboriginal cultural identity, while others followed the new ways. Most, unfortunately, ended up without a firm place in either culture.

The sacred beings that are kept in museums have faced similar efforts to transform them. Regarded as “objects,” many of them have been studied by academics who have had little knowledge or regard for the protocols associated

with handling them. The manner in which they have been stored has reinforced their objectification and has usually denied their status as living beings. But just as residential school failed to assimilate all of the students, museums have not succeeded in transforming bundles from living beings into objects and commodities. While residing in museums, they may become dormant, but they do not lose their energy or become inert. An understanding of this is fundamental to the recognition of Blackfoot (and other First Nations) rights to cultural autonomy. So far, the museum understanding of bundles as objects, whose status can change in accordance with circumstances, has prevailed. Consequently, Blackfoot people who become involved with repatriation once more find that they must follow the prerogatives that have been developed for objects and that may not be appropriate for the care of living beings. For many, this is an uncomfortable compromise, one that reinforces their neocolonial relationship with society's bureaucracies. Nevertheless, it is a compromise that they feel they must make in order to bring the bundles home.

### *Changes and Challenges*

The Niitsitapi have faced innumerable changes to their political, social, economic, and spiritual life over the past three centuries. Some of these changes were slow and incremental; others were like a tsunami. Some changes were beneficial; others destroyed individuals and families and threatened the entire culture. Among these changes were shifts in the traditional treaty-making processes and protocols and, indeed, in the very meaning of treaty itself. These agreements became ways of negotiating for territory rather than ways of agreeing to live together in harmony. Alcohol and disease changed both the social structure and the economic focus of Blackfoot society. Some people may have lost their belief in the importance of maintaining the special relationship with the other-than-human beings that had characterized Niitsitapi culture and beliefs. The education system that was imposed by government and administered by religious organizations attacked the identity of people as First Nations and tried to destroy the traditional understanding of the place of human beings in the world. A more detailed look at each of these will illustrate how these processes contributed to the alienation of sacred bundles from their homes.

*Trade.* At first, the Niitsitapi controlled access to their homeland and ensured that encounters with other people adhered to Blackfoot protocol. Over time, this authority was eroded, and Euro-Canadians took control of the land and resources. While the Niitsitapi were staunch defenders of their territory, they did not live in complete isolation from neighbouring nations. For thousands of years, they traded with their neighbours. For example, obsidian, a volcanic glass used to make sharp-edged tools, came from the Yellowstone area of present-day Wyoming. The source of Knife River flint—another type of stone used to make knives, scrapers, and projectile points—lies close to old Numakiki, Sahnish, and Minitari villages in present-day North Dakota. Dentalium shells from the Pacific coast and unsmelted copper from the Lake Superior region were made into personal ornaments. None of these was necessary, nor were any of the myriad of other materials that were traded. Suitable stone occurs locally, and ornaments can be regarded more as a status symbol than a necessity. Instead, each trading episode represented a ceremonial treaty making between the Blackfoot and people from other nations that involved smoking a pipe together and exchanging gifts. The shared smoke brought the Creator as witness to the vows of cooperation and goodwill. Materials were exchanged, not as commodities, but as gifts that signified that the individuals regarded each other as relatives who would avoid conflicts and who would help one another in times of hardship.

The non-Natives who arrived to trade recognized that treaty making was a vital prerequisite of concluding any business:

One way the [Hudson's Bay] company's traders fulfilled the orders of the governor and committee to use the religion or custom of the country for the company's advantage was by participating in the First Nations diplomatic customs. All Indian nations had well-developed diplomatic/political traditions for reaching peace and other accords with outsiders. It was a widespread practice in the territory of present-day Canada to cement treaties with the smoking of the calumet, an exchange of gifts that symbolized goodwill, and through arranged marriages. The latter served to extend kinship bonds and the mutual obligations associated therewith to strangers. Bringing outsiders into the fold in this way was especially important when First Nations wanted to establish long-term relations with each other. . . .

In short, the HBC acknowledged Aboriginal peoples' possession of the territory of Rupertsland and the need to obtain their consent to occupy trading sites within it. Likewise, the company appreciated the need to obtain this consent by taking part in Aboriginal diplomatic and religious ceremonial practices. (Ray et al. 2000, 5)

During the gift exchange, important leaders from each side were often given special articles of clothing. For example, when the Hudson's Bay Company governor George Simpson met the Blackfoot at Fort Edmonton in 1841, he was given five hide shirts. Four were ceremonial, decorated with human hair, painted figures, and special motifs of porcupine quillwork (Brown et al. 2010). Shirts such as these were usually transferred through ceremony from one Blackfoot man to another. The British traders did not record why these were given to them or whether there was a ceremonial transfer. Unfortunately, there is no Blackfoot oral tradition about the exchange that might help us understand the circumstances under which it took place. Clearly, the Blackfoot who presented these gifts were intent on establishing a very special relationship with Simpson, albeit one that seems to have been neither understood nor appreciated by the visitor. But this was not an isolated instance. Artists such as George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, and Paul Kane collected items, both as purchases and as gifts, that they used as reference specimens in their studios in eastern North America and Europe. When the Earl of Southesk travelled through western North America, he, too, was given articles of clothing by Niitsitapi people, which he seems to have regarded as souvenirs.<sup>3</sup> Again, there are no Blackfoot oral traditions that recall why these gifts were offered, and Southesk's own account lacks the understanding of Blackfoot culture that would provide us with much insight.

The bartering that characterized the exchange of pelts, hides, and provisions for trade goods was driven on the European side by profit, a motivation that had been missing from First Nations exchanges. Animals that had once been regarded as gifts for survival now became commodities in a mercantile exchange system. How did the Niitsitapi recognize or understand this commodification? Certainly, the European traders had a Western perspective on the use of animals that was quite different from that of Aboriginal peoples. But perhaps the Niitsitapi felt that the gifts of the other-than-human beings had been made to sustain life, and the presence of Euro-Canadian traders meant that the

ways of making a livelihood had changed. Some scholars, speculating about the effects of the commercial fur trade on relationships between human and other-than-human beings, emphasize the complexity of these connections and the far-reaching implications of the fur trade (Brightman 2002; Martin 1978). They also reveal how difficult it is to understand, or even discuss, these relationships outside of the Aboriginal cultural context and language. It is clear, however, that the Niitsitapi world began to change with the arrival of the fur trade.

Many of the new items brought by the traders enhanced the lives of the Niitsitapi. Steel blades made butchering and hide scraping much easier. Metal pots meant that food could be boiled as well as roasted or dried. Metal arrow-heads were thinner than ones made of stone and penetrated animals more easily. Firearms made hunting easier and provided a great advantage over more meagrely armed opponents. Wool and cotton cloth, glass beads, and commercial paint enhanced the Niitsitapi artistic palette, adding vibrant colours and enabling artists to explore new designs (fig. 6).

Initially, alcohol was introduced to First Nations by European traders as part of an exchange of gifts between Aboriginal leaders and fur trade officials. The reports of Hudson's Bay Company officials to the company governors and politicians in Great Britain emphasize the controlled distribution of spirits and the great effort that was made to ensure that the substance was not abused. The more informal diaries, however, often record drunkenness in the Aboriginal camps and a prevailing fear on the part of HBC employees of being attacked when people became inebriated and obstreperous. By the late 1860s, the Blackfoot had shifted their trade from the Hudson's Bay Company on the North Saskatchewan River to the American traders who travelled overland from the Missouri River in present-day Montana. The focus of the trade moved from pelts to bison robes and hides. Since it was illegal to sell alcohol to First Nations in the United States, it was freighted north and became such an important part of the trade that the venture became known as the "whisky trade." The raw alcohol was frequently doctored with everything from gunpowder, chilis, pepper, and other spices to strychnine. Those who did not die from poisoning became addicted. The traditional spiritual protocols, decision-making processes, and ways of peacekeeping and peacemaking that required everyone to care for each other began to fail. Blackfoot society became more fractious as intratribal and even intrafamilial violence grew.



Figure 6. Naomi Little Walker (Siksika), with glass beads, harness leather, and metal tacks enhancing the artistry of her attire. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-1773-28).

*Disease.* The disastrous effects of alcohol compounded relentless epidemics of smallpox, measles, whooping cough, and other diseases introduced by Europeans. While we do not know for certain when the first outbreak reached the northwestern plains, Blackfoot winter counts give us a good picture of the frequency with which the diseases swept through the population. Winter counts are collections of pictographic signs representing the important events of each year. Keepers of the Beaver Bundle kept track of the days, months, moons, stars, and so on for spiritual and practical purposes. This led to the winter counts that record the long-term history. In the early years of the twentieth century, Bull Plume, a Piikani, transcribed one such record into an accounting ledger provided by the Indian Agent (Raczka 1979).<sup>4</sup> Disease is a recurrent theme in this winter count (fig. 7), with a significant epidemic recorded about every twenty to thirty years.

Research on epidemics indicates that these waves of disease do not impact all members of a population in the same way (Thornton et al. 1991; see table 1). The highest mortality rate, unsurprisingly, is found in the oldest segment of the population, those over fifty years of age. While we might expect the high death rate (40 percent) among the very young, it is notable that the death rates among those in their thirties and forties were at least as high (40 percent and 50 percent, respectively). The potential for population growth would be reduced by the loss of the youngest age group, while the death rate among the oldest took away the teachers and the keepers of the oral traditions. The significant death rate among those in their twenties and thirties may have further narrowed the knowledge base by reducing the number of people who would be learning from the Elders and becoming ceremonial bundle keepers in their own right.

Comparisons of Blackfoot age-grade societies recorded by various European and American visitors (table 2), as well as those specific to the Piikani, Kainai, and Siksika (table 3), indicate that not every society was present in each group all of the time. While this may reflect cultural differences, it may also reflect population loss that precipitated adjustments to the composition of sacred societies. In some cases, a society became extinct. In other instances, the bundles from two or more societies were brought together so that there would be a critical number of people who had the right kinds of bundles in their care to enable the ceremonies of the societies to be carried on.

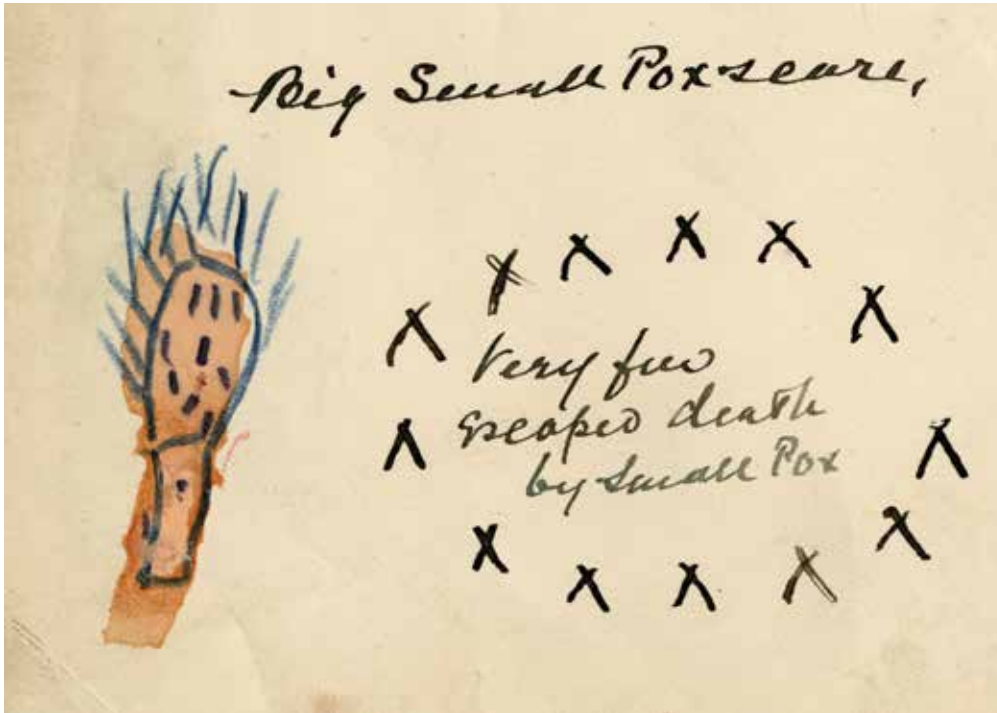


Figure 7. Niitsitapi winter counts, which contain symbols for years in which disease spread throughout the population. Courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

The timing of epidemics is also a crucial factor in determining the survival rates for all age categories. The longer the periods between contact with a disease, the more severe will be the impact. Those generations who were not exposed to the virus in their youth may have grown to middle and old age, at which time they would have been particularly vulnerable to new disease vectors. Thornton et al. (1991) suggest that two smallpox epidemics that occur thirty years apart can reduce a population by half. Bull Plume's winter count reveals that some diseases were spaced at just such a crucial interval, making their impact even more disastrous (Raczka 1979; see table 4). In addition, the variety of diseases that swept through Niitsitapi camps struck a population whose resistance was already weakened.

Table 1. Mortality rate from smallpox.

Age	Mortality rate
0–4 years	40%
5–9 years	25%
10–14 years	20%
15–19 years	25%
20–29 years	35%
30–39 years	40%
40–49 years	50%
50+ years	60%

SOURCE: Data from Thornton et al. (1991)

Table 2. Blackfoot age-grade societies recorded by various early non-Native visitors

Maximilian	Uhlenbeck	Grinnell	Curtis	McClintock
Mosquitoes	Birds	Little Birds		
Dogs	Doves	Pigeons	Doves	Doves
Kit Foxes	Flies	Mosquitoes	Flies	
Raven Bearers	Braves	Braves	Braves	
Thin-Horned Buffalo	Brave/ Crazy Dogs	All Crazy Dogs	All Brave Dogs	Mad Dogs
Soldiers	Tails	Raven Bearers	Tails	Brave Dogs
	Crow Carriers	Dogs	Raven Bearers	
	Dogs	Tails	Dogs	
Large Bulls	Bulls (extinct)	Horns (Kainai)	Kit Foxes	
	Catcher (Soldiers) (extinct)	Kit Foxes (Piikani)	Catchers	
	Kit Foxes (extinct)	Catchers, Soldiers, Bulls	Bulls	

SOURCES: For Maximilian, see Witte and Gallagher (2010, 437–438); Uhlenbeck (1912); Grinnell (1892); Curtis (1970 [1911]); McClintock (1999 [1910]). The German explorer, ethnologist, and naturalist Prince Alexander Philipp Maximilian of Wied travelled in North America in 1832–34.

TABLE 3. Niitsitapi age-grade societies (1912)

<b>Piikani</b>	<b>Kainai</b>	<b>Siksika</b>
Pigeons	no equivalent	no equivalent
Mosquitoes	Mosquitoes	Mosquitoes
no equivalent	no equivalent	Bees
no equivalent	no equivalent	Prairie-chickens
no equivalent	no equivalent	Crows
Braves	All Brave Dogs	All Brave Dogs
no equivalent	no equivalent	Bad Horns
All Brave Dogs	Braves	Black Soldiers
Front Tails	Black Soldiers	Braves
Raven Bearers	Raven Bearers	Raven Bearers
Dogs	Dogs	Dogs
Kit Foxes	Horns	Horns
Catchers	Catchers	Catchers
Bulls	Bulls	Bulls
no equivalent	no equivalent	Kit Foxes

SOURCE: Data from Wissler (1912).

TABLE 4. Epidemics recorded in Bull Plume's winter count

<b>Year</b>	<b>Disease</b>
1764	big smallpox scare
1780	cough disease (measles)
1839	year of smallpox
1864	smallpox (probably measles)
1868	smallpox (little)
1883	year of disease
1893	when children died with measles

SOURCE: Raczka (1979).

Disease also had indirect effects on Niitsitapi society. First, the great psychological impact on surviving individuals incurred by the loss of spouses and close family members cannot be underestimated. In addition, as gender ratios became unequal and fertility levels dropped, family associations and clans were reorganized. Some clans disappeared and others merged. When the fur trader and explorer David Thompson wintered among the Piikani in southwestern Alberta in 1787–1788, he spent many hours with the Elder Saukamappee, who had probably been born in the early 1700s. The old man recounted much about tribal history and culture, including how the Piikani reacted to the demographic changes brought about by the epidemics:

A War Tent was made and the Chiefs and Warriors assembled; the red pipes were filled with Tobacco, but before being lighted an old Chief arose, and beckoning to the Man who had the fire to keep back, addressed us, saying, “I am an old man, my hair is white and have seen much: formerly we were healthy and strong and many of us, now we are few to what we were, and the great sickness may come again. . . . Now we must revenge the death of our people and make the Snake Indians feel the effects of our guns, and other weapons; but the young women must all be saved, and if any has a babe at the breast, it must not be taken from her, nor hurt; all the Boys and Lads that have no weapons must not be killed; but brought to our camps, and be adopted amongst us, to be of our people, and make us more numerous and stronger than we are.” (Thompson 2009, 297)

The social disorganization caused by these epidemics was far-reaching. The deaths of both the hunters and the ceremonial leaders increased the challenge of providing food and protecting the camp. While the young men may have done the actual hunting, it was the prayers of the old people that reminded the other-than-human beings of their connections with the Niitsitapi and that brought success. The general mortality rate may have increased due to food shortages. Once more, Saukamappee describes the situation: “War was no longer thought of, and we had enough to do to hunt and make provisions for our families, for in our sickness we had consumed all our dried provisions; but the Bisons and Red Deer were also gone, we did not see one half of what was before” (quoted in Thompson 2009, 296).

By the late 1800s, Niitsitapi life had changed forever. The impacts of disease and alcohol, compounded by the growing scarcity of game, threatened the social fabric. For some, the spiritual connections with the rest of Creation were beginning to break.

*Treaty 7.* The pressure of a growing population of Euro-Americans and Euro-Canadians was, perhaps, even more catastrophic for the Niitsitapi than were the impacts of trade goods and disease. The timing and the effects of migrations westward were different in the United States than they were in Canada. While the emphasis in this book is on the Niitsitapi and their sacred bundles in Canada, their history in America has an important bearing on this discussion. Niitsitapi in present-day Alberta are closely related to those in present-day Montana and regard the international border as an artificial barrier that separates families. In addition, the “Indian” policies of the two countries influenced one another. A brief review of American events helps contextualize the processes that occurred north of the border.

In the decade from 1840 to 1849, the number of Euro-American migrants crossing the continent in wagon trains from St. Louis to San Francisco increased tenfold. Many others chose not to complete the trip, and those who settled on the plains displaced the American Indians living there, who, in turn, found themselves moving into the territories of other tribes. The conflicts both among individual tribes and between American Indians and the newcomers were an impediment to the development of local resources (farming, ranching, lumber mills, mining) and the construction of transcontinental railways. One solution, preferred by US Army General Phillip Sheridan, was to “let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffalo are exterminated, as it is the only way to bring lasting peace and allow civilization to advance” (quoted in Brown 1971, 254). Once this animal that was so vital to the livelihood of Indian peoples was gone, Sheridan reasoned, it would be easy to confine them to reservations, where they would either assimilate into mainstream society or die out.

Along with the bison-extinction initiative, the government negotiated treaties with the American Indian groups on the plains. Most notable for the Niitsitapi was the *Lame Bull Treaty* of 1855. Named for one of the Niitsitapi leaders, it was made between the Niitsitapi, Flathead, Pend d’Oreilles, and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) nations and set aside large tracts of territory for each in which they

could continue to pursue their traditional lifestyles. However, the treaty did not stem the tide of settlers, and as more newcomers came west, these territories were reduced, usually through presidential decree and with no meaningful consultation with the American Indian groups who were affected.

North of the 49th parallel, the government had been generally unconcerned about the Indigenous peoples living on the plains. In 1670, King Charles II had granted the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) exclusive trading rights in all of the territory that drained into Hudson Bay. Any disputes among the various trading companies that entered the area, or between the companies and the First Nations, were of little concern to either the British Parliament or the colonial government in Canada. Only after they acquired the territory from the HBC in 1870 did the newly created Dominion of Canada feel some urgency to establish ownership of the region. The rapidly increasing westward migration of American settlers that threatened to spill over into the "unoccupied" territories of western Canada was supported by the US policy of manifest destiny, which supposedly justified the annexation of as much of the continent as possible. While it was clear that Canadian settlement of the region was imperative, the government understood that it needed to acquire legal title to the land as a precursor to the arrival of Euro-Canadian immigrants. Just as the Hudson's Bay Company had made treaty before constructing trading posts, the government began negotiating treaties with the First Nations of the prairies and parklands.

We have seen how treaty making was an integral part of Niitsitapi culture. Trading exchanges with neighbouring nations was a form of treaty, and fur traders had sought permission to enter Niitsitapi territory through a treaty negotiation. The Niitsitapi had also entered into the Fort Laramie and Lane Bull treaties with the US government. They had experienced the devastation of repeated epidemics and were watching the bison become extinct. Their leaders, who were aware of the large numbers of immigrants who would soon be moving into their territory, believed that the negotiation of treaties was the only possibility to prepare for a new way of life. They came together at the Hand Hills the year before the Canadian treaty party arrived and agreed that they would make treaty but would also make four demands of the government. First, they wanted help in finding a new way of life in a changing world. Second, they wanted medical aid. Third, they wanted efforts made to protect the bison and restore the herds to their former numbers. Fourth, they wanted all other Native

peoples to be removed from Niitsitapi territory so that there once again would be enough resources for their own people (Walter Hildebrandt, pers. comm., 1995; Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council et al. 1996).

When Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney entered into negotiations for Treaty 7, he made it clear that the assistance provided by the government was intended to help the First Nations adjust to a new way of life. Everyone recognized that bison would soon be gone and that a new economic base would have to be found. Accordingly, in setting out the terms of the treaty, Treaty Commissioner David Laird made certain promises, which Hugh Dempsey (1987, 16) summarizes as follows:

When the Indians were settled, the government would provide two cows for every family of five persons or less, three cows for families with five to nine persons, and four cows to families of ten and over, as well as one bull for each chief and councillor. If a family wished to farm besides raising cattle, it would reduce its cattle allotment by one cow and receive instead two hoes, one spade, one scythe, and two hay forks. Three such families could collectively receive also a plough and harrow, with enough potatoes, barley, oats, and wheat to plant the broken land.

In return, the First Nations would “cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of Canada” all rights, titles, and privileges to their traditional territories (fig. 8).

*Reserves.* When Treaty 7 was made on 22 September 1877, it was easy to imagine a smooth, gradual transition from a reliance on bison and a mobile lifestyle to a settled agricultural means of existence. But by 1879, there were no bison left on the Canadian prairies, and the government was encouraging Siksika to travel to the Judith Basin in central Montana, where one last herd remained. That summer, First Nations from across the northwestern plains converged on the area in a desperate search for food. Sheridan’s policy had borne fruit: by the time autumn arrived, the First Nations had returned, starving, to the reserves and reservations that had been set aside for them in the treaties. There, they were expected to adjust to a new economic, political, and social order. Guiding these changes were the policies of the Canadian and American governments.

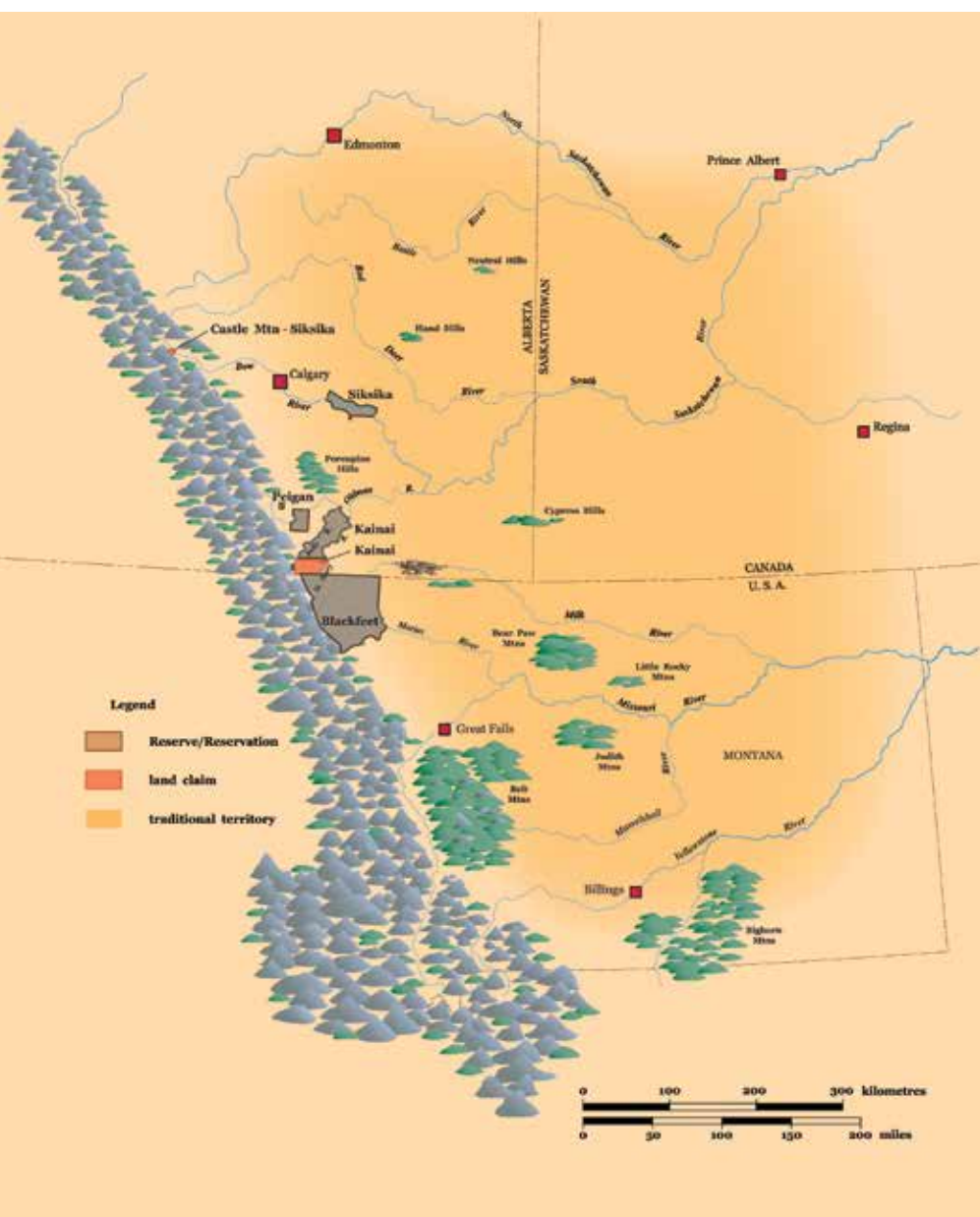


Figure 8. Niitsitapi reserves and reservations following treaties with Canada and the United States, 1855 to 1910. Courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

The following discussion focuses on the developing relationship between the Government of Canada and the Kainai, Siksika, and Apatohsipiikani nations, with less emphasis on Ammskaapipiikani, for two reasons. First, although Ammskaapipiikani are regarded by Niitsitapi in Canada as close relatives who have been separated by an artificial and arbitrary border, that boundary made a significant difference in recent historical developments. While the United States and Canada did not formally coordinate their “Indian” policies, they did have the common goal of eliminating the expense of maintaining First Nations people and, ultimately, of assimilating the Aboriginal population into the dominant society. Moreover, as Samek (1987) recounts, the two governments had joint discussions about the “Indian problem” and often borrowed ideas from each other as they developed and refined their policies. Even so, the comprehensive examinations of Ammskaapipiikani in Montana offered by Farr (1984), Samek (1987), and Rosier (2001) highlight how some American policies—concerning land allotment, the political organization of the reservation, and even the fundamental relationship of the federal government to Aboriginal peoples (see Thomas [2000] for a more general discussion of these issues)—created a very different social, political, and economic situation south of the border. This environment, in turn, affected the circumstances under which bundles were sold to museums and private collectors and the reasons underlying their sale. Second, the stories recounted in this book concern sacred bundles that have returned to southern Alberta. In order to understand why they left in the first place, it is necessary to examine the particular circumstances of reserve life in southern Alberta throughout much of the twentieth century.

Neither the Niitsitapi nor the government were satisfied with the way events unfolded in the years after the making of the treaty. The Niitsitapi were undergoing extensive culture shock as they struggled to exist and find a new way of life. Their freedoms were rapidly curtailed as the government began to control all aspects of their lives. Indian Agents were appointed to oversee all of their affairs, while other officials looked after the distribution of rations, instruction in farming and ranching techniques, management of land and animals, medical aid, education, and law enforcement. After 1885, Aboriginal people could not even leave the reserve without a pass issued by the Agent. These passes were usually valid for only three days. By 1905,

legislation was passed that prohibited Aboriginal people from buying or selling livestock—and, eventually, anything—without written permission of the Indian Agent. They could not even slaughter their own animals for food without his permission. Failure to comply with the new rules led to punitive treatment by the Agent: rations could be reduced, tools withheld, or jail sentences imposed.

Although the government had committed, through treaty, to supply provisions to the First Nations, the expense of providing food quickly became a focus of bureaucratic and political complaints. At the same time, these rations became the only means of survival for Niitsitapi (fig. 9), although the quantity was usually inadequate and the meat and flour was often so rotten and disease ridden that people died after consuming it. Despite the terms of the treaties, the government seems not to have been expecting to assume the responsibility for providing food for the First Nations. Annual reports of the Department of Indian Affairs contained in the Sessional Papers of the House of Commons (especially for the period from 1909 to 1921) lament the cost of supplying food to the people on reserves, and bureaucrats continually promised to reduce the expenditures.

In 1901, J. A. Markle, the Indian Agent at Siksika, explained to James Wilson, the Blood Tribe Indian Agent, that according to department regulations, people who raised cattle were ineligible for rations. Markle recognized that this contradicted First Nations' understanding of the treaty: "I don't know how to get over the Treaty obligations, the Indians claim them as their own also, and you know the trouble this is sure to make. Possibly the return of cattle that go into the ration house can be construed to 'cover treaty obligations.'" Still, the government could unilaterally reduce rations, since "that's law too, and the kind your Mr. Indian won't like" (Markle 1901). This opinion was reinforced in 1903, when James McKenna, the assistant Indian commissioner, wrote to Wilson that "there is no obligation on the Government of Canada to feed them" and that the government "does not purpose [sic] continuing indefinitely to feed Indians who are quite able to provide for themselves after they have been given reasonable assistance" (McKenna 1903). Officials believed that it was imperative for First Nations to learn agricultural techniques and to become self-sufficient farmers and ranchers. To the Blackfoot, this was more than a question of learning new skills. It meant



Figure 9. Kainai women waiting for rations on the Blood Reserve, 1897. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-943-42).

developing a new kind of relationship with everything around them—with Sspomitapiiksi, the Above People; Ksahkomitapiiksi, the Earth People; and Sooyitapiiksi, the Water People.

Government officials did not understand the magnitude of the change they were demanding and continually expressed frustration at the length of time it was taking for these people to change their way of life from hunters to farmers. The government believed that education was the only solution: not only would it teach people agricultural techniques, but it would also be an avenue



Figure 10. Piikani men harvesting hay near Brocket, Alberta, ca. 1892. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-4461-4).

for assimilation, resulting in a reduction in the expense needed to support the people (fig. 10). Government officials saw farming, ranching, and a Christian world view working hand-in-hand to undermine traditional knowledge and spiritual practices, in which they found no moral value. Traditional spiritual practices were, moreover, often lengthy and usually involved an investment of wealth, as food was prepared for all who attended ceremonies and gifts were distributed to honour guests.

The annual summer gathering, or Aako'ka'tssin (fig. 11), was especially troubling. Traditionally, at this time of year, all of the people, groups of whom had wintered elsewhere, reassembled in a large camp to socialize and to participate in the ceremonies of the sacred societies. The ceremonies of each society lasted for four days and followed a specific sequence. There could also be several days between the ceremonies during which little seemed to happen. When an honourable woman made a vow to be the Holy Woman, another four-day ceremony, called an O'kaan, would occur. Government officials saw these ceremonies not only as a waste of material resources but as a diversion from more productive economic activities. After all, Aako'ka'tssin could draw

large numbers of people together for several weeks in the middle of summer—a time when the men should be cutting hay, managing their crops, or tending cattle. Overt and covert pressure was applied to stop the ceremonies. Those who kept to their traditions frequently found that their food rations were reduced and that they were denied permission to sell or slaughter their livestock to feed their families. Opportunities for employment with neighbouring ranchers were most often given to those who had abandoned their traditional beliefs.

Officials considered the land that was not being grazed or cultivated to be a wasted economic resource whose sale would create substantial trust funds to offset the reserves' expenses. The Kainai successfully resisted the pressure to sell their land, but, in 1912, a substantial part of the Siksika Reserve was sold:

During the month of June, last, the Indians surrendered about 125,000 acres of their reserve. This area has since been subdivided and action taken to place it on the market for sale at public auction on the 14th of next month. The Indians agreed to the surrender referred to on the condition that \$400,000 of the proceeds of the sale is to be expended for their use and benefits and the remainder of the proceeds of the sale is to be funded and the interested accruing thereon also be expended for their benefit and for the advantage of their successors. The outcome of this deal will be, I think, that these Indians and their successors will soon have a sufficient income of their own to meet all their wants and that they will then be no longer an expense on the government outside of what is guaranteed to them by the treaty, i.e., a cash annual annuity of \$5 per head. (Markle 1912, 187)

This land sale was not without controversy (Hanks and Hanks 1950). Land could not legally be alienated without the approval of all adults through a vote. After the Siksika rejected the initial referendum on the proposed sale, Markle arranged for a number of subsequent votes to be held, until a majority agreed to the sale. Oral tradition, passed down from people who were alive at the time of the voting to Siksika who are currently living, indicates that the voting procedures may have been irregular and that the final result did not reflect the sentiment of the majority of Siksika.



Figure 11. An Aako'ka'tssin, or midsummer gathering, held by Ammskaapiikani near Browning, Montana, 1900. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-1700-11).



By 1920, Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs, could report:

Nearly half a century ago the aboriginal title to the vast areas east of the Rocky mountains was extinguished by treaties; annual gifts of cash, special reserved lands, assistance in agriculture and education were promised by the Government. For a time the plains Indians had to be fed, owing to the disappearance of the buffalo, but gradually stock-raising and agriculture were introduced, and now hardly a pound of gratuitous food is issued. (Scott 1921, 9)

If, as seemed the case, it was difficult to persuade adults to give up their traditional beliefs, then attention would have to be focused on the children. Schools were established on the reserves to provide the rudiments of literacy, housekeeping, and trades skills (fig. 12). Run by missionaries, they also became a place where Christianity was inculcated, often accompanied by the physical and psychological abuse of any students who resisted conversion. These changes and pressures resulted in reserves that were complex communities of people with diverse economic status, spiritual beliefs, and levels of education, who also differed in the degree to which they had assimilated aspects of the dominant society. In documenting early-twentieth-century developments among Ammskaapiikani, Rosier (2001) illustrates the mosaic-like nature of the reservations that developed in the United States and the political tensions that ensued. Some of the people held on to traditional beliefs and resisted new economic measures. Others integrated the two, and still others rejected everything that could be called “traditional.” In his biography of James Gladstone, Dempsey (1986) demonstrates how similar patterns emerged in Canada, where some successful farmers and ranchers often supported sacred societies at Aako’ka’tssin without actually becoming members. He also observes that some of the men who became successful ranchers and farmers were careful to retain the cultural values that emphasized the importance of sharing with those who were less fortunate.

Two cultural changes, in particular, proved to be especially important, in that they contributed directly to an atmosphere in which the sale of sacred items became acceptable to at least some individuals. First, attitudes toward



Figure 12. Boys at the Anglican mission on the Siksika Reserve, ca. 1890s. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-3322-7).

property changed as people were pressured initially to grow their own food and raise cattle for their own use and then to harvest a surplus for commercial sale. Traditional attitudes that placed value on communal sharing were replaced by an acceptance of the private ownership of resources. Ultimately, resources that had once been regarded as animate—as beings who had been given to all of the Blackfoot people but were cared for by individual families—were commoditized. For many, the sacred bundles that connect humans with other-than-human beings no longer held meaning, except as commodities. This process was exacerbated by the dire economic and political circumstances that kept families isolated on their plots of land, where they could not meet together to reinforce their traditional ways. In some instances, the shortage of food meant that selling a bundle was the only way to survive.

In the early twentieth century, it was the hope of the government bureaucracy that Niitsitapi culture would disappear forever. In light of this possibility, a second change emerged that resulted in the removal of sacred items from their Aboriginal context: the undertaking of “salvage ethnography” by anthropologists such as Clark Wissler, from the American Museum of Natural History, and the Dutch linguist C. C. Uhlenbeck.<sup>5</sup> Others who were interested in Niitsitapi culture—such as Walter McClintock, the naturalist George Bird Grinnell, the photographer Edward Curtis, and James Willard Schultz, who had married a Niitsitapi woman—also spent time on the reserves recording traditional stories and practices as described by old men and women who had witnessed the changes of the past fifty years.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Charles M. Russell and other artists were creating works that depicted an imagined West that had largely disappeared.

These were very difficult years for the Niitsitapi as they struggled with the authority of the government agents and tried to adjust to a new way of life. Some of the White visitors did write letters to the authorities and to the public, asking that help be sent to the Niitsitapi (see, for example, McClintock 1930; Schultz 1921). The conditions described in these petitions stand in stark contrast to the photographs, paintings, sculptures, and writings that these same men created. In addition, even as they portrayed Niitsitapi ceremonies, they made no comment on government efforts to suppress these practices.

During this period of salvage ethnography, many items of material culture were collected. Everything from hide clothing to sacred bundles was gathered up for museum collections, where these items could be preserved for posterity. The artists collected specimens for their studios. In addition, people who dealt in antiquities appeared on reserves with the intent of purchasing items that commemorated a vanishing way of life. Euro-Americans have always harboured contradictory attitudes toward First Nations. On the one hand, they have been eager to acquire their land, suppress their traditional culture, and encourage them to assimilate into mainstream society. On the other hand, First Nations were, and are, an integral part of society’s nostalgia for a romanticized past. The sacred material, clothing, and other items that were purchased from Niitsitapi and then sold to other individuals served to reinforce this nostalgia. Some of this material eventually found its way to museums, where it contributed to a romantic image of the nation’s past, one that further marginalized First Nations within contemporary society. The money paid for these items helped Niitsitapi

to buy food and clothing for their families. Meanwhile, Blackfoot material was dispersed across North America and Europe.

In Canada, the Niitsitapi remained under strict government control as wards and non-citizens for nearly one hundred years. In 1965, they were allowed to vote in federal elections for the first time. In 1966, they were allowed to purchase alcohol like any other Canadian of legal age. While alcohol had always been available surreptitiously, it was no longer illegal merely to possess it. Before long, however, it became a significant social problem, in many ways achieving what proselytizing had not. Some people who were still following their traditional beliefs began to conclude that a new social order was emerging, one in which traditional values and protocols had no place. As practitioners of the traditional ceremonies became fewer in number, some Niitsitapi felt that it would be better if their bundles were sent to museums, where they could be kept safe until interest in the traditional practices revived.<sup>7</sup> Others felt that their bundles had lost their life, their usefulness, as ceremonies became less frequent. Anything they sold to a museum would at least provide some money for food and clothing. Sometimes, sacred items were taken illicitly and sold, thefts that were rarely reported to the officials. The long-standing negative attitude of the Indian Agent, the police, missionaries, and others had taught people the futility of asking for assistance. Today, when people find family items in museum collections, it is not uncommon for them to recall individuals who were known to steal things from aged relatives and sell them to collectors. These comments are nonjudgmental and are made without acrimony, but they do call into question the right of museums to hold such material.

#### REVITALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

In many respects, Blackfoot traditional spiritual practices reached a low point during the late 1960s. Fewer people were joining the sacred societies or attending ceremonies, and sacred bundles were continuing to be sold to museums and private collectors. The 1966 Aako'ka'tssin at Siksika was the last one held there until the Iitskinaiksi (Horn Society) and Maoto'kiiksi (Buffalo Women's Society) were revived in the 1990s. The Apatohsipiikani had not held an O'kaan for many decades, and their sacred societies were not active. Only one Thunder Medicine

Pipe Bundle remained on the reserve. The Kainai still held an Aako'ka'tssin each summer, but Iitskinaiksi bundles had not transferred for decades, and the aging members of the society watched as interest in the ceremonies declined. This situation began to change in the early 1970s, first with the transfer of a Iitskinaiksi bundle at Kainai in 1972 and then with an O'kaan at Apatohsiipiikani in 1979. Both of these involved repatriation requests to the provincial government. It is tempting to link these to the Aboriginal political activism and cultural awareness that developed in reaction to Canadian federal policies or by the American Indian Movement occupations of Alcatraz (1969–1971) and Wounded Knee (1973). In fact, the leaders at Kainai and Piikani were concerned only for the survival of the ceremonies that defined them as a people and that helped them as individuals. These initiatives were met with distrust on the part of provincial officials.

After the Iitskinaiksi society was revived at Kainai in 1972, the new members, with the leadership of Adam Delaney, brought a renewed vitality to the society. Adam wanted to begin bringing sacred material back home from what was then the Provincial Museum of Alberta. Unfortunately, events that had occurred just prior to this created an atmosphere of distrust among provincial officials. Adolf Hungry Wolf (1977, 363–364) relates how this episode developed:

Several summers ago the [Long Time Medicine Pipe] Bundle was brought to the Sun Dance Encampment [Aako'ka'tssin] and ceremonially opened. . . . Many Grey Horses came and brought his drums, which had originally belonged to the Bundle. He himself was one of the drummers for the ceremony. At the end of it he surprised everyone by announcing that he was taking the Bundle back to his own home and that he would shortly have it transferred to himself and his wife. . . . When [the provincial museum] learned of the affair they rushed down to see Many Grey Horses and used threats of law and order to frighten him into returning it. They told him that he would be allowed to have it for the annual ceremony, provided he sign many complicated legal papers first.

The following winter I had a vivid dream in which I saw the Long-Time Pipe being brought back home for good. I went to see Many Grey Horses and his wife, and told them about the dream. They offered to accept the dream and follow its directions. Accordingly, Siksikaki

and I joined the elderly couple for a trip to the Provincial Museum in Edmonton the following spring.

At the museum we were treated courteously. Permission was granted for Many Grey Horses and his wife to pray with the Bundle and to give thanks for the return of Thunder. . . . Dressed in moccasins and blankets, we made a colorful procession outdoors, where we could pray directly to the Spirits of Nature. We went around the museum building, stopping at each of the Four Sacred Directions to pray. . . . After the fourth stop Many Grey Horses and his wife took their Bundle directly to our car. We explained our purpose to the amazed museum officials, who made no effort to stop us. Shortly we were headed south, joyfully bringing the ancient Bundle back home.

As a result of this incident, during which the bundle was given some much-needed fresh air, the members of the Iitskinaiksi society found themselves in a difficult position when they tried to borrow bundles from the museum:

In the previous year Pete [Standing Alone] and some other Horn Society [Iitskinaiksi] members had gone to borrow some Horn Bundles for the Sun Dance. The Museum handed them over, and they were returned in the fall. When they went the next year for the same purpose, they had not heard of the airing incident. The Museum officials were not interested in talking to them because of the recent removal, and the Horns finally had to find the Minister in charge of cultural matters. There was a lengthy argument but finally the Horn Bundles were loaned out. Later, when they were through with them, Pete, as second in command of the Horns, made the decision to keep them, not knowing if they would be able to borrow them again. (Taylor 1989, 152)

It would be many years before the provincial museum began to openly return sacred material.

The Piikani began to revive the Kana'tsomitaiiksi (Brave Dog Society), and in 1979, they prepared for their first O'kaan in many years. However, when Joe Crowshoe, who was to lead the O'kaan, asked to borrow sacred material from the museum, he was required to leave his Short Medicine Pipe Bundle as collateral

for a Natoas bundle (needed for the O'kaan). He complied with this draconian stipulation, and a revitalized interest in other ceremonies at Piikani ensued, with commitment to traditional practices growing throughout the 1980s.

At the end of the decade, both Piikani and Kainai approached the provincial museum with requests for sacred material. A Piikani individual who had vowed to sponsor an O'kaan asked to borrow the Natoas bundle that had been used in 1979. The museum officials were reluctant to have the original one used in a ceremony and suggested that a replica be made and used in its place. After some deliberation, a Piikani ceremonial leader agreed to undertake this task. To the museum, it seemed to be a viable compromise, one that preserved the physical condition of the older piece, which could then be retained within a museum environment and used as a "reference" item. The new, sturdier bundle would reside in the community and be available for ceremonial use. Among the Piikani, however, there was some hesitation about accepting a new bundle that had no history of helping people through ceremonies.

Coincidentally, Dan Weasel Moccasin asked that a Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle be returned to Kainai. Perhaps the incidents that had occurred in the 1970s were still remembered by museum staff. Perhaps they suggested that the bundle could be replicated, something that Dan would have firmly rejected. In any event, the request was denied. Dan then approached the Glenbow Museum, and an agreement was made whereby the bundle could reside with the Weasel Moccasin family for a period of not more than four months in any calendar year. This process, which could be renewed annually for an indefinite period of time, kept the bundle tethered to the museum while enabling the Weasel Moccasin family to take it home in order to prepare for ceremonies. However, within a year, the loan agreement had been amended so that the bundle stayed with the family on a long-term loan.

This arrangement worked well, and before long the Glenbow had loaned a number of sacred items to Kainai and Piikani people. In addition, the Kainai had begun repatriation processes with museums outside of Alberta. In the summer of 1997, the Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society asked to meet with the Glenbow's president and the ethnology staff. The Mookaakin Society—a Kainai not-for-profit society formed to preserve and promote traditional culture—appreciated the Glenbow's work and wanted to formalize a cooperative arrangement. Our first thought was to develop a co-management

agreement whereby we were jointly responsible for the care and interpretation of Kainai material in the museum and archival collections. The Glenbow's collections, however, are owned by the people of Alberta, and when we notified the provincial government of our pending agreement, we were informed that it was not appropriate to develop a co-management agreement regarding provincial resources. Despite this objection, the Glenbow went ahead, believing that making an agreement with the Mookaakin Society was the right thing to do. The resulting memorandum of understanding (see appendix 2) outlines the Glenbow's responsibilities, especially regarding repatriation of sacred material and Mookaakin Society's duty to help with the care and interpretation of Kainai material. This agreement may have been a motivating factor that led provincial government officials to begin to formalize ways of organizing requests for the loan of sacred material. It has also served as a model for agreements with other researchers.

When a group at Siksika began the process of reviving the Iitskinaiksi society in 1996, they looked to the Glenbow and the provincial museums for the sacred bundles that are an integral part of the society's ceremonies. These had been sold to the museums in the 1960s, at a time when it seemed that these traditions would be lost forever. Arrangements were made by both institutions to loan the bundles, and the first Aako'ka'tssin in over thirty years was held in 1996. These bundles have since been transferred to another group as the society has grown.

By 1998, the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai had, on loan, more than thirty sacred objects from the Glenbow Museum and the Provincial Museum of Alberta. Some of these had been ceremonially transferred several times, spreading knowledge and extending relationships. Glenbow staff had been taught how important these bundles are to entire communities. Earlier fears that the bundles would fall into disuse or be sold had been quelled, and the appropriateness of returning them was no longer challenged. Now the question became, Why should museums continue to be responsible for these bundles that were residing permanently in communities? In chapter 8, Jack Ives relates how the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act was drafted, and, in chapter 9, Robert Janes details the lengthy process that convinced the Glenbow's Board of Governors to agree that repatriation was an appropriate course of action.

Today, almost all of the Blackfoot sacred ceremonial materials at the Glenbow and at what is now the Royal Alberta Museum have been returned. Most of those that remain are personal items and would not be of use to other individuals. The bundles still housed in the museums can be transferred: it is simply a question of waiting for someone to come forward and take on the responsibility of caring for them.

## NOTES

- 1 But see Conaty (2004).
- 2 As the reference to the Bow River suggests, the “Blackfeet” are evidently the Siksika (the Northern Blackfoot), rather than the Ammskaapiikani, to whom the term “Blackfeet” today refers. Indeed, in the transcription of Tearing Lodge’s account provided by Paul Raczka (2011), “Blackfeet” is glossed “[Siksikai, ed.]” In addition, the name that Curtis spells “Piegan” (that is, the Ammskaapiikani) is consistently spelled “Peigan” (that is, the Apatohsippiikani) in Raczka’s version (which also renders the term *Istssóhtsi* as *Ishtssohatsi*).
- 3 “The Royal Alberta Museum’s Southesk Collection,” <http://www.royalalbertamuseum.ca/human/ethno/collects/southesk.htm>.
- 4 The original document resides in the Glenbow Archives. Compiled ca. 1910, the count records events of significance to the Apatohsippiikani from 1764 to 1910. For a description and images, see “Item IW-Glen-22: Bill Plume’s Winter Count,” <http://www.albertaonrecord.ca/iw-glen-22>.
- 5 See Wissler (1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1918); Wissler and Duvall (1995); Uhlenbeck (1911, 1912); and Eggermont-Molenaar (2005).
- 6 See McClintock (1900, 1935, 1936a, 1937a, 1937b, 1948, 1992, 1999); Grinnell (1892, 1917, 1962); Curtis (1970); Schultz (1907, 1919, 1923, 1927, 1962, 2002); and Schultz and Donaldson (1930).
- 7 Glenbow Indigenous Studies Department source files for Margaret Waterchief indicate that she left several bundles with the museum for safekeeping.

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# 3

## *Repatriation Among the Piikani*

ALLAN PARD

I first became involved with repatriation around 1974, when I was director of the Oldman River Cultural Centre on the Peigan Reserve. Joe Crowshoe, one of our Elders, came to visit me, and we began talking about our significant cultural ceremonies. At the time, Joe was the keeper of the Short Medicine Pipe Bundle, the only bundle left on the reserve. In fact, that was probably the only ceremony that was ongoing at the time. As we discussed how we could start to revive our traditional ceremonies, we started to focus on the O'kaan. Before long, we were at the point where we really wanted to have the O'kaan again. There was definitely a spiritual need for it, and it seemed we had most of the prerequisites to carry it out. The younger people who were coming to the cultural centre showed a real willingness to make the effort and perform the duties necessary to have an O'kaan. The appropriate ceremonial leaders, who had the sacred rights and



Figure 13. Sleeps First (Apatohsiipiikani) wearing a Natoas headdress, ca. 1930s. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-5425-72).

the knowledge to have an O'kaan, were all still alive. The only missing component was the Natoas bundle (fig. 13). Joe's grandmother had had one, but it had ended up in the provincial museum in the late 1950s.

Joe pressured me to talk to the appropriate government people regarding the possibility of purchasing the Natoas bundle or having it returned some other way. Joe and I met with Horst Schmidt, who was the minister of the Department of Culture at the time, and described how important it was for our community to try to revive our O'kaan. We also explained how crucial it was to have the Natoas bundle; without it, we could not have the O'kaan. Our discussions were very involved and took a while, but finally we could see that a loan was possible. However, the only way they would let us have the Natoas bundle was if Joe Crowshoe gave the museum his Medicine Pipe Bundle as security. Joe basically said, "In order for us to have an O'kaan, I will give them my pipe to hold." He brought his Medicine Pipe Bundle to the museum and brought out the Natoas bundle. That year, we revived our O'kaan.

#### EARLY REPATRIATIONS

This was about the same time that Adam Delaney from Kainai was approaching the government to have some Iitskinaiksi [Horn Society] bundles returned. He was also having difficulties negotiating with the museum. Later, we discovered that these problems were arising because Many Grey Horses [from Kainai], along with Adolf Hungry Wolf, had taken the Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle from the museum without their permission. Although that had already happened, we hadn't heard anything about it until our meeting with Mr. Schmidt. We felt that the bureaucrats unfairly used that as a reason not to trust us. They were blaming us for the actions of others. After the O'kaan, we took the Natoas bundle back and the museum returned the Medicine Pipe Bundle to Joe.

Then we wondered what else we could do. After a great deal of talk and thought, we realized that if our ceremonies were to continue, we would have to negotiate a longer-term loan of the bundle. Those discussions did occur but I wasn't involved at that time. Joe knew what needed to be done.

But it got me thinking. In order to have a successful O'kaan, we had to revive the Kana'tsomitaiksi [Brave Dog Society] at Piikani. That society plays

a very important role in organizing the camp and constructing the centre lodge and is really necessary in order to conduct the O'kaan properly. Once the Kana'tsomitaiksi was brought back, it seemed to stimulate more interest in our culture. But we could still only do so much because we had only one Medicine Pipe Bundle at Piikani and the provincial government wanted us to leave it as collateral whenever we borrowed the Natoas bundle.

Interest in our traditional ways was definitely growing. Membership in Iitskinaiksi at Kainai had not changed for a very long time. However, by the early 1980s, there were younger people at Kainai who wanted to join the society. When the leadership of that society changed, it created a whole new wave of involvement both at Kainai and Piikani. More people showed a willingness to take part in our ceremonies and to be more involved in our traditional culture. I think people were starting to realize that there was nothing really wrong with our culture. Most of us had attended residential school, where we had been taught not to go in that direction. With the change of mind came the realization that our ways were more positive and more meaningful to us as First Nations people than anything the Christian beliefs had to offer. The interest was there, but we still lacked sacred articles to circulate among our community. This was stopping us from doing more with our culture and ceremonies.

At the same time, some people had become reluctant to transfer bundles in our traditional way. Museums and private collectors had been buying our cultural items, and this put a commercial value—a price tag—on our sacred bundles. Our traditional protocol of passing on bundles to others became very restricted as individuals and families held onto them because of their commercial value, rather than transferring them to others. We could see what would happen if this attitude persisted, and the lack of bundles really created a greater need and desire on our part to be more active in the revival of our traditional culture.

#### REPATRIATION IN THE 1990S

In the 1990s, the sudden willingness from the Glenbow Museum to return sacred bundles really drew our interest. As each of the Blackfoot communities began to take home most of our sacred objects from the Glenbow, we realized

that the Blackfoot people should come together and start collaborating more so that we would have successful repatriations. But the possibility of bringing home our sacred bundles brought with it some significant challenges.

First, we could not just reintroduce bundles into the community; we had to also reintroduce the protocols for handling and transferring them. For example, when the repatriation act [First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, Province of Alberta, 2000] was being proposed, we realized that we had to reorganize ourselves and to relearn that those bundles are not individually owned. This concept had changed when collectors and museums had started purchasing bundles from individuals. We had begun to think like mainstream society and were regarding bundles as individual, private property. Some people began to think that they still had the rights to sacred objects that their parents or relatives had sold. But according to our traditional practices, those bundles are communal or tribal property. It was difficult for us to come to that conclusion. But we had to all come to that conclusion in order for us to safely and successfully repatriate those articles. They are not individually owned. If a bundle was sold, then the family no longer has any ties to it. That was a very important concept to get clear.

Second, in order for us to safely and successfully repatriate those sacred articles, it was important for us not to critique or “gate keep” to the point where we would be judgmental about who gets the bundles. We had to come to the realization that as long as the bundles come back to the community, then maybe our traditional protocol would eventually come into play and maybe the bundles would be dealt with appropriately. But first our sacred items needed to come home. Our main concern was to get the bundles back to our communities.

We did not just look to the Glenbow for our bundles. We started looking at other museums and realized that there were other bundles in many other places. When the United States enacted NAGPRA [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act] in 1990, we started investigating repatriation bundles from museums in the United States. We often travelled to various museums and institutions to identify bundles. Some of the bundles had left the reserves such a long time ago that there were very few people who had an understanding or knowledge of them. This created another set of challenges for us because we could not always identify some bundles and we did not know the ceremonies for them. Luckily, among all of the Blackfoot, we still had enough

people with the appropriate knowledge. My exposure to ceremonies and the knowledge I gained by talking to my Elders gave me a broad view of our culture, and I was often able to help.

Those were some of the challenges that we faced.

Once we started successfully repatriating and really started working with other museums, we had to learn the museum procedures and how to deal with institutions in the United States. Of course, I think the collaborative efforts of both sides—museums and Blackfoot—as we recognize and respect each other’s protocols are important. To do that, you have to develop relationships and use diplomacy in negotiations.

#### BUNDLES I HAVE HELPED REPATRIATE

I have helped repatriate a number of bundles. I started out with Joe Crowshoe’s Natoas bundle. When we started Kana’tsomitaiksi in the 1970s, some of the members individually approached museums to repatriate some of the rattles. But I wasn’t directly involved.

I helped return the Many Shots Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Provincial Museum of Alberta to people at Siksika (fig. 14). In the mid-1990s, a group from Siksika was trying to repatriate a Iitskinaiksi bundle from the provincial museum. They had developed a very antagonistic negotiating pattern with the museum director at the time. When I was brought in by the director to help with the discussions, I realized that Siksika people were not approaching this bundle with appropriate protocol. The person who wanted the bundle had asked someone who was, in fact, his spiritual parent to transfer it to him. But our protocol is that a bundle keeper cannot independently transfer a bundle to a new keeper. A third party—a spiritual grandfather—has to be involved. I explained to them that if they wanted to repatriate this bundle correctly, they had to approach it in the right way. Following that, I met with the Siksika and told them, “Hey, do it correctly. Get your proper Elders. If you don’t have them at home, get them from Kainai. Get them up here and they’ll tell you what you need to do to successfully repatriate all your Iitskinaiksi bundles.” I organized that meeting for them and invited Adam Delaney to come up and talk to them about Iitskinaiksi protocol. They started following that and soon held the first Aako’ka’tssin in thirty years.



Figure 14. Many Shots, ca. 1930. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-583-2).

The concept of protocol means going about things in an appropriate way. The people who wanted to revive and join the Iitskinaiksi had to be separated by a generation of bundle keepers from the people who had been the keepers before that. We refer to these people as the grandfathers of the person to whom the bundle will be transferred, whereas the person who currently holds the bundle is the parent of the new keeper. If the people who had last kept the bundles had already passed away, then someone would have to act as an adoptive parent. Moreover, the new bundle keepers and their parents have to be kept physically separate. Elders, we call them grandfathers, are needed to advise and direct the new keepers. That is what the people at Siksika did; otherwise, they would have been going around in circles. I helped that process get going. I wasn't directly involved in repatriating all of the Iitskinaiksi bundles, but this initial undertaking helped successively repatriate the rest of the Iitskinaiksi bundles.

I also travelled to New York and Boston with Kainai. They were working on repatriating—I'll refer to the bundle by the name of the past keeper—the Eagle Speaker Beaver Bundle that was at Peabody Museum, near Boston. They brought that bundle back home, but at that point the people who had wanted to take that bundle decided that they were not ready for it. When Kainai people told me to take care of it, I said, "Well, then I'm going to do it properly." I went down to Montana and met with Mike Swims Under, one of the few people who still knew all of the Beaver Bundle ceremonies and protocols. I talked to him and said, "Well, just come up and paint me. While it is at my house and waiting for people to come for it, I'd feel more comfortable with that bundle if I was painted to take care of it." When he came up, I had been thinking about it, and I asked him, "Why don't you just transfer it to me?" That was basically what the people at Kainai were telling me—just have it transferred since no one is ready to take care of it. That is how I came to have that Beaver Bundle transferred to me.

Later on, I became more involved in repatriating the Medicine Pipe Bundle that came from the Smithsonian. Frank Weasel Head kept it when it first came home. He transferred it to Narcisse Blood, who then transferred it to Pete Standing Alone. Pete has recently transferred it to another family.

We repatriated more Beaver Bundles from the Scriver Collection at the Provincial Museum of Alberta. At first, the museum said that the Scriver Collection was immune to Alberta's repatriation act. However, after discussing



Figure 15. White Calf (Apatohsippiikani). Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-1700-12).

this with others, I said, “Let’s write a letter asking for the bundle and push the envelope.” Through that, we were successful in repatriating the Home Gun Beaver Bundle. Once that was home, I transferred it to John Murray and requested the White Calf Beaver Bundle (fig. 15). That stayed at my place for a

year or two, and I successfully transferred it to Rick Grounds in Montana. Then I helped with repatriating the Bos Ribs Beaver Bundle, which is now being kept by Ryan Heavy Head.

I didn't repatriate many other Natoas bundles, although I did help to have one returned from the Glenbow Museum for an O'kaan that Chris McHugh from Siksika held. I believe it had belonged to Margaret Waterchief. That went to my daughter, who was Chris's partner in the ceremony.

I also helped repatriate the Head Carrier Beaver Bundle from the Smithsonian. That went to Chris McHugh from Siksika, who later transferred it to Leonard Bastien from Piikani. Leonard still has it. I think that is the one that is mentioned in Clark Wissler's books.

The Split-Eared Seizer's Pipe Bundle was repatriated from the Smithsonian. That is the one that Richard Right Hand at Siksika has. I also helped Chris McHugh repatriate a Bear Knife Bundle from the Smithsonian. Finally, there was the Medicine Pipe Bundle from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, which Martin Heavy Head kept. While I didn't help with repatriation, I did help fix it up and put things together after it came home.

Those are the repatriations in which I have been directly involved. I think all the major bundles that I was involved with have been successfully reintegrated into our communities, and our proper protocol and responsibilities for caring for them are occurring. I am quite happy with that.

#### ON MAKING NEW BUNDLES

It is important to understand why we can't just make new bundles. I think most of the bundles in museums are still in fairly good condition. Because we were just in this infant stage of reviving our culture—you might say reviving our ceremonies through repatriation—it was important for us to cling to, to hold onto, something that had some sentimental and spiritual value to our people. A ceremony would not have the same effect with a remade bundle. So it was important to have possession of the emotional and spiritual value that is in place in those ancient bundles. I don't think any of us felt quite appropriate, quite spiritually adequate, to remake those bundles. It was of more value to us if we had the real thing.

WHAT MAKES SOMETHING ELIGIBLE FOR REPATRIATION

When we consider repatriating a bundle, the most important criterion is need. There has to be desire for the bundle to be returned and a willingness on the part of our people to take care of it. The bundle must have a spiritual and sentimental value to our people. If the bundle still exists, then we should try our utmost to get it repatriated before we consider duplicating it or replicating it.

I think the most important part of repatriation is successfully identifying the bundles. There is a lot of confusion about bundles. For example, some people don't distinguish between a split-horn headdress and a Iitskinaiksi headdress. We also have to be aware that some of the material in museum collections was duplicated. When we are attending those institutions, we have to examine the material carefully to determine whether it is a replica or the real thing. If it is a Natoas bundle, was it actually used in an O'kaan? You can see the telltale signs, such as the paint. People have to know what they are doing, what they are looking for.

Sometimes, we can mix parts from different bundles if we follow the proper protocol. For example, Mike Swims Under advised us that if we could just repatriate the Beaver pipe, we could always get the rest of the articles either from other bundles or by going directly to the source and getting a pelt or a skin. I think it was important for us to know that. Sometimes, these bundles were incomplete. Some had been opened and parts sold separately. For example, a Medicine Pipe Bundle might be missing a fan or a bowl. If there was one in another museum, it would have no significant value to the museum, but there would be sentimental reasons for it to become part of the bundle. At least it would be used in its proper way.

Sometimes, we had to think about what to repatriate and what to leave behind. There are some paraphernalia that probably make no sense to repatriate because of their value. Something might be priceless as an art form. Or the museum might be able to preserve something that is very old and almost worn out so that in the future we can see what it looked like and how it was made. I think sometimes we have to put a value on that, as opposed to taking it out of the museum and saying it is no longer useful and then putting it out as an offering. We could just leave it in the museum as an offering. That's how we should be looking at those things and realizing maybe it would be more valuable just



Figure 16. Ammskaapiikani man wearing traditional headdress and weasel tail suit. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-3587-1).

leaving them there where they can be preserved so that in the future, if people want to duplicate or replicate them, they will have something to work with. In that manner, it's important.

Headdresses and weasel tail suits are also transferable items that should be repatriated (fig. 16). They present interesting questions to us and to museums. If those suits are useable and in fair condition, I think that there may have to be some negotiations with institutions. Maybe a person can repatriate the weasel tail suit until it starts to wear out, and then they would feel good about returning it to the institution and working on a replication. For that reason, I think we have to at least have it in our possession so that we feel comfortable about replicating it. I think there is room to work with some of these things. We have to have some serious discussions about items such as headdresses and weasel tail suits as an art form and as priceless artifacts. It might be better to preserve them in museums rather than using them in ceremonies. Some thought and effort has to be made in that regard.

I think sometimes we repatriate because we can't find some of those animals or some of those bundles anymore. For example, eagle feather headdresses—there are laws about collecting and keeping eagle feathers. There are all kinds of restrictions concerning the possession of these feathers. Consequently, sometimes it seems easier just to repatriate a headdress. If it is only in collection storage and not being displayed, then that's where other thoughts have to come into play. I would sooner see them being used than stuck in storage.

#### IMPACTS OF REPATRIATION

All this has had some pretty major impacts in our communities. Now there are more ceremonies creating more opportunities for our people to get involved. The young people are becoming more interested in our culture and more willing to participate. I'm not saying it's like that for all of our people in the communities. Our people have diverse interests. But these opportunities are available for the traditional people. Repatriation creates a need in our community to recognize and honour all the diverse interests. It's here; it's happened.

Beyond rejuvenating the ceremonies, I think repatriation is creating more self-esteem for some of our youth. It is enhancing our cultural identity;

people are more self-assured and willing to identify themselves as Piikani. It's still too early to really look at all the social impacts, but I feel that it has been positive for the people involved. I also see more willingness to collaborate with other Blackfoot communities. Our real Old People, who knew about the ceremonies and bundles, have left us. The younger generation was clinging to the identities that developed when we were forbidden to leave the reserves and we became separated from each other. We had developed tunnel vision. But the renewal of traditional practices and the repatriation of sacred material have brought more scope.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

The people who were involved in repatriation were practicing our traditional beliefs and ceremonies. We wanted to utilize the sacred material that was ours. We also wondered how those bundles ended up in the museums. Some of them have very unhappy stories regarding how they ended up in museum collections. All those reasons motivated us to work toward the safe return of those bundles into our communities.

As soon as contact started happening, the sale of our bundles started happening. As soon as someone like George Catlin or Karl Bodmer or Paul Kane painted a subject, he would think, "Oh, I have to have his outfit or his pipe that he posed with." The people back then gave them up readily because they knew they could successfully duplicate or make another one. They didn't have the challenges that we face today. We don't have the spiritual integrity that they had or the access to resources such as the buffalo hides or the skills to form the piece or the quill work. We don't have the art behind replicating the bundles.

I think our biggest challenge with some of those bundles that were sold and ended up in museums, institutions, and private collections was the simultaneous loss of our culture. Laws were passed to curb our activities. Missionaries worked to imbue us with a negative attitude toward our culture, our activities, our ways, our language, and ourselves as a people. Many of us ended up believing that it was wrong to do what we were doing; it was wrong to be "Indian." Our interest in repatriating bundles was stimulated when we finally came out of that way of thinking.

It is important for our people to understand that sacred bundles were not individually owned bundles. It is still important for our people to be exposed to that. It is also important to understand why it was necessary to have the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. Without the repatriation act, there is a legal stumbling block. Because those bundles were bought with public funds, the law had to be passed so that we could bring the bundles back home. A lot of people were wondering why we were just so accepting of this repatriation act. The advice of the Elders we were working with at the time was, “Hey, let’s just work with this as long as we can get our bundles repatriated without creating stumbling blocks for ourselves.” When we started realizing what NAGPRA, the repatriation act in the United States, was all about, it helped motivate us and stimulated more interest in the work we had to do on repatriation.

With NAGPRA, we just had to learn the process and had to have the proper people to document the efforts. That is where people like Ryan Heavy Head came in handy. He helped do the paperwork in repatriating some of those articles from the United States.

When repatriating bundles from the United States through NAGPRA, we needed to have the support and cooperation of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana. We were faced with the dilemma that many Ammskapipiikani in Browning, Montana, do not fully understand the importance of repatriation and the importance of maintaining and preserving our culture. They had to see that need. They had to look beyond their restrictions, their thinking. We are so diverse now, and we are not all traditional thinkers. Some of our thinking is motivated by some of the religious denominations. All of this has an impact on First Nations people.

I think the only remaining challenge that we face in repatriation is at the international level—beyond North America. There has been a successful repatriation from Scotland (a Iitskinaiksi headdress to the Kainai), so I think we just have to expand more into the European countries where the rest of our major bundles are.

The main point, and we can’t forget it, is not the repatriation itself, but the use. What helped us in the successful repatriation of our sacred articles was that we were still capable of performing those functions and those ceremonies. It makes no sense repatriating any sacred article if it cannot be put into use.

I am happy that Blackfoot people can repatriate almost any sacred article and put it into use. The bundles are moving through the communities—maybe not as much as we would like to see, but they are moving around. The membership in Iitskinaiksi at Kainai has changed many times. Even among the Siksika, Iitskinaiksi has transferred—and they are even looking at another bunch coming through. Most of the Medicine Pipe Bundles are being circulated. I think we are pretty active; the natural process is in place.

# 4

## *Reviving Traditions*

JERRY POTTS

I always had a passion for learning about our traditional ways. After I finished high school and came back home in the early 1970s, I approached a few different Elders for guidance. They all said, “You have to have a pipe.”

It was pretty clear that no one was going to just give me a pipe, so I decided to make one. As I began looking for someone who knew how to do that, everybody said, “Go see Joe Crowshoe.” I went out there, and Joe said, “I don’t know anything about that. Go see my brother, Old Man Jackie.” It turned out that he didn’t know anything about it either, and he said, “I know they get the rock by Bad Eagle’s place. There’s a quarry there where that stone is.” I went down to see Art Bad Eagle, and I gave him some tobacco and some other gifts. I asked him if he could show me where that rock was so that I could get some to make a pipe.

He took me down and he showed me the vein. He told me I had to put tobacco down as an offering. He knew the protocol for digging the stone.

I dug out some of the stone, and I guess that's where my story starts. I made a pipe and stem—just by trial and error. When I finally made one, I took it to Old Lady Many Guns and asked her if she could give it a blessing. She went through that ceremony with my pipe. She was quite touched that a young guy had brought her a pipe and wanted to learn about it. Old Lady Buffalo heard about it, too. Those two Old Ladies were very close friends. My involvement with the ceremonies and with the different teachings all started with those Old Ladies.

#### STARTING OVER AGAIN

Joe Crowshoe, Old Man Joe, had the Medicine Pipe Bundle that Old Lady Buffalo once had. They call it the Short Medicine Pipe. That's the one pipe on the reserve that never left. It was never sold to a museum. Old Lady Buffalo hung onto that pipe, and they used to open it at the Old Lady's house. Later, Joe had it transferred to him.

Old Lady Many Guns was the last O'kaan [Sun Dance] woman we had on the reserve. Even when they had an O'kaan down in Browning, Montana—it was in 1970 or 1971—she was the one who actually went down there. Old Lady Many Guns, Old Lady Rides at the Door, and Mike Swims Under were the key people for that ceremony.

At that time, there were not many young guys participating in any of the traditional ceremonies. I started to go to the medicine pipe ceremonies and started to cut tobacco and worked at Kano'tsisissin [All Smoke] ceremonies. I grew up hearing about the Iitskinaiksi [Horn Society], and I knew they were still very active at Kainai. There were a couple of other Medicine Pipe ceremonies that we went to at Kainai. We also used to go down to George Kicking Woman's Medicine Pipe ceremony in Browning. I saw Adolf Hungry Wolf at these different ceremonies. He eventually came up, and I talked to him and used to hang around with him. I guess that was all part of learning. I got to really see how Adolf could be an "Indian" when he wanted something from the Old People. But then, when anyone wanted to have something transferred back

that had come from the Old People, he would be a White Person and not share with the community.

This was the same time that Allan Pard began working at the Oldman River Cultural Centre. The federal government had a Cultural Education Centres Program, the whole intent of which was to preserve culture and save the languages in the communities. Allan was very organized and structured, and he started to get a number of books and tapes and gather all kinds of information. This was probably 1974 or 1975.

The other resource we had at that time was the late John Yellow Horn (fig. 17). I went to his place when I first wanted to learn about our traditions. He was a real man of action. He said, "Well, if you guys want to learn culture and be part of this, you have to learn how to sing." He pulled his drum out and began to play, saying, "The only way you are going to learn is to do it."

We used to go there and he'd be singing Sun Dance songs. That's where we started to get the vision of having an O'kaan. He talked about the Kana'tsomitaiksi [Brave Dog Society]. In fact, he knew the songs so well he was like a tape recorder with the Kana'tsomitaiksi and other songs. He was a past Niinaimsskaiksi [Medicine Pipe Bundle holder] and a past member of Iitskinaiksi.

At the same time, we were saying, "There's still only one Medicine Pipe Bundle on the reserve. What can we do?" That's where Joe stepped up to the plate and said, "Well, you'll have a Sun Dance." In order to do that, we had to get the Kana'tsomitaiksi going and we needed a Natoas [Sun Dance woman's headdress]. Joe Crowshoe had had one, but it was in the provincial museum in Edmonton. At that time, things were really messed up between us and the museum. Adolf Hungry Wolf had staged a breakout of the Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle from the provincial museum. The museum staff members were very afraid of anyone who went up there to ask for anything. The Natoas bundle was one of the first repatriations to Piikani that I'm aware of. Allan Pard went up and negotiated with the provincial government to borrow the headdress. There was no way they were going to permanently return it. In fact, the only way we got the Natoas bundle was by Old Man Joe Crowshoe taking the Short Medicine Pipe Bundle to Edmonton and leaving it there in exchange for the Natoas bundle.

From the museum's point of view, Hungry Wolf had committed a theft, although he calls it a coup. It really made it difficult for everybody else. We wanted to revive our ceremonies and societies, and we knew the museum had



Figure 17. John Yellow Horn (Apatohsiipikani), who kept many songs and ceremonies alive during the 1960s. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NB-44-70a).

all these bundles and the ceremonial regalia. Allan had been able to get access to a lot of that and even got some pretty good financial support to make that first O'kaan happen.

If we were going to undertake a transfer with the Kana'tsomitaisi, we had to get the Leader's, the Rider's, and the Pa'ksikopyi Bundles. At that time, all the people who had had those bundles were still alive. A couple of the Pa'ksikopyi Bundles weren't here, but the Elders said, "Well, you could go to the previous bundle keepers in Browning—those guys never transferred it." And that's where our sharing of the ceremonial material with the Ammskaapipiikani began. Bundles are all communally owned among the Blackfoot-speaking people. Everybody owns them.

Everybody was approaching the different people who had the Kana'tsomitaisi rattles. Everyone was in support of reviving the society. So we started the process. I remember I wanted to take a Rider's Bundle. Everything was set up to do all of the transfers, but nobody would go after the Leader's Bundle. The late Eddy Yellow Horn had that, so I approached him for the Leader's rattle. He was a bishop in the Mormon Church, so you know that he had his priorities in life set out. When I approached him, he said, "Well, I want a pipe." So I made him a pipe. He said, "I want to just keep it. I'm just going to keep it up on my mantle."

So I was the one who ended up going there, and he agreed to transfer the bundle to me, and we sorted out all the transfers and rattles. That process is a long story in itself. Even at the Sun Dance camp, there were a couple of transfers that went on. It was very difficult. Three or four times, we set up a camp to do a transfer and none of the people that had the Kana'tsomitaisi bundles showed up. That was very disheartening. But I guess that's part of life. Sometimes, you think something's going to happen and it doesn't.

When the time came, there were about twenty-five members. The majority of the young guys who were in there at that time have gone on to become ceremonial leaders or have gone through a number of transfers.

The O'kaan in 1977 is the benchmark in our community for rejuvenating our traditional culture. In the Blackfoot language, we would say Siksikasitapi—the Blackfoot Way. We were the ones at the forefront of it.

The Kana'tsomitaisi in Browning also had a Sun Dance—I think it was a year or two after we did. All the Kana'tsomitaisi from up here went down, and

we were working with them, showing them what to do. Mike Swims Under was at our O'kaan, and he was down there, too. But we had a lot of support. There were a lot of Old Men, traditional Elders, from Kainai. They used to really support us here and would come over to help us.

I guess that is kind of the start. We were able to bring Kana'tsomitaiksi and the O'kaan back. We did it traditionally. I think that we held about three or four O'kaan while I was leader of Kana'tsomitaiksi. There's been quite a number and so it has gone on. A number of people have had Natoas bundles transferred to them.

We have had a number of Piikani who have joined the Iitskinaiksi at Kainai. That is such an old society, and they still had many of the old Elders, so the teachings were really strong there. We were never taught a lot of basics here. I guess the Elders that we were learning from didn't think that a lot of the preliminary teachings were important, so we were just put right up at a certain level.

Some people, such as Bob Black Plume (fig. 18) from Kainai, came over to our ceremonies. There were a lot of transfers—we never even asked for anything, they were just transferring us things—and we were asking, "Why?" Looking back on it, I guess there was nobody else to transfer to. They believed in these traditions and really wanted to keep things going. We caught the tail end of a generation of those old guys. But I think they really looked up to us for what we were doing.

We also believed that we needed more than just the one medicine pipe. I transferred the Kana'tsomitaiksi Leader's Bundle to Reg Crowshoe. He and the Kana'tsomitaiksi brought the Rider's Medicine Pipe Bunde out of Browning, and we had it transferred up here. The entire Kana'tsomitaiksi brought it up, and they all paid for the expense of transferring it.

Then I got involved doing other things and really wasn't concerned with ceremonies for a couple of years. Later on, I was captured by the Iitskinaiksi at Kainai and went through the whole learning curve with that society. But everything I had done—Kana'tsomitaiksi, the O'kaan, and Kano'tsisissin—everything I'd done with Blackfoot ceremonies really helped me to understand the true meaning of a lot of things once I joined Iitskinaiksi. They say that when you learn something, sometimes you don't know what it means until later. People say, "Ah—now I understand." Today, there are so many things happening.



Figure 18. Bob Black Plume (Kainai), who, during the 1970s, transferred many songs to Jerry Potts and other young men who were interested in keeping the ceremonies alive. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-4978-2).

## OUR HISTORY OF REPATRIATION

What really got us interested in repatriation around here was the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) passed in the United States. Museums were told that they had to return all ceremonial items to Native Americans. Well, that got everybody's attention up here. A lot of the collectors who were working in Browning back in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s had inside men on the reserves in Canada going around collecting material. They took that material down into the United States, where all of a sudden it had big money value. Some of those collections were sold to museums and private collectors in Chicago, Washington, DC, Denver, Los Angeles, and other places.

Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, there was another round of collecting. That was when the majority of our sacred material left us. A lot of children were being sent to boarding school and the parents were left at home. It was a very rough time. When someone came along and offered money for something that was just hanging on the wall, not being used and with nobody to care for it, people readily made a deal.

There has always been controversy around our traditional ways. The Christian religious factions devastated the Blackfoot ceremonialists. This began when the first Roman Catholic missionaries came to the Piikani Reserve in 1885. In 1889, the Anglican missionary landed on the reserve, and then, in the early 1900s, the Full Gospels came. The Catholics didn't want anything to do with the Anglicans. The Anglicans didn't want anything to do with the Catholics. The Full Gospels—well, they just did not want anything to do with anyone.

Now, we have a generation of people who are the result of that attitude. The people who are working on repatriation face a lot of criticism from these other religions. It doesn't matter how we approach it, whenever we repatriate something, we face criticism by all those groups.

It was happening. The bundles were coming home. When Adam Delaney was in the Iitskinaiksi during the 1970s and 1980s, he spent a good deal of time and his own resources getting some of the Iitskinaiksi bundles out. Adam was the kind of guy who went ahead without worrying about the consequences. He was the leader of the Iitskinaiksi, and he expected everybody to follow him. But then he ran into a government bureaucracy that did not respect anybody with traditional knowledge. It just followed policy and government structure. That

was what Adam was up against. But Adam was able to get some bundles out. There was a paper that he needed to sign, and the bundles would have been on loan. But he said, “No. This is no damn loan. I’m taking them. These belong to us. I don’t care what your policies say.” He did get bundles out.

Down in Browning, Montana, Bob Scriver’s father had owned a store and collected all kinds of Blackfoot artifacts and information. Bob was an artist, and he continued collecting. He ended up with many kinds of bundles. He had Iitskinaiksi material, Beaver Bundles, and other things that he had accumulated over time. It was a very big and very important collection. In the late 1980s, he sold his collection to Alberta’s provincial museum.

At that time, we were trying to get the medicine pipes and some of the other bundles out of the provincial museum. The director of the museum kept saying, “This stuff is too old.” He said, “Leave it here. Just remake it.” At Old Man Joe’s O’kaan, Reg actually got money to remake the Natoas headdress, and he was happy to leave the old one in the museum.

But then we came to a point when we had to ask: “Well, who is alive now who can put the right spirit into new bundles and make them the way they are supposed to be? Who is there alive who can do that? Some of these bundles are thousands of years old, and they go right back to the story of Creation when Thunder gave us the ceremony. Who is around who can sit there and say they can do that?” This is where I parted ways with Reg Crowshoe. He supported the museum and the assistant deputy minister in charge of the Department of Culture, who wanted to keep the bundles in the museum and make replicas for use. We wanted to bring our bundles back home.

After NAGPRA was passed in 1990, we started visiting museums. Allan Pard worked very closely with the Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society from Kainai. A lot of Kainai are fully knowledgeable about the Iitskinaiksi and Medicine Pipes. But when it came down to Beaver Bundles, the Sun Dance, and other ceremonies—that was the Piikani’s area of knowledge. That’s what we started in. That’s what we understood. When the Kainai had a O’kaan, they had to get Mike Swims Under. He and Old Lady Many Guns kept things alive.

When the Mookaakin Society went down to New York, Allan went with them. That was when the Beaver Bundles started to come back. At the same time, Chris McHugh and the people at Siksika wanted to get the Iitskinaiksi going again.

It was another world at Siksika. Here were these young guys who really believed in the traditional ways. I remember one of the first meetings they had—Allan and I went up with Bruce Wolf Child and Frank Weasel Head to meet with Chris and the others. They were saying that the only way they could get things going was to use the grandfathers of the Iitskinaiksi at Kainai. The Elders who had anything in Siksika wouldn't have anything to do with them. Chris had already met with people at the provincial museum in Edmonton. He made them aware that they would be coming back. He let them know that he was a force that had to be dealt with.

In order to get bundles back that were in the United States, we had to work with our counterparts in Browning, Montana. People like John Murray and Carol Murray. Some of the people who were running the cultural program were not ceremonialists, and that sometimes complicated matters. At the same time, Leonard Bastien was chief here, and he got a couple of bundles out from Denver or some other place. He and G. G. Kipp (from Browning) got the Elk Tongue Beaver Bundle. Originally, that was from up here. The Snake Pipe Bundle, which Conrad LaFrombois has, is a Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle from this reserve that ended up in a collection down south. But Leonard got it out and gave it to people in Browning.

#### ALBERTA'S REPATRIATION ACT

We took a different approach to working with the museums in Alberta. The provincial government knew they had to set up a process to deal with the Blackfoot people and other repatriation issues. In terms of policy, it all started with the Glenbow Museum's efforts. Gerry Conaty, the Glenbow's ethnology curator, and Robert R. Janes, the president and CEO, really respected Blackfoot ways and always showed us goodwill. The will of the Glenbow to work with the Blackfoot people on a more traditional level was very important. Their hearts were in the right place. They saw what was going on and acted. The provincial government couldn't say no.

The repatriation process described in the act [First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act] and its regulations set up the procedures by which First Nations can begin dealing with the provincial government.

We said, “Well, we better form a committee that’s going to give us strength. But if we’re going to do that, it needs to be a committee that represents all of the Blackfoot, especially the people involved with Blackfoot ceremonies. The government needs to understand that we can work with each other.” The people who were brought to the table included Herman Yellow Old Woman, Irvine Scalplock, Frank Weasel Head, Narcisse Blood, Martin Heavy Head, Allan Pard, and myself.

As a group of ceremonialists with transferred rights, we had to develop an approach that represented who we were and what we do. But we didn’t want to be viewed as sellouts of the culture—to be giving up information or anything that is sacred and has real heart and meaning to us. At the same time, we were dealing with lawyers and with the government policies. The Alberta government’s view was that all Albertans owned the provincial museum collections, including the Blackfoot sacred material. But we said, “No. This belongs to us. If an individual has it, they don’t have the right to sell it to you, or you, or you, because it belongs to all of the Blackfoot-speaking people.”

We started to work with that process and that opened up the door. One of the last Iitskinaiksi bundles from Kainai that was in the provincial museum came out. The meetings the committee had with the provincial government led to policies and eventually to legislation. It was just a matter of working through the policy and getting the paperwork in place. This was a legal process, and of course, lawyers were brought into it. We never used a lawyer. While we always had to work with the language of the Alberta government’s legal team to appease them, we also had to maintain the integrity of what we were representing. But we also knew we had the right spiritual help behind us to make it happen. Because it did happen; it did!

On a more traditional level, the legislation didn’t have anything to do with the ceremonies or the bundles. Once the bundles came home, we were able to transfer them in the traditional way. They went to a lot of people and have allowed families to have access to ceremonies and the spiritual help that they have to offer. Right here on the Piikani Nation, there have been two Beaver Bundle transfers and several Medicine Pipes—there are a lot of things that have come home.

When we began working with repatriation, we had to ask, “What are we going to give up so that we are going to be able to bring something home?” We

concentrated on the bundles. That's what was important. We still have people who can run the ceremonies. There is a desire and will on the part of different families to get involved with it.

When somebody wants a bundle, they send a request to the Royal Alberta Museum. They need to have a letter of support from someone who is directly affiliated with the repatriation process. Once they submit a request, the repatriation committee reviews it. The minister of Alberta Culture still has the last say. We could recommend everything "yes," and they could still say "no."

When we look at what makes something eligible for repatriation, we have to think about its role in ceremonies. A headdress is a ceremonial item. It is transferred, there is paint that comes with it, and there is a song that comes with it. It is a public ceremony. It is a real thing of honour. Former premiers Ralph Klein and Ed Stelmach both had headdresses transferred to them, and I am sure they have really cherished them. Something like a headdress is of real significance to an individual, especially if it has been transferred. But if it is just a headdress that was made to be sold, well, that makes a bit of difference. It may have sentimental value as opposed to transferred ceremonial value. However, this brings up an important question concerning what kinds of items should be repatriated. This is a whole other level of discussion that will have to be visited by the government, in discussion with the committee. I think, like everything else, it's something that can be amended. It is something that needs to be discussed.

Our approach to repatriation helped get us in the door. We recognized that it was a give-and-take situation. While we knew that museums were afraid of losing all of their collections, we could identify what we wanted. It was a matter of negotiation. These government people aren't ceremonialists or First Nations people. Most don't care about our communities. They might have some emotional tie to the well-being of people—but they don't know who we are or what we are doing.

When we are going to go do something and reaching out to it, there is a proper way to go about doing things. If you set out to do one thing, you really need to look at the larger context. It's not just the one thing. That might open the door, but there are larger implications.

A government repatriation committee was set up to review applications. One drawback to the committee that I experienced is the requirement that we

work to the province's schedule. The committee only meets twice a year, and only if there are enough applications. Although I try to attend and I want to contribute, sometimes my work takes me out of the province and I end up missing the meetings.

At lot of bundles have come out of Alberta museums, and they are all being used in Blackfoot territory. These bundles are working for our spiritual well-being as Blackfoot people.

#### THE LONG TIME MEDICINE PIPE BUNDLE

After the implementation of NAGPRA in the United States, museums knew that they had to work with the Blackfoot people, at least to identify what the museums held that were holy items. We went down to Denver with some Kainai people to get some Maoto'kiiksi bundles. We saw things that grave robbers had dug out and sold to the museum. Those things have a certain odour that doesn't go away. We could see the dirt. The way we've been treated is appalling—just as objects and not as real human beings.

When I was in Ottawa, I saw the Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle. [The Piikani and Kainai each have a Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle named the Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle.] It was up on a shelf. I remember going in there and making a vow that I was going to take that pipe. I told that pipe, "I'm going to do everything I can to get you out of here." I just felt so, so sad with it being there. I talked to Morgan Baillargeon, the curator of Plains ethnology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and he said, "Well, there have been other people trying to get it out. If you're going get that pipe out, you have to go through the Siksika, because the Siksika passed a band council resolution saying that any Blackfoot bundle in the museum here belongs to the Siksika Nation. If anybody is going to get any bundle out, you have to get a letter from them."

That letter came from Chief Strater Crowfoot and the band council. When repatriation was starting and they were getting interested, they went down east with some Elders. Those Elders said, "Ahh. This stuff all belongs to us from the reserve here." They just claimed all of it. Although the museum records didn't back that up, the museum's Board of Governors was afraid of bad publicity.

I wrestled with it and asked different people for guidance. When my wife, Velma, and I went to an Indian Days celebration at Siksika, two Old Ladies were pointed out to us, and we were told, "If you can get those Old Ladies to agree to it, there will be no problem." I brought the Old Ladies traditional gifts and explained to them how we were trying to get the bundle out of the museum. They said, "Hey, no problem. It's not good that it is there. You and your wife should go and get it out."

But when we went back to the Siksika band council, they still said "no." They would not have anything to do with it. This was at the same time that bundles from the Scriver Collection in the provincial museum were coming back and the Siksika Iitskinaiksi was starting up. When the Iitskinaiksi started at Siksika, they also established a traditional affairs committee, with Irvine Scalplock and Herman Yellow Old Woman as members. Irvine and Herman were part of the group that was reviving the Iitskinaiksi. They recognized what was going on, and they wrote me a letter without any hesitation and sent it down to Morgan Baillargeon.

Allan Pard and I just happened to be in Ottawa at two different meetings on tribal business for the Piikani. We went out for supper with Morgan one evening, and he told us, "Hey you guys, I got that letter through, everything is processed. Everything is a go. You better take that pipe out of here today."

We began thinking of how we were going to do this. We didn't have everything we needed to wrap it up and take it out properly. There is a protocol to handling bundles. Allan was opening Medicine Pipe Bundles and running ceremonies. With anything like that, when you go and you do something, the person who is giving you advice is responsible for everything going right. If there is something wrong, it is that person's responsibility.

We headed to the museum to look at the bundle. But first we had to go to Canadian Tire to buy some containers for the pipe and everything else in the bundle. When we were both leaving Ottawa, we took that pipe out of the museum. Allan had it up in his hotel room, and we fixed everything up before we left. We thought, "Well, if we don't make it home, we know we screwed up." Allan even got on the plane with that pipe. He went right through all the security checks. There was no hassle, no problems. Nothing. We brought it home. Now, we've opened it each year for twelve years.

We researched the history of that medicine pipe. Velma's dad—Old Man John Yellow Horn—used to have it. This pipe came to John from Little Leaf. Little Leaf used to live just down the road from us. John transferred it to Emil Wings at Kainai. Emil Wings took that pipe and gave it to Cyril Olds from Siksika. He never transferred it; he gave it to him as a gift. Cyril Olds didn't know what to do with it, so he gave it to Dick Brass to keep. Dick Brass sold a lot of things to a collector in Calgary, who, in turn, sold his collection to the museum in Ottawa. That was how that pipe ended up in Ottawa. No one from Piikani knew where it was. I would hear that it was in Germany or in Seattle or somewhere. But when we checked the museum records, that's where we found out that it came from Dick Brass. Dick Brass got it from Cyril Olds, and then Cyril Olds was given it by Emil Wings. When we asked Velma's mother about it, she said, "Well, Old Man John transferred it to Emil Wings." All of sudden, everything just connected.

It's interesting that Old Man Little Leaf had it and transferred it to John Yellow Horn, and they all had lived in the area where we live now. It left here, went over to Siksika, and spent some time there. I don't know how many years it was in Ottawa. Then it came back home.

That's the most intimate repatriation story I have.

#### REPATRIATION AND THE EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY

I think repatriation has really helped our community. A lot of young people would not normally be exposed to our traditions; well, now they see it. We have a few young men who want to learn about it. They're pretty sincere about it, too.

I am concerned about what will happen when some of the people who are considered Elders today get into a position where they are determining what happens. It isn't our way to stand up and shout, "I have this. I can do that." That isn't what these bundles are about. If somebody is going to learn about it, or use it, they will come and want to be a part of it. But we always have opposition, no matter what we do. Perhaps it is just part of life on a reserve where some family grudges go back four generations. Some of these situations get handed down.

As I think about it, many people have influenced the process. Everything that is going on today on the Piikani Reserve goes back to those two old ladies, Old Lady Buffalo and Old Lady Many Guns. They prayed for us. They gave us

their blessings. They are the ones who were tied directly to Brings Down the Sun and all the ceremonialists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Old Man Joe Crowshoe would not have had his Medicine Pipe Bundle if Old Lady Buffalo hadn't given it to him. The Sun Dance came from Old Lady Many Guns. John Yellow Horn was the one who started us off singing.

All those teachings that we got from Apaikii (Bob Black Plume), Pat Weasel Head, Chief Calf, and other ceremonial Elders were very important. I don't know how many times Bob Black Plume would say, "Come and sit here. We'll transfer this to you. Make sure you have enough, so that when you sit in Kano'tsisissin, you'll have enough songs to sing." There was Willie Eagle Plume, and Ben Calf Robe from Siksika. He used to come down to the ceremonies here. That's what I mean when I say these Old Guys were very special.

I remember the time I went to a Kano'tsisissin at Kainai. I think there were fifteen pipes there. I had made every one of those pipes. In the Blackfoot culture, everything starts with the pipe. Making pipes was the one thing I worked very hard at learning how to do, mostly through trial and error. That was my first contribution to repatriation—bringing back the knowledge of how to make pipes. Willie Eagle Plume was a pipe maker, and I learned some things from him. Willie told me that someday the Iitskinaiksi would be coming to get pipes from me. I have made pipes for Kainai, Siksika, Piikani, and Ammskaapipiikani ceremonialists.

It's quite the thing. That's something. We made that happen.

# 5

## *Repatriation Experiences of the Kainai*

FRANK WEASEL HEAD

Through the establishment of the Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society in December of 1996, the return of White Calf's Medicine Pipe Bundle in 1997, and the memorandum of understanding that was signed between the Mookaakin Society and the Glenbow Museum on 6 March 1998, I have become intimately involved with negotiations for the return of religious materials to our Blackfoot-speaking communities. In fact, my experience with repatriations in general began as early as 1972, when I became the keeper of a Iitskinaiksi bundle that was brought home from the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton. Although I don't consider myself to have a lengthy history in relation to repatriations, or to be the only member of our community to have played an essential role in bringing our ceremonial bundles back into their original

contexts, I have recently felt pressure from my peers and the museum community to document what background I do possess.

Normally, I prefer to follow our own system of oral instruction, passing down what I know of our historic, religious, and intellectual traditions by memory to those members of future generations who would find useful what I have to offer. The European equivalent, what I call the “paper trail,” allows sensitive information to be available for those who might misuse it and promotes forgetfulness and misinterpretation. It is important to pass along our knowledge face to face among our own people. At the same time, we must also accept the fact that we are living in a multicultural environment and that it is critical for us to have the ability to communicate our concerns in ways that will be validated by the non-Native communities with whom we have to negotiate in order to maximally benefit the future lives of our children. Our traditions and protocols have never been stagnant. Our people’s main concerns have always been to maintain a sense of comfort, to lead our lives in ways that will better our future generations, and to sustain the language, ceremonies, and religious beliefs that have been passed down to us from the Creator and the spirits of our land.

When new and useful avenues of experience have been opened to us, we have always found ways to adapt them into our culture. While our oral traditions and cultural protocols are perfectly suited to support communications within our own community, we cannot expect them to benefit us in the same way when we are dealing with non-Natives. Instead, we will have to occasionally utilize some means of expressing our beliefs that will be familiar and understandable outside of our community in order to gain external support for our concerns. In other words, we must cooperate enough to meet them halfway in order for them to hear us. As well, non-Native researchers and writers have already written about our cultural beliefs and practices, as well as our history. These writers often interpreted what they saw through their own experiences and belief systems and have not always presented a fair or a true representation of us. It is important that we record our own history for our young people and for the wider world. We need to tell our own story, in our own words.

With this in mind, I have decided to document my own repatriation experiences. My main reason for doing this is to make this documentation available to Blackfoot-speaking people, who can use it as a resource to assist in their own repatriation efforts. I hope it will also help non-Native people

working in the museum community as they work to support our repatriation negotiations. I have not gone in-depth into any of the specific collection histories or religious aspects of the bundles described below. Nor have I included any information that could be misinterpreted to contradict our interests. My only intent is that this document be used to briefly illustrate my role in our repatriation history and to assist in communicating our cultural protocols to those who need to gain a partial understanding of those practices in order to assist us in achieving our ambitions.

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Repatriation, the recovery of culturally important materials that were alienated from our community without rightful consent, had never been a foreign concept in the tradition of Blackfoot-speaking communities. Yet, in all of our remembered history, the religious practices that originated among our people had never been threatened by the theft of physical ceremonial articles to the extent that they have been since the time of European contact.

In the late nineteenth century, after foreign diseases swept through our families, taking away scores of Elders and children, and while the buffalo herds were being destroyed, our leaders agreed to share portions of our territories with European immigrants in return for money, goods, protection, and educational, economic, and health assistance. While portions of our land base were to be shared, other areas were reserved for the sole use of our people. This type of arrangement, the making of treaties and establishment of reserves, is a history common to many Native North American communities. So, too, have most Indian tribes encountered similar repercussions: the Canadian and US governments took for themselves what land we had agreed to share (as well as some areas that we had retained for ourselves) and forced members of our communities to stay within the boundaries of our reserves. They also withheld the goods and funds that were promised, allowed our people to starve and suffer sickness, and brought religious clergy from various Christian traditions to educate and ultimately abuse our children in boarding schools. Furthermore, these foreign political entities outlawed any practice of our religious traditions, even on the reserves, and strove to make our children forget their Native languages.

With Aboriginal communities across North America sharing these same oppressive conditions during the turn of the past century, Natives and non-Natives alike were led to believe that Native religions and languages—if not the people themselves—would soon become extinct. Simultaneously, in the expanding cities along the eastern shores of this continent, a massive push to establish public educational facilities that could serve common European immigrants brought a healthy sum of national and philanthropic funding to newly founded science and curiosity museums. Scholars from these institutions were instructed to travel west in hopes of salvaging material and linguistic remains of Native cultures, which could then be stored and exhibited in these public museums as well as traded to similar facilities around the world. These exhibits were designed to reflect academic beliefs in the Darwinian theory of evolution, presenting Native cultural materials as technologically inferior to those of our European counterparts, thereby convincing the general public of the evolutionary righteousness of their participation in the colonial expansion over Native territories.

From the 1870s to the 1940s, representatives of the museums and freelance collectors from around the world flooded our reserve communities, spreading their belief in the soon-to-come extinction of Native religions and languages. These collectors used various funding sources to purchase whatever Native cultural materials they could, but when our people refused to sell their antiques and religious objects, some of the collectors stole directly from our grandparents' graves—even taking human remains, the skulls of which were used to further probe for evidence of the evolutionary inferiority of Native people. Merchants who settled around and within the reserves caught onto this salvage paradigm and used it to their entrepreneurial advantage. Often, merchants would accept Native religious materials in a pawn relationship for food during extremely hard times, only to turn around and sell the materials to museums and private collectors, making it impossible for their Native customers to have the belongings returned once they became more financially stable. Of course, the Christian clergy were only too supportive of collection practices, for in their opinion, the disappearance of Native religious materials would help considerably to “civilize” the children they were trying to convert and educate.

Here in our own Blackfoot-speaking communities, the older generations resisted the destructive processes underlying collection projects described by

the well-intentioned scholars who visited our reserves. In fact, it wasn't until rather late in the collections era that the majority of our religious materials found their way into museum accessions. By the 1920s, a generation of our children had already been through boarding schools, and some of these young people had then become convinced of the European prophecies that stressed the extinction of Native cultural practices. On occasion, these younger people would seek to have religious bundles ceremonially transferred to them for the covert purpose of selling those materials to collectors. On other occasions, they would actually steal our bundles from the homes of their parents in order to trade them away. Because of our love for children, no legal repercussions ever befell these individuals. Similarly, when our former religious leaders became financially destitute, or converted to European spiritual practices, and decided to sell our bundles off the reserves, nobody ever laid charges. Instead, we followed our own traditions and tended to socially shun those who cooperated with collectors. In fact, we had no other choice; even if we had sought to have the stolen materials returned, it was highly likely that, even if any court did agree to hear us, we would have only succeeded in putting another one of our brothers or sisters behind bars. It seemed as though the materials that left the reserves would be gone forever.

Toward the end of the collections era, in an attempt to avoid flagrant thefts, some of our old people decided that it might benefit our future generations if they ceremonially transferred religious materials to museum collectors themselves. By our traditions, religious articles are never owned or sold. Rather, they are temporarily kept. The rights to keep one of our bundles can only be obtained through a ceremonial transfer. One of the main conditions that is expressed and agreed upon during a bundle's transfer arrangement is that in the future, when another able Blackfoot-speaking person comes forth with the intent to have a particular bundle transferred to him, such an exchange must occur. In other words, a person can become a bundle's keeper only if they agree to eventually develop into a bundle's releaser. In fact, until keepers transfer the bundle to another Blackfoot-speaking individual, they are considered only as children in our religious ranks. It is through the transfer itself that bundles live and create Elders. So, in light of the thefts that had taken place, and in consideration of the anthropologists' expressed purpose of saving the religious materials for our own future generations, some of our Elders decided to ceremonially transfer

their bundles to museum representatives. These transfers took place in the usual manner, with all the same conditions attached as would be expressed if the bundles were being transferred among Blackfoot people alone. Only afterwards, when these materials were safely under lock and key in museum storage facilities, and after the representatives who had sat through the transfers had retired, did the museums lose all recollection of the ceremonies that had occurred and the conditions that went with them. From our perspective, these museums—even though they had funded the transfers—did not have any rights whatsoever to even temporarily keep our bundles. In the same manner, if I financed a transfer for my son, it would still be he who had all of the rights to keep the bundle, for only he would have sat through the ceremony and agreed to its conditions. Even when these transfer ceremonies were documented or filmed, the museums still refused to release the bundles. Instead, they ignored overwhelming evidence and argued that our religious materials were their “property.”

When we visit museums today and request the return of portions of their accessions, we base our claims on our understanding of the collection history from our Blackfoot reserves. We have never asked for the return of any materials that were utilitarian rather than ceremonial. Nor have we ever asked for anything that we did not sincerely believe to have been taken from our community without proper consent. And yet, although we always articulate our memories in the above manner, it is not uncommon for collection institutions to argue for their rights to the possession of our religious objects. The understanding we maintain is that these materials were often stolen, that museums know nothing about them and have no educational use for them. The only beneficial avenue of use for these objects is within their community of origin, where we know their ceremonies, histories, and intellectual purposes. Collection facilities, which have always been funded as institutions of enlightenment, should be able to see how the return of portions of their collections to Native communities would indeed serve their stated purpose to promote education.

#### OUR EARLY EXPERIENCES WITH REPATRIATION

In 1972, we saw, for the first time, ceremonial materials returned to the Blood Reserve from a collection institution. Repatriation was unheard of back then,



Figure 19. Bruce Wolf Child (left) and Adam Delaney (right) talking to students in the Glenbow Museum's First Nations storage area. Photograph courtesy of Ryan Heavy Head.

and museums were not in the general practice of deaccessioning their trophies to Native communities. Adam Delaney (fig. 19) and Pete Standing Alone, two of my contemporaries, had approached the provincial museum in Edmonton, hoping to negotiate the release of four Iitskinaiksi bundles. Horst Schmidt, then minister for the Cultural Development Branch of the Alberta government, agreed to loan the four Iitskinaiksi bundles to the Kainai for the duration of the annual Aako'ka'tssin encampment each summer—with the condition that the museum maintain storage of the materials throughout the remainder of the year. When these bundles were transferred at the Aako'ka'tssin, I became the keeper of one of them.

As promised, we returned all four bundles after that Aako'ka'tssin—even though doing so constituted a major break in our normal protocol for those of us who had sought the responsibility of becoming bundle keepers. Over the next year, the provincial museum had a less-than-desirable—yet totally unrelated—experience with a couple of other people who were associated with our community. When we returned to Edmonton in the spring of 1973 to make arrangements for that year's Aako'ka'tssin, Horst Schmidt refused to meet with us. Of course, we had no idea why he was shunning us. We only knew that he had made a promise and that the ceremonies we had worked so hard to strengthen were again in jeopardy. That's when I first became directly involved in repatriation negotiations. A group of us—Pete, Adam, their wives, and I and my wife—followed Schmidt from Edmonton to Calgary, and back again to Edmonton, hoping to at least speak with him. Still, he refused. Adam Delaney, who was our Iitskinaiksi leader, finally decided to call a Roman Catholic priest he knew in Ottawa named Denis Chatain. With Chatain intervening on our part, Horst Schmidt was once again convinced to return the four Iitskinaiksi bundles to us on loan for the Aako'ka'tssin. Schmidt and his representatives met with the Blood Council in Standoff to finalize the loan, but I was unable to attend because of my work schedule that day.

Adam and Pete, not wanting to risk a reoccurrence of this event the following year, thought it would be best to invite Horst Schmidt to our Aako'ka'tssin so that he could witness first-hand the ceremonies for which these bundles are so important. That decision on the part of our leaders proved to be very wise, because right after the Aako'ka'tssin ended, Schmidt sent us a letter in the form of a bill of sale, which asked us to trade a single penny for complete ownership of all four Iitskinaiksi bundles. Unfortunately, even though some of our protocols and beliefs had been set aside to establish the loan arrangement, we felt that if we agreed to purchase these bundles (even for a penny), it would somehow be taking our neglect of tradition too far. Worried that this refusal to cooperate might again stir conflict and confusion, jeopardizing the following year's ceremonies, we decided to keep the bundles rather than return them. Since that time, the provincial museum has felt that we retained the four bundles by force, and, as Schmidt has retired, they no longer recollect any offers that were made to sell these materials. Although our refusal to return the four bundles turned out to be very beneficial for the future of our Iitskinaiksi (these bundles have

been transferred to five new generations of keepers since they left Edmonton), it seriously altered the provincial museum's willingness to work with us over the following two decades. Only recently has any hope of further negotiations between our parties returned.

In 1988, Wilton Good Striker negotiated the return of a Iitskinaiksi bundle from the Glenbow Museum. I was not involved in dealing directly with the museum. However, once this bundle was returned, my partner, Floyd Many Bears, and I had it transferred to us as keepers. Over the last ten years, this bundle has been transferred to three other generations of keepers besides Floyd and myself.

My next experience with repatriation came in 1990, when the late Dan Weasel Moccasin, along with the late Florence Scout, obtained a Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. This bundle was released to Dan on a yearly loan basis, meaning that every twelve months, he or Florence would have to account for its whereabouts and sign a loan renewal. I was not involved in any of the negotiations for this Medicine Pipe Bundle's return, but once it came home, I was the Elder who ceremonially transferred it to Dan's son, Daniel. Since that time, this bundle has had three other generations of keepers, and I have always led the transfer ceremony.

#### NAGPRA REPATRIATIONS FROM THE UNITED STATES

In 1994, I was approached by Narcisse Blood, Francis First Charger, and Martin Heavy Head, who had been working through our brothers and sisters of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana to arrange for the repatriation of a Medicine Pipe Bundle from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. By that time, the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was just beginning to work for tribes in the United States—the final rules for the act had yet to be published. Our Blackfoot-speaking communities had traditionally occupied land that encompassed most of southern Alberta and the state of Montana. The introduction of the non-geologic boundary that eventually separated Canada from the United States did not change our memories of the extent of our original land base or the relationships our northern and southern communities had with each other. We have always been related by blood, language,

and ceremony, and these alliances continue into the present day. Thus, when collection institutions in the United States have demanded that Blackfoot repatriations be negotiated through personnel in Browning who are appointed as legal NAGPRA contacts in the Federal Register, we have been able to gain our brothers' and sisters' help in seeing that our bundles return home.

Since I had experience with handling Medicine Pipe Bundles, I was asked to accompany the delegation that would travel to Gonzaga. Before we travelled, I learned that the Medicine Pipe Bundle we were to procure was only partially intact. Paul Raczka, a friend of mine who was living in Sun Valley, Idaho, at the time, told me that the people who had originally sold that bundle off the reserve had left portions of it with another collector. This unnamed second party had passed the missing objects to Paul, and he was willing to give them back to the bundle once it was released by Gonzaga. So on our way back from Spokane, we met Paul in Missoula, Montana, and he handed us the misplaced portions. When we returned home, I was involved in the transfer of this bundle to Martin and Pam Heavy Head. It has since been transferred to two more families for keeping.

After that success, we became very excited by the possibilities that the US repatriation legislation held in helping us to strengthen our religious traditions. Over the years since the collections era, young people had constantly been approaching our Elders in hopes of becoming more involved in learning our ceremonies and language. Unfortunately, those Elders did not have enough of our old religious materials on hand to assist all of these people in fully realizing their ambitions. NAGPRA, and the hope that Canada would follow suit with similar legislation, gave us the opportunity we needed to enhance the religious benefits we could offer to our children. With this in mind, a delegation was formed in 1996 to search for some of our missing bundles in the American Museum of Natural History and the Heye Foundation in New York (which had become part of the new Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian), as well as the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. We were also planning to retrieve a Beaver Bundle from Harvard's Peabody Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In September of 1995, a student from the University of Massachusetts named Ryan Hancock (who later changed his name through marriage to Ryan Heavy Head) had begun a long-term project to locate and electronically

inventory all Blackfoot museum collections worldwide. By December of that year, he had communicated with Joyce Spoonhunter in Browning about a Beaver Bundle that was located in Harvard's museum, not two miles from his apartment in Boston. Joyce recruited him to negotiate for the release of that bundle on behalf of the tribe, and, over the next four months, he and Joyce focused all of their efforts on convincing the Peabody Museum to comply with their request. In early May of 1996, while travelling between New York and Chicago, our delegation—which included Allan Pard from the Piikani Nation, Carol Murray and Tom Black Weasel from the Blackfeet Nation in Montana, and Martin Heavy Head, Narcisse Blood and Alvine Mountain Horse, Dorothy First Rider, Annabel Crop Eared Wolf, Les Healy, Francis First Charger, and myself from Kainai—went to Cambridge, packed up the Beaver Bundle, and walked out of the Peabody with it. Carol and Tom took it immediately back to Browning while the rest of us went to Chicago. Then, when our entire delegation had returned home, the Beaver Bundle was transferred to Allan Pard.

While we were in Chicago, we ran into a familiar problem associated with repatriations: they wanted us to take home human remains. During the collections era, agents of the institutions in the east and other entrepreneurs often stole from our ancestors' graves in order to obtain human remains and cultural materials that they could not otherwise convince people to sell. Here in Blackfoot territory, where our traditional burials involved setting individuals on platforms in lonely places, our graves were easy targets for such collection practices. As the times changed and collection institutions began to realize how unconscientious their former exploitation had been, they moved their human remains out of display and into storage. It really wasn't until formal legislation demanded the return of Indigenous human remains that these institutions suddenly developed a desire to deaccession their embarrassing grave collections. Of course, from our perspective, it is very important that our ancestors' remains be reburied on our traditional lands. At the same time, our religious protocols and beliefs forbid any contact with human remains, and so we can't really work with their returns directly. Our opinion is that if a collection institution truly wants to return Blackfoot human remains, they should come forward and make all of the arrangements for the burials. We will gladly provide whatever space they need. In other words, we definitely want our ancestors returned to their Native land, but in order for that to happen, the collection institutions

themselves will have to approach us—admitting their inappropriate history—to arrange proper burials.

June of 1996 brought our delegation to the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, DC, and back to the American Museum of Natural History and the Heye Foundation in New York for a second assessment of their collections. On that occasion, the delegation consisted of Allan Pard, Narcisse Blood, Martin Heavy Head, Francis First Charger, Margaret Crop Eared Wolf, Ryan Heavy Head, and myself. We flew to Washington, DC, first, and then went to New York.

Some events during these June visits can serve to exemplify our typical experiences when communicating with collection institutions. Perhaps the worst insult came when we visited the American Museum of Natural History. While viewing the portion of their Blackfoot collection on exhibit, we noticed that they had part of a Beaver Bundle and a very famous Weather Dancers' Bundle on display. We instructed their repatriation coordinator that the components of our bundles should never be separated, that they should have never opened the bundles without proper transferred rights, and that when bundles are opened for public viewing, it is only within a ceremonial context. Their repatriation coordinator informed me that previous visitors from Blackfoot tribes had already expressed these concerns but that the museum had refused to even consider taking any appropriate action unless an official request for the change in exhibition practices was sent by our tribal government. At that point, I noticed some problems with another portion of their display. Behind a glass wall, they had replicated the inside of one of our tipis, complete with clothed mannequins and our familiar household items. One of the mistakes that I noticed was that they had taken sets of clothing that would normally be worn as one complete outfit and separated their components onto different mannequins—so that the moccasins from an outfit would be on the feet of one mannequin, while the matching leggings would be worn by another, and the shirt on yet a third. The second mistake I noticed in their life-sized diorama was in how they had placed willow backrests against the walls of the tipi. In reality, these backrests should be supported by tripods within the tipi so as to make a series of couches around the perimeter that could be divided by blanket walls to allow for the privacy of single occupancy chambers. When I pointed out these misrepresentations of our material culture, their repatriation coordinator

again stressed that no change in the display would even be considered without a formal tribal request. In other words, the American Museum of Natural History was not concerned with our expressed views of their exhibits, or even with accurately informing their audience as to the historical use of the materials in their collections. When we came back to our reserves the following week, our tribal governments received phone calls from the American Museum of Natural History stating that our delegation of religious Elders had wasted the time of their repatriation personnel because we had not brought along the one person listed on the Federal Register in the United States as our NAGPRA representative. We were informed that future visits and discussions with their repatriation personnel would not be welcomed without the inclusion of Joyce Spoonhunter, the representative from Browning whom we often advised in repatriation matters.

The Heye Foundation facility—housing Native cultural materials and human remains—included dual guard stations and a razor-wire perimeter. While inside, viewing the collections, we were escorted by a museum delegation of equal number to our own, and they kept a watchful eye on all of our movements—thus ensuring that we would be unlikely to succeed in sleights-of-hand to conceal their collections in our jeans pockets. However, we did locate White Calf's old Medicine Pipe Bundle that had been collected from one of our communities in Canada. In fact, we found a number of significant bundles on that excursion, but it would be some time before any steps were taken to retrieve them.

In the meantime, I was becoming increasingly frustrated at what little work was being done with the information our delegation had collected in Chicago, Washington, DC, and New York over the previous year. In particular, I wanted to see the return of White Calf's Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Heye Foundation. In February of 1997, my friend Ryan Heavy Head came to our reserve for a visit, and one afternoon, during lunch, I discussed my frustrations with him. I strongly felt that repatriation-related pursuits were being conducted in a manner contrary to our religious protocols. By our traditions, as I described earlier, people who had possession of our bundles were only temporary keepers. In fact, our beliefs—based on observations of processes ever present in our environment—hold that nothing can ever really be owned. Everything, even that which non-Natives would consider inanimate, has its

own period of life and eventually loses its form and returns to basic natural elements. Any materials we use to enable our own survival and comfort during our lives is merely borrowed, in a sense. For that reason, it is still common practice for us to leave tobacco as a payment to earthly spirits whenever we pick up something from our land—as when we gather sweetgrass or berries for our ceremonies. When our own belongings wear out and are of no use to us, we bring them outside and leave them as offerings to Creation, allowing those things to pass their old age naturally while being brought back into elementary forms. So, too, do we replace components of our religious bundles when they wear out, so that the bundles have long life and history, just like our community. When bundles are in museum storage facilities, subject to curation practices that involve pesticides and hi-tech humidity-controlled environments, they are in a period of stagnation, unable to live out their days and serve their original purposes as educational and health tools for our people. At home, they are allowed to live and be transferred among individuals, rather than families or larger community units—ensuring that their lives will touch thousands of generations of religious initiates and that they will be made available to assist all of our people, without being tied up in political or community disputes.

What I saw happening with the legal process of repatriation was a well-intentioned disregard for our basic transfer and keeping practices. Academics and some Native people alike wanted to simplify our traditions, to classify our religious materials merely as communally owned, so that conflicts over rights to possession could be easily settled. Accepting this interpretation, the collection institutions—wanting to negotiate all legal obstacles safely—were demanding to deal only with tribal governments, and specifically with those people within the governments that were listed in the Federal Register as NAGPRA contacts. Our own traditional religious practices demand that requests for bundle transfers be sought on an individual basis, for reasons that often involved vows of sacrifice for the purpose of healing oneself or one's family. Although our bundles were, in the past, communal property, this was because we were living in a fairly closed society that encompassed only Blackfoot-speaking people. When the various spirits originally gave us our bundles, and the ceremonies to accompany them, they were for the benefit of all our people (that is, Blackfoot-speaking people, those whom we were related to by family). But along with those first transfer ceremonies came the conditional agreement

that our bundles be kept and transferred among individuals, who would have to sacrifice or manipulate their lifestyles in accordance with the protocols that went with the teachings involved in keeping each particular bundle.

Although some members of our tribal governments are familiar with this understanding and participate in our ceremonial life, others do not. Our tribal governments are arranged to justly represent all of the people in our communities, and many families have been actively involved in Christian religions for a number of generations. For this reason, they might be too focused on other community interests to actively pursue a particular bundle for a specific tribal member. In addition, when our ceremonial materials are being repatriated only through the consent of our tribal governments, the individuals who are seeking the transfers—who should be the main negotiators—become relegated to positions of third-party involvement. Their desires and initial risks in seeking the transfers are not really even a consideration in the negotiations.

For these reasons, I dictated a letter to Ryan requesting that the Heye Foundation transfer the White Calf Medicine Pipe Bundle from themselves to me through a traditional transfer ceremony. By our old ways, the only third party involved in transfer arrangements might be a messenger sent by the hopeful initiate to state his or her basic intentions. In this case, the paper would be my messenger. I was able to briefly articulate, in written English, the concepts and protocols involved in such a transfer, the history of Medicine Pipe Bundles, and the reasons why I believed that I had the right to become that particular bundle's keeper.

The following April, I received a reply from the Heye Foundation to the effect that my letter was one of the most convincing repatriation requests they had ever read. Still, in order to maintain a safe legal stance, they decided to seek the approval of our tribal government. I felt that their decision to consult a third party was their own business and that it had not really corrupted the traditional protocols, because at least I had taken what steps I could to act appropriately in the situation. If they had, in the long run, refused my request based on their discussions with our tribal council, then I would find their decision problematic. I had approached them just as if they had the rights to be keeping that bundle. By our traditions, since I had made a vow and had come to them in accordance with as much protocol as was possible, and since I was willing and able to make a respectable transfer payment, they really could not refuse me.

Over the next seven months, I learned first-hand how much patience one needs to possess when negotiating repatriations with large collection institutions. Contrary to some people's beliefs, we cannot simply walk into a museum with a copy of the NAGPRA regulations in our hands and expect to come out with a bundle. The collection institutions, being of a different society, have their own protocol, and the language of NAGPRA allows them room to maintain those practices. After the original response from the Heye Foundation, I had to wait until June before their review committee—comprised mostly of volunteers—was able to even consider my request. They agreed that my claim was well founded and, at that point, began their own research process in relation to the claim. They had to assign someone to look into their archival information in order to ensure that they had no evidence that might contradict my statements and also to interpret my request and research relevant anthropological literature so that they could document the event and the concepts behind it. In August, while this work was being conducted, I had to travel to their museum again to correctly identify and inventory all of the bundle's components. Then, in October, their research was completed and their review committee met again to approve my request. At that point, all I had to do was wait through a public notification period, until November, to receive the bundle. Dorothy First Rider, Narcisse Blood, Adam Delaney, John and Lisa McDougal, Martin and Pam Heavy Head, and Francis First Charger accompanied me to New York that month. Pam carried the bundle out of the museum, and in May of 1998, it was transferred to me, my wife Silvy, our daughter, and our grandson.

On 24 August 1997, a number of members of the Mookaakin Society, including myself, travelled to the Denver Art Museum in Colorado. The Denver museum was a major customer for the freelance collector Madge Hardin Walters, who worked through a couple of members of our community during the 1920s and 1930s to obtain many of our bundles. Although extensive trade of these collections occurred between Denver and a number of the large East Coast museums in the United States, many of our bundles are still being held in Colorado. During that visit, we conducted a full inventory of these materials to begin negotiations for those that are most urgently needed.

During the winter of 1997–98, Annabel Crop Eared Wolf, Dorothy First Rider, and Narcisse Blood, through our tribal government department, began negotiations with Denver Art Museum for the return of the bundles that were

most urgently needed. By the following summer, we had arranged for a tripartite loan agreement among the Mookaakin Society, the Glenbow Museum, and Denver Art Museum that allowed most of the bundles from the Maoto'kiiksi, or Buffalo Women's Society, to be brought home for the Aako'ka'tssin. This was similar to the very first repatriation agreement we had in the 1970s with the provincial museum. Some other bundles had eagle feathers in them, and the US Fish and Wildlife regulations prohibited us from taking them out of the country. However, by the end of July 1998, we were able to negotiate the loan of these as well—but, again, just for the duration of the Aako'ka'tssin. In late August 1998, we returned the bundles to Denver.

The following year, we again entered into a tripartite agreement; however, this time we were allowed to keep the bundles for one year, with the provision that someone from the Glenbow would visually check the bundles once each month to ensure that they were still in the possession of Mookaakin members. The bundles with eagle feathers were not initially loaned to us. However, we prevailed upon authorities in Washington, and, once more, special permission was given for these bundles to travel across the border.

These repatriation negotiations became very difficult and were very hard on us. When the United States passed NAGPRA in 1990, they made a distinction between items that were owned by individuals and those that were kept on behalf of the entire tribe or band. The former are private property and therefore can be sold by an individual. These kinds of items do not have to be repatriated, since they were sold legally. Items kept on behalf of the tribe were not owned by individuals and could not have been legally sold. These items are eligible for repatriation. The Denver Art Museum believed that these Maoto'kiiksi bundles were privately owned, not communally owned, and had therefore been legally sold. It was the museum's opinion that they were not obligated to repatriate these sacred objects under the guidelines of NAGPRA.

Our Elders all provided information indicating that these bundles were really communally owned and had been sold improperly. But there was one person at the Denver Art Museum who was intent on proving us wrong. Roger Echo Hawk, the museum's repatriation officer, did not believe our oral traditions. He brought out letters that Walters had received from our people saying "I own this" or "I own that" and indicating that they were willing to sell the bundles to her. We tried to explain that this was a problem translating between

Blackfoot and English—that individuals could not “own” such bundles. But he would not listen to our arguments. He made it very hard on us. Our old people were very afraid that the bundles would never come home to stay.

In the end, we enlisted the help of a national Native legal committee in Denver, who approached the mayor of Denver for support. As a result, John Goes In The Center, a Native American who was on the Board of Directors at the Denver Art Museum, visited us to learn about our ceremonies and bundles first-hand. It still took a long time, but in the end, the board decided to give us the bundles without going through the formalities of NAGPRA.

Once more, we found that there were bureaucratic obstacles to bringing the bundles back to Canada. We again worked with our Ammskaapiikani brothers and sisters in Montana. They supported our request and helped us by signing the official repatriation form.

We retrieved several other ceremonial bundles at the same time that we brought the Maoto’kiiksi bundles home. One was a Small, or Warrior’s, Medicine Pipe Bundle. I took that home and kept it. When nobody requested it, I had it transferred to my grandson, who still has it today.

#### FIRST NATIONS SACRED CEREMONIAL OBJECTS REPATRIATION ACT

In December of 1996, Dal McCloy, one of the new members of the Kainai Chieftainship, decided that he would like to do something helpful for the Kainai. McCloy decided to start the Mookaakin Heritage and Culture Society, a nonprofit organization that could collect funds to support repatriation and cultural research projects. I was asked to become a member of the Mookaakin Society, which was named after my dad, and we began repatriation discussions with the Glenbow Museum.

During the time that my own negotiations were proceeding with the Heye Foundation, members of the Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society continued to meet with the staff of the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. We negotiated a memorandum of understanding that was signed between the museum and the Mookaakin Society on 6 March 1998 and witnessed by Premier Ralph Klein. This memorandum described a co-management arrangement that would allow the Mookaakin Society to advise the Glenbow as to the appropriate methods

of managing and exhibiting their Blackfoot collections. The memorandum also designated the Mookaakin Society as the negotiating agent for all future Kainai repatriations from the Glenbow and myself as the signatory for any such arrangements. After that memorandum was signed, a curator of Native American materials from the Glenbow, Gerry Conaty, sat on the board of the Mookaakin Society, and I was appointed to the First Nations Advisory Council at the museum.

In February of 1998, before we signed the memorandum of understanding with the Glenbow, Jerry Potts, Allan Pard, and Reg Crowshoe from the North Piikani Reserve and Herman Yellow Old Woman and Irvin Scalplock from Siksika had begun communicating with the Provincial Museum of Alberta (which is now the Royal Alberta Museum). On the morning that our memorandum with the Glenbow was signed, these five individuals recommended that Narcisse Blood, Martin Heavy Head, and myself join them to sit on a committee that would be meeting with the provincial museum. We then requested and received band council resolutions from each of our three tribes recognizing our committee as the responsible party for repatriations and all associated negotiations with the provincial museum. Although twenty-some years have passed since our first repatriation efforts at that institution, they still have a vivid recollection of the four Iitskinaiksi bundles that we supposedly took by force. It is with some caution that we again began considering long-term loans or full repatriations. However, Ralph Klein, the premier of Alberta, had recently been inducted into the Kainai Chieftainship (an honorary recognition by our community). We were hoping that, with his recent association established with the Kainai, Klein would be willing to help us reopen the provincial museum's doors for the return of our ceremonial materials from Edmonton.

Alberta's repatriation act is the only such legislation in Canada. Premier Ralph Klein introduced the act because he wanted to return sacred objects to First Nations, but he was told he could not legally do so. As I understand it, there is another law in place, the Historical Resources Act, stipulating that all archaeological materials and similar items belong to the province, to all the people of Alberta. He was told that if he wanted to repatriate sacred objects to us, he would be breaking the law. So Klein introduced the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (FNSCORA) in order to override the Historical Resources Act.

The items we are most interested in are the ceremonial objects that are transferred from one person to another. It can be the tiniest little thing. We have these buffalo stones—*iiniskim*—that are transferred. You can't just go pick one up and decide, "OK, I've got one," and then brag about it. If somebody shows me one, I will ask them, "Who transferred it to you? Did you get your face painted? Were the songs sung for you?" It doesn't matter what the item is, as long as it is sacred and as long as it was publicly transferred with songs and face painting.

FNSCORA was introduced by Premier Klein in March 2000. It went to third reading and was passed with the full support of all the other parties. But then the bureaucrats and the lawyers became involved. They had to set up rules and regulations that explained how the act was to be implemented. Although it took us four years to work out the proper wording, I still was not happy with the way the process was going to work. But I was getting scared that the act was going to sit on the table too long and never be put into use. Reluctantly, I agreed to the regulations for the act.

This is an example of the difference between our understanding and the non-Native governmental way of doing things. If I were to ask someone to do something and they agreed, I would not ask a third person to start coming up with all kinds of rules and regulations. A lot of our people understood that Premier Klein and the legislature had passed a bill, and now we were able to go to the provincial museum and negotiate with them for the return of our sacred bundles. We did not know that the lawyers and everyone else were going to come into the picture and say, "This is what you have to do. And this is what you have to do."

There is still a lot of controversy among my own people because they don't understand the regulations that go with the act. Some of them don't really want me to be involved when they apply for a bundle. But because of the rules and regulations that the bureaucrats developed, it is my responsibility to go to the Royal Alberta Museum, sign the documents for the bundle, and take it out of the museum. If we go through many hearings over a request and if that request is turned down, I get the blame for the rejection, even though I have no real say in the approval process. But because I have to sign, they put the blame on me. This is what I did not like when the regulations were developed. But I had to agree because the discussion had been going on too long. I had a feeling that they might let the legislation become defunct if it stayed on the books too long. The act has been hard on me.

That act covers all of the First Nations in Alberta who are part of Treaties 6, 7, and 8. So far only the Blackfoot-speaking people—that is, Apatohsiipiikani (Piikani at Pincher Creek), Siksika (Blackfoot near Strathmore), and our own reserve (Kainai) have used it. The other two treaty areas have not really used the repatriation act.

Following the passing of the act, I helped Siksika retrieve two Medicine Pipe Bundles from the provincial museum. Both of those bundles are now back into practice in Siksika.

#### BUNDLES FROM THE SCRIVER COLLECTION

In 2002, I helped repatriate a Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Scriver Collection that had been sold to the Province of Alberta and had it transferred to a person from Browning, Montana. Robert Scriver was a world-renowned painter and writer and sculptor who lived among the Piikani Indians in Browning. He collected a lot of materials from both the Canadian and the American side of the border. When NAGPRA was going to be introduced, he was afraid that he would be forced to give everything back to the original owners. In order to prevent this, he sold his collections to the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton. When we started our negotiations, the provincial museum wasn't too willing to repatriate Scriver's collection. They argued that it belonged in Browning, Montana, and not at Kainai. They also argued that without regulations for the repatriation act, they could only loan items and that they could not make long-term loans across the international border. But we kept stressing the fact that when the artificial boundary was introduced, we happened to be camped in our traditional clan areas and therefore became separated. That is why we still call people from the four reserves our brothers and sisters; we are inter-related. For example, my grandmother on my mother's side was from Montana, and I have lots of close relations in Montana, in Brocket, and in Siksika. It goes that way with just about everyone on the four reserves. Those bundles travelled freely among the four Blackfoot-speaking peoples before the reserves came into existence and before the artificial boundary was put in place. We kept stressing this fact, and we eventually obtained several sacred bundles from the Scriver Collection and had them transferred to the people in Montana. Some of those

bundles have since been transferred to people on the other three reserves, especially to Kainai and Piikani.

#### KAKKOYIIKSI

My role as signatory for the release of material from the collections of the Royal Alberta Museum and the Glenbow has led to my involvement in a number of repatriations. The Kakkooyiiksi (Pigeons or Doves) is a young man's society that had not been in practice at Kainai since the 1920s or early 1930s. Their bundles were at the provincial museum. But we were lucky enough to have some Elders who had been part of that society and still knew the ceremonies and the songs. Quentin Heavy Head and Duane Mistaken Chief retrieved those bundles and reintroduced that society. Now that society is going strong with about forty or fifty members. Some of them have transferred and moved on to other societies, and that has created a lot of new interest from our younger people.

I might add here that, before White people came, we had many societies, some for people even younger than Kakkooyiiksi. Those were our schools. What we, as society members, learned was our curriculum. They *weren't* just spiritual societies. They *aren't* just spiritual societies. Members were taught how to live their lives: how to conduct themselves, how to raise a family, how to provide for their families. That was what those societies were all about. We were inducted into them as young people. It was just like sending your child to school. The members advanced to the next age group where they learned more, and so on, until they reached the top, the sacred societies: the Iitskinaiksi and the women's society, the Maoto'kiiksi. We have been trying to reintroduce those societies so that our young children can have a stronger education not only in the White man's ways but in our own cultural ways, in our own way of living. This is why when we get those holy things back, other things happen.

#### REPATRIATIONS FROM GREAT BRITAIN

In the summer of 1999, Alison Brown, a graduate student at Oxford University, visited our reserve. She was looking for relatives of people who had sold items

to an American who had been collecting items for the British Museum in the 1930s and had been working with people at Piikani. Alison was at Kainai for the Aako'ka'tssin and was sitting with a group of us, watching the Iitskinaiksi dance. We explained to her how some of our bundles had disappeared and how the society was not complete without them. As the members danced past us, Alison had a good look at one of the headdresses whose matching partner was missing. She pointed out that she had worked on a similar headdress at the Marischal Museum when she was an undergraduate student at the University of Aberdeen. The headdress had been sold in Browning in 1923 and ended up at the museum in Aberdeen. When she returned to Oxford, Alison contacted the curator in Aberdeen and notified him that we would be in touch.

In 2002, a group that included Randy Bottle and Karen White Quills, Charlie Crow Chief, Duane Mistaken Chief, and Marvin and Betty Mistaken Chief visited Aberdeen to view the headdress. The following February, Randy Bottle asked me to go with him on a second visit, along with our good friend Gerry Conaty. We met with the University of Aberdeen's Court at Marischal College in Aberdeen, Scotland, and had our negotiations. They wanted us to make them a replica of the headdress but to use turkey feathers instead of eagle feathers. I did not agree with that. I simply wouldn't. It would be like being a hypocrite. I could have made a replica here, but I did not want to.

By the beginning of July, we had brought that bundle home, and it was immediately put back into use. Now our most sacred society, the Iitskinaiksi, is complete with all twenty-five bundles. I don't think it has been complete since about 1923.

In the autumn of 2001, Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society made an agreement with two researchers from the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford. Dr. Laura Peers and Dr. Alison Brown had discovered photographs of our people that were taken in 1925 by a museum worker named Beatrice Blackwell. They wanted to bring these images to our reserve to see if anyone remembered the photographer or had any stories about the people who were in the pictures. I met them in Calgary and introduced them to some of our people. It took us all summer to identify the people in the pictures and learn something about their history. Alison and Laura returned those pictures to us, and they are now housed at Red Crow Community College, where they are available for our students. We also collaborated on a book with them, *Museums and Source Communities*.

From 1998 to 2001, seventeen people from the four Blackfoot reserves worked on a permanent display telling our way of life at the Glenbow Museum. The sacred objects that the Glenbow had repatriated to us built a strong relationship of trust and respect between people at the museum and Blackfoot people. We worked collaboratively as full partners, not as advisors, to create an exhibit that tells our story, in our words. As far as I know, this is the first time that a museum has allowed us to present our side of the story. The exhibit has become an important place for our students to have an introduction to our culture and history. I hope it also helps non-Native people to understand who we are as a people and as individuals.

The Glenbow then created a smaller exhibit that travelled to the Netherlands, Manchester, England, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Québec. I travelled to Manchester with Andy Blackwater, Sandra Crazy Bull (who was working on the education part of the Blackfoot gallery at the Glenbow), and some Glenbow staff. While in England, we visited with two other researchers who had worked with us on other projects. Dr. Laura Peers and Dr. Alison Brown took us to the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University where Dr. Peers worked. There we saw five Blackfoot warrior shirts. They were supposedly traded to the Hudson's Bay Company governor George Simpson at Fort Edmonton in 1843. They fell into the possession of his secretary, Edward Hopkins, who took them to his home in Montreal about 1834. He then sent them back to England when he retired, and after his death, they were donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum.

I had heard of these kinds of shirts. They are warrior shirts and are transferable. They are decorated with porcupine quills. They are beautiful shirts. Although I had heard of them, I had never seen anything like them.

We worked for six years to arrange for these shirts to come to our community. After many years of hard work, mainly on the part of Laura Peers and Alison Brown, they were able to come home for a visit in the summer of 2010. They were displayed in the Glenbow Museum for about two months, and then they came down to Galt Museum in Lethbridge and were displayed for our community. Before each exhibit, Drs. Peers and Brown held workshops where we could get close to the shirts, examine them in detail, and talk about what the designs might mean, who might have owned them, and what they meant to our people (fig. 20). This was an important time for our Elders and our young people



Figure 20. Shirts from the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, which were the focus of workshops with Niitsitapi. Photograph courtesy of Laura Peers.

to come to see the shirts. And the project is still ongoing. Although the shirts returned to England in August of 2010, we are trying to find a way for them to be returned home permanently.

In the spring of 2011, I attended a conference at Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University with several others—Allan Pard, Charlene Wolf, Herman Yellow Old Woman, Narcisse Blood, Alvine Mountain Horse, Debbie Magee Shirer, Lea Whitford, Delia Cross Child, Albertine Crowshoe, Ryan Heavy Head, and Adrienne Heavy Head—along with curators Gerry Conaty from the Glenbow and Wendy Aitkens from the Galt Museum. We met with curators from a number of British museums and learned that these museums also house materials from the Blackfoot people. One has seven or nine sacred bundles that they are not allowed to open because their museum’s protocols prohibit them from touching sacred material. Another museum has Chief Crowfoot’s

full porcupine-quilled buckskin outfit intact and on display. Crowfoot was an important Siksika leader who was present at the making of Treaty 7. Those museums are now in the process of working with us to find better ways to care for these items and to discover ways of making this material more accessible to us. As you know, everything costs money, and our tribal governments just don't have the finances for research or to travel halfway across the world to work on these projects. The researchers in Britain are trying to raise money so that we can visit other museums. Most of the museums we talked to are willing to repatriate, although we cannot really use the word "repatriate" in England without raising alarms. We use the term "long-term loans" when meeting with British museum workers.

While we were negotiating the loan of the shirts, Narcisse Blood, Alvine Mountain Horse, Ryan Heavy Head, Adrienne Heavy Head, and I, along with Marcella LeBeau from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, were invited to a conference at the University of Aberdeen in February 2010. There, we met with several curators from Scottish museums to discuss the process and implications of repatriation. The Kainai had brought home the Iitskinaiksi headdress, and a Ghost Dance shirt had been returned to the people at Rosebud. The people from the museums were very interested to learn more about the implications of repatriation, both for their museums and for us.

#### THE EFFECTS OF REPATRIATION

A lot of the bundles that we have brought home have been transferred to other families. Martin Heavy Head's bundle, which we brought back in 1995 or 1996, was transferred to Roger Hunt and his family. He has since transferred it to another family. The new keeper had never been exposed to bundles, and when he had his first opening ceremony on 2 July 2011, he spoke about how good he felt to be the keeper of a bundle: "Now I am somebody." It made him think of who he is as an individual and as part of our community. That is the reward I have been getting for the work I have been doing.

At Piikani, Jerry Potts repatriated a bundle from the Canadian Museum of Civilization. When he brought it home, his young nephew became part of the bundle family. This fellow did not speak much Blackfoot. In fact, he never said

a Blackfoot word. But in the summer of 2011, when he got up to dance with the pipe, he prayed in Blackfoot that was more fluent than mine.

These things illustrate what these bundles mean to us and what they do for us. The transfers that have taken place mean that more and more people have a chance to learn about our culture. The very first bundles that we brought back in the 1970s have been transferred six times. Each of those bundles requires three keepers. Look at how many people they have helped! That is the process of cultural and personal renewal that repatriation helps to maintain and flourish.

We do not see all the benefits of repatriation at once. Several weeks ago, I was having supper with my wife and we started talking about repatriation. Something occurred to me. In the 1970s, when we first brought back those bundles, the community started talking about taking over our health services. We did that, and now we run our own health services (fig. 21). When more bundles came back in the 1980s, we took over our education. Now, we run our own education, and about 90 percent of our education system is staffed by our own people (fig. 22). With each repatriation, something else happens. In the 1990s, we started our irrigation project. This is one of the largest in North America, bringing 25,000 to 30,000 acres under irrigation and providing much-needed income to our reserve. Now we are talking of repatriating our own children who have been placed in foster care outside of our communities. This requires negotiating a tripartite agreement with the Province, the federal government, and ourselves. We believe that just as our bundles belong at home, the community is the best place for our children.

The Alberta government has introduced a consultation process whereby we are now beginning to repatriate our sacred sites. For example, we have worked with the provincial and federal governments through Alberta Parks and Parks Canada on one of our most sacred grounds at Aisin'aipi (Writing-On-Stone), just east of Milk River. That is a very significant site. We have had it designated as a Provincial Historic Site and as a National Historic Site. Now we are working on having it designated as a World Heritage Site. To me, getting these sites recognized and keeping them safe is part of repatriation.

Now things happen that I have never heard our Elders talk about. The Kakkooyiksi meet just about every month. When they found out that one member was drinking, they suspended him for one meeting. Our ancestors never did things like that! But these young people are policing themselves. Not



Figure 21. The extended health care facility at Standoff, Kainai Nation. Photograph by Ron Marsh, courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

just in terms of drinking, but in their general behaviour at school and at home. They are policing themselves and that is what we need in our community. That is where we can get our balance and our harmony back.

Another part of our repatriation that I am involved with, aside from the sacred material, is the Kainai Peacemaking Centre. In the case of a dispute, instead of going to court, the parties come and we have a peacemaking session with them. In this session, the victim wins and the accused wins. It becomes a win-win situation where they can resolve their dispute. There is no sentencing circle. They, themselves, will settle it. They agree what one individual will do. We are repatriating that part of our way of life.

When the Blackfoot shirts were here, two people had transfers so that they could keep similar shirts that have been newly made. But now people ask me, “Are the shirts going to come home permanently? When are they going to come home?” And what answers can I give them? It is really hard for them. A lot of the materials are in storage, where nobody has access to them. Museums don’t



Figure 22. Elementary school, Kainai Nation. Photograph by Ron Marsh, courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

understand them. If you have a Medicine Pipe Bundle in a museum, there is no understanding of the use and what it means. It is hard to see these spiritually and culturally important things stored in museums where no one sees them and no one understands them. That's the hard part for me.

But when we have these things in our community, being cared for by an individual or a family, there is an understanding of what they mean spiritually and what they mean to the community. And that is the point: If you don't understand something, why keep it? When they are held in a museum, they aren't in the community and they don't fulfill their purpose. They have to be out here so that they can fulfill their purpose. To us, when they are in a museum, it is just like they are in a prison. They are not in the community doing what they are supposed to be doing. They are kept away. We treat them as living things. They are here to help us, not just spiritually, but in our everyday life.

It seems to me that whenever we bring home something that came from our ancestors, it ignites our will and our self-esteem. We remember that, at

one time, we were able to do all these things on our own. If we can bring back a bundle, we can bring back other parts of our culture. To me, it is all part of repatriation. It is not only a repatriation of sacred items. It is a repatriation of a way of life that was taken away from us through residential schools and all those other efforts to assimilate us. I have mentioned this to a few other Elders, and they are pondering it. We had a misunderstanding of repatriation—that it was just bringing our sacred bundles back. But as the years have gone by, I have started to realize that there is a lot more to repatriation. And hopefully, the general public would start understanding—museums, even private collectors—why we like to have our materials back.

These are the things that got started by Adam Delaney, Pete Standing Alone, and others, including me, but in a limited way in those first bundles. The young people are now really interested in our societies.

After all the misunderstandings and conflicts of culture that have occurred during our negotiations for repatriations, the future still looks very bright. Through religious transfers, and along with the responsibilities that come with keeping a bundle, many of our young people are becoming more interested in attending and eventually leading our ceremonies and in learning our language. Each year, our Aako'ka'tssin grows larger and our bundles, through repatriation, become more numerous. It is perhaps impossible to accurately communicate the full extent to which bringing our religious materials home has benefitted our people. Our families are strengthened more every year that these bundles are present. Yet there are still more bundles in collection facilities here in Canada, in the United States, and overseas than there are within our own communities. That being the case, there are great opportunities available for our future generations to continue to strengthen our religious practices through repatriations. Hopefully, I will be able to persist in giving what assistance I can offer to make these efforts successful.

When I say "I," it has not only been me. Many of our own people have worked on repatriation. I will name a few: Annabel Crop Eared Wolf, Dorothy First Rider, Narcisse Blood, Martin Heavy Head, Rodney First Rider, Randy Bottle, Calvin Williams, Quentin Heavy Head, Rosie Day Rider, the late Louise Crop Eared Wolf, and the late Adam Delaney. Adam was the pioneer and he supported it, and whatever we did, he was behind us. He made a couple of trips with us to New York. He wasn't up front anymore, but he supported it. He was

a great inspiration. From Piikani, we have Allan Pard and Jerry Potts. From Ammskaapiikani, we have John and Carol Murray. From Siksika, we have Herman Yellow Old Woman, Irvine Scalplock, and Chris McHugh. And our good friend who accompanied us on a lot of the trips and who was sort of the go-between with museums because he was a curator and he was a pioneer in repatriation from museums—Gerry Conaty always helped us and supported us. And sometimes he got doors opened for us in museums.

Through repatriation, we have built some very strong relationships with some museum personnel. People whom we once might have regarded with suspicion have become close friends, attending our ceremonies and the Aako'ka'tssin; celebrating our successes and supporting us in difficult times. Individuals such as Robert Janes, Irene Kerr, Beth Carter, and Gerry Conaty from the Glenbow, Laura Peers and Heather Richardson from the Pitt Rivers Museum, and Alison Brown from the University of Aberdeen are role models for museum workers everywhere.

I hope that whoever reads this can understand what I am trying to say.



# 6

## *Bringing Back Iitskinaiksi at Siksika*

HERMAN YELLOW OLD WOMAN

*Oki. Nitsitaniko Naatootisiini.*

I'll start with the time before repatriation happened. In 1979, we began having a camp that we called a Spiritual Retreat. It was somewhat like an Aako'ka'tssin, but it only lasted for three days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. During those days, our Elders who had transferred from the Iitskinaiksi and the Maoto'kiiksi would have a day to talk about their societies. At that time, I think there were only about ten of them. The camp was at Blackfoot Crossing.

At that time, the Kiitokiiksi [Prairie Chicken] and Kana'tsomitaiksi [Brave Dog] were the only societies that were still very active. The Kano'tsisissin [All Smoke Ceremony] was also still going strong. The other societies—the Iitskinaiksi and the Maoto'kiiksi—were dying off. We realized that it was getting to a point where it was going to be very difficult to continue our traditional

ways. Some of the Old Folks were still around—we still had Beatrice Poor Eagle, who cut the tongue for the Kano'tsisissin. But then, by about 1994 or 1993, the few Elders that we had all seemed to be passing away.

We thought, "Gee, we have to do something." We asked ourselves, "How are we going to get it back? How are we going to have the songs and ceremonies transferred to us?" Those of us in the Kiitokiiksi decided that it was time for us to transfer, to give our bundles to a younger group, and that we had to move on to another society if we wanted to preserve our societies. I was one of the younger members—the older ones were in their fifties. To be honest, there wasn't much going on, other than the Kano'tsisissin and the Spiritual Retreat.

A couple of weeks before the retreat, I said to Chris McHugh, "I'm going to go get some pegs for my tipi. I need to cut new pegs for my tipi." He said, "I'll come with you. When are you going to do it?" I told him, "Well, maybe I'll go this evening." He said, "Okay, I'll be ready. Bring your pipe. We'll smoke a pipe out there."

I didn't know why he wanted me to bring my pipe. I was told to respect my pipe and not to fool around with it. But I got ready, gathered my pipe, and I picked up Chris. We went to the Sand Hills and starting cutting the pegs. He sat a little distance from me at first. Then he came over and said, "Herman, did you bring your pipe?" I replied, "Yeah." He said, "Could you fill it fast?" I said, "Yeah, yeah." So I filled my pipe and I gave it to him. I didn't know what he was going to do with it. Maybe he was going to pray. Then he turned back around and pointed to me, and he said, "You know, all these years you people have been talking about bringing back Iitskinaiksi? Well, Granny has told me to take the Iitskinaiksi Leader's Bundle. She said that I have to have a partner, and I've been thinking about you. You filled your pipe for yourself and I'm asking you right now. This is going to change things if you take this pipe." I thought to myself, "Let me think about this." And then I remembered those Old Folks who talked to me about transfers and if the pipe comes to you, you can't refuse. So I took it, and that's how it all started. That was 1994, May of 1994.

#### STARTING AGAIN AFTER THIRTY YEARS

We needed to talk about it with the Elders who were left. They were blessing the ground of the area where we were going to have the retreat, so we sent a pipe

to them. They smoked it. I remember it was a cold morning, with a wind. It was June, the rainy season. They were all bundled up. We made a fire out there and were all sitting around. When they were done, we said to them, “We have something to ask you. We would like to get things going again. And this is our idea. We are going to transfer out of the Kiitokiiksi—give it to the younger ones. But we want to carry on. We want to bring back the Iitskinaiksi.” At the time when we said that, nobody had any interest in the Maoto’kiiksi.

They listened to us and they were very quiet. Finally, Mrs. McHugh—Chris’s grandmother—spoke up and said, “When you talk about these things, you have to pray. You have to pray with your whole heart. So let us make a smudge.” We made a smudge and she prayed, and when she was done, she said, “Anytime you want to talk about this, this is what you have to do. Don’t just talk about it. That’s the proper way. You guys are talking about taking the Iitskinaiksi. There are only about three bundles left. The rest are in the museum. Furthermore, you cannot do anything without having Maoto’kiiksi. Maoto’kiiksi are the ones who start the camp, and there are only three of us left here who are Maoto’kiiksi. We’re all hitting ninety.” Then Old Lady Mrs. Three Suns said, “I never thought we’d live to the day we’d be talking about this. To me it is very exciting. It is a blessing.”

They are all gone now. Mrs. McHugh was there, and Mrs. Three Suns, and Maggie (figs. 23–25). And she was in her nineties, too. They were all sitting there and said, “Okay, let’s not talk about it right now. We’re here for the purpose of blessing the ground where we’re going to camp. Let’s finish this and when you guys move into camp, invite us and use this pipe again.” So we started moving into camp. It wasn’t a very big camp. The first night, we set up camp. The second night, we got food together. Then we invited them. At the start, it was just the Old Ladies who were supporting us. The good thing about that was that one of them, Mrs. Poor Eagle, was an O’kaan woman. The other ladies were ex-Iitskinaiksi, present Iitskinaiksi, present Maoto’kiiksi, or ex-Maoto’kiiksi. So we had support from all those Old Ladies.

They came in, sat down, and said, “You have a problem. Two of the main people that could have helped you out just passed away.” At that time, Jim Black Face Chief was in his nineties. He had always prayed for this to happen and could have helped us. We lost him three weeks before the retreat. The other one was Steve Many Fires. He knew every song, he had transferred



Figure 23. Clarence and Victoria McHugh, Siksika Elders, 1958. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA 5571-60).



Figure 24. Emily Three Suns (left) and Heavy Shield (right), of the Siksika Nation, at the Calgary Stampede. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives (NB-40-611).

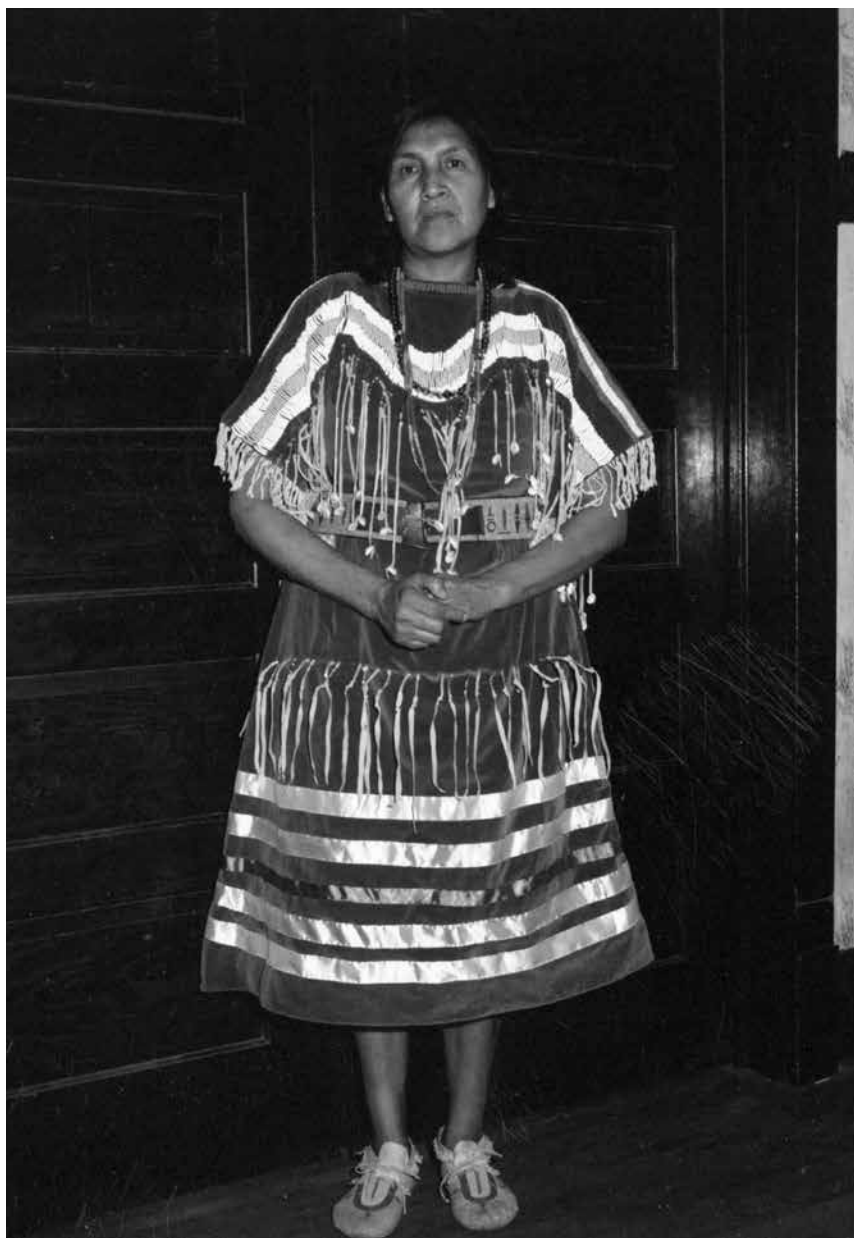


Figure 25. Maggie Black Kettle (Siksika) in traditional dress, 1968. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA 5571-7).

everything—Medicine Pipe, Beaver Bundles—everything that we needed to learn. He was the guy. He had also passed away recently. They went on to say, “You’re not stuck. We have Mark Wolf Leg. We just have to convince him. This is what you guys have to do to get started. First of all, you have to negotiate for those bundles to come home.”

There was a lot of resistance in the community to our efforts to bring back Iitskinaiksi. After that first retreat, when we negotiated and talked with the Elders, they supported us. But that did not lead to community support. The community started getting involved, saying, “You know, it’s not a good idea to bring this back. Maybe you guys should leave it alone.” To understand why people would say that, we have to look at how the bundles left us. In the 1960s, when people sold the bundles, there were a lot of bad things happening. But we told people, “We’re not giving anything up. We’re bringing it back. We’re going to bring back our way of life, the prayer. Our way was very strong then. That’s what we’re going after.”

I’ve got nothing against Christianity, but it was very strong in our community, and that is where the resistance was coming from. As well, some of the families who were involved in selling these bundles to museums and collectors had experienced tough times as a result of their actions. Thirty-two years had passed between the time when the bundles left and when we first talked about reviving things. But they remembered what had happened when the bundles had left, and they resisted their return.

When we asked the Old Ladies for more advice, they told us, “Once you think about it or talk about it, then you can’t turn back. You have to do it. You might hurt yourself if you’re just going to talk about it and never do it.”

We started to organize a meeting with other Elders. Henry Sun Walk, one of the Elders at the time, wasn’t very strong in his legs, and he was using a cane to get around. But he sat in on our meeting and advised us: “You have to go south. You have to go get our brothers to the south. They’re still going down there. You guys go down there and they’ll help us.” So that’s what we did—we got help from Kainai.

Sometime after our first meeting, I was all by myself at my mom’s house. I was living with her at the time. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. I jumped up and went to the door. It was my uncle, Adam Delaney, from Kainai. Uncle Adam very seldom came around. Oh, I was happy! I thought to myself,

“Something’s right! I was going to drive down there to meet with him and here he is, standing at the door.”

I immediately got him some tea to drink, and he sat down. He’s one of those people who, if you don’t offer him something to drink, if you don’t show interest, he will get up and walk out. I told him, “It’s very amazing that you came here today.” Then I explained to him what was going on. He said, “Let’s pray.” After we prayed, he said, “I’m going to tell you what to do. You put up a sweat for me. Call all of the men who are involved in what you are doing. In that sweat, we’ll talk about what needs to take place.” That was the beginning.

There was myself, Chris McHugh, Raymond Crow Chief, Leo Pretty Young Man, Jr., the late Henry Three Suns, Norbert Bear Chief, Irvine Scalplock, Richard Right Hand, Randall Axe, Fred Breaker, Clement Leather, and there were some who came in at the start but dropped out. There were twelve of us. We had the sweat down at Raymond’s house in Cluny. Adam said to us, “Okay, it might take two years. It might take five years. This is the beginning. You guys need to go negotiate for those bundles to be returned.”

This would have been in 1995. We planned the day when we would go see the people at the Glenbow. They had most of our Iitskinaiksi bundles. I couldn’t go because I was teaching Blackfoot at Crowfoot School and I didn’t have a replacement or anyone to help. If I didn’t go to work, there was no Blackfoot class. But I did go when they went to Edmonton. At the time, I thought it would take a year to get our bundles. Then, all of a sudden, they said, “We’re going to go get them.” It was about three months after that that we started taking them home. We kept them on the third floor of the Old Sun College (fig. 26). This was a mistake because Henry Sun Walk (fig. 27) was the only Elder who was able to help us, and Henry wasn’t able to make it up the stairs. He tried once, and after that he said, “Don’t come to get me. It’s too much to climb those stairs.” But there was no place else we could have brought them, unless it was into a home, and that was against our protocols. They were hung all around as though it was in a tipi.

Most of the male Elders who were around were the Iitskinaiksi who had sold these bundles. At first they tried to help, but then they backed off. But we still had a lot of Iitskinaiksi ladies. I think we had about eight Iitskinaiksi ladies. Today, we still have two out of that group, and they are in their nineties. We have Pius Three Suns left—the only one of the men left. But he is up in his



Figure 26. Old Sun Community College, a former residential school, where Siksika Iitskinaiksi bundles were kept after returning home. Photograph by Anita Dammer, courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

nineties. If you talk to him like this, he won't hear you. He has special earphones and a device. His hearing is really poor.

Adam said, "You have to ask these questions. You need to know who the fathers of the bundles are, who the grandfathers of the bundles are." We didn't know these things. It turned out that only Henry Sun Walk was qualified to be a grandfather. Adam explained to us that because the others were the previous owners, they were our bundle fathers. Not only were they the fathers, but some of them were still Iitskinaiksi. So that was difficult. Our cultural protocols concerning bundles tell us that those who are in the position of being our "fathers" aren't supposed to talk to us about Iitskinaiksi things. But by then, it was too late—we had already met with them.



Figure 27. Henry Sun Walk (third from left) and other Siksika Elders, ca. 1968. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-5571-1).

It gets pretty complicated. If you had a bundle and you sold it without transferring the rights, then you were still a Iitskinaiksi. When that bundle gets repatriated to someone else, the new keeper would want the rights transferred to him—rights that someone else already had—so we had to work out who still had the rights to which bundle. The previous keeper should transfer the rights to the new keeper of the repatriated bundle. But sometimes they refused to become involved. Thirty-two years is a long time. They had forgotten how to do things and were afraid of making mistakes. So they just said, “You guys hired Kainai. You let the Kainai finish this off.”

Adam would come here and run meetings and pipe ceremonies. At that time, I still thought it would be a year or two before we transferred into the

society. I didn't realize that the next spring we would be going ahead. We had sweats; we had meetings. It was so amazing and so interesting. I learned so much just in that time.

Adam would come and say, "There's only so much I can tell you guys. You're not Iitskinaiksi yet. I'm just preparing you to become Iitskinaiksi. You're not going to sing. You're not going to smoke a pipe the way Iitskinaiksi smoke a pipe, because you're not Iitskinaiksi yet. The majority of you have transferred rights for Kiitokiiksi and Kana'tsomitaisi. That's why I'm telling you certain things."

But he would get stuck with something, and then he would say, "I've got to go back home. I have to think about this. Next Sunday, you guys have another meeting and I'll come back and I'll tell you how we're going to do this. In the meantime, you guys negotiate for the bundles that are here on the reserve." That was the most difficult thing we tried to do. Today, there are still bundles in the homes, but people don't want to transfer them. One of the reasons is that the people who have them don't want Kainai to handle their bundles. They said, "We'll wait until you guys are on your own." So there are three bundles still out there. One of them is the bundle that shoots the gun. And the one called Niitopii, the bundle that's on its own. Then there is another one called the Lighter's Bundle. Those three were never sold.

But we managed to get everything with the other ones. The Glenbow gave them to us.

The biggest obstacle that I experienced was that people were scared. The community was frightened. Many people had lost their belief in our traditional ways and followed various Christian denominations. They were afraid of Iitskinaiksi. It took about four years before people started coming back to the Aako'ka'tssin. We would move into camp, and only the society members would be there. We would "dance out," and there would be nobody sitting, waiting for us. Those who did come parked far away, watching from a distance. Finally, finally we got people to start coming. We are not back to the times where the whole community comes to the Aako'ka'tssin. When Maoto'kiiksi had their last dance, there were maybe three hundred people here watching. When the Kiitokiiksi danced, it was double. When we were the Iitskinaiksi, when we came out, there were probably a thousand people watching. In 2009, we had, I think, thirty-three tipis in the circle. We had a lot of people.

## COMING HOME FROM MEDICINE HAT

There was a lot of power in repatriation, especially when it came to Maoto'kiiksi. I'm going to tell you about this one experience I had in Medicine Hat.

A Cree or Métis lady had invited me to Indian Awareness Week in Medicine Hat to do a tipi demonstration. I went down and they put me up in the Travelodge motel, about a block away from the museum. I wanted to go to that museum, but by the time I was finished my tipi demonstration, I'd be tired and just go for supper. By the time I got to the museum, it would be closed. The day I was going to go home—I had my tipi poles and everything all loaded up—I said to myself, "I'm going to go in there before I head home." I told the people at the museum about repatriation, what was going on back home, and our efforts to bring back the Aako'ka'tssin. The lady at the museum said, "You know, we have something in the back. I want you to take a look at it. I want you to tell me what it is. If it is one of the bundles that you guys are repatriating back into your community, you take it."

I was kind of excited, and, at the same time, I was shocked. So I walked back there and they had this big cupboard that they opened up. There were two Scabby Bull headdresses of the Maoto'kiiksi. They said, "We've asked where they come from. They come from Siksika." I told them that these were powerful and that I was going to make a smudge. They said, "Oh yeah. We know. We know what they are. We know they're powerful." So I made a smudge and I talked to the bundles and I prayed. I told the bundles, "Don't be surprised, I'll be back in a few days. But in the meantime, you do your work and I'll do my work." As I was walking out, I was praying for the people there. I got home and I unloaded my stuff. I was working for Old Sun Community College at that time, and when I told Irvine Scalplock, curator at the Siksika museum, about the bundles, he wrote a letter requesting that the bundles be returned to Siksika. Two days later, I got a phone call, and Irvine said, "Are you ready?" I said, "Why?" Irvine replied, "We're going to get those headdresses."

I sent word for Mrs. McHugh to come with us. She was in poor health and very weak, but she came with her grandson, Chris. We met them at Medicine Hat and drove to the museum. She asked them, "Where's that stuff?" She was a real bold old lady. "Where's that stuff?"

When they opened the storage cupboards, Mrs. McHugh started praying. Then she said, "What are you guys just standing there for? Wrap them up!"

Chris looked at them: "They're Maoto'kiiksi. We can't handle them."

"Oh no!" she said. "You guys are going for Iitskinaiksi. You guys are the boss. You wrap them up. Don't be scared. Wrap them up!"

We had some cloth, and we wrapped up both of them. She said, "I'm going to say a prayer. As soon I'm done, you guys start walking—straight for the door." I took one headdress and Chris took the other one, and we started walking and she started praying.

That was my first experience of taking a bundle, of actually carrying a bundle, and it was like somebody was pushing me from behind, pushing me to go faster. The bundle itself was a headdress, but it felt like somebody was pushing me to the door. When we got outside to put it in the vehicle, there was nobody pushing me any longer.

We put the headdresses in the back of Irvine's van and turned to the Old Lady and said, "What are we going to do with these headdresses when we get them home?" She said, "Take them back up to the museum. When the time comes, when the Maoto'kiiksi are going to get started, then they will come and get them and bring it to the retreat."

So we took them home and then went for bundles that were at the Glenbow. We took everything we thought we needed. But that was an experience.

#### COMING HOME FROM THE ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM

It was a little more difficult working with Edmonton. We discovered that, in the 1960s, a collector had been working for both the Glenbow and the provincial museum. Some bundles were split up, with parts ending up in both places. The provincial museum would have half of a bundle and the Glenbow would have the other half. For example, some of the Iitskinaiksi bundles that we got from the Glenbow didn't have garters. When we went to Edmonton, we'd say, "Hey, that bundle didn't have garters. And they belonged to so and so and these are his garters. Why would he take out the garters and sell them to Edmonton?" Sometimes, the paints were separated. Sometimes, the main bundle went to the Glenbow, but the secondary parts were in Edmonton. The keeper would not

have done that, because he was only paid one price. The collector made double money on these because both the Glenbow and Edmonton would have paid him. We didn't actually repatriate full bundles from Edmonton until the Kit Fox Bundle came back, until the Medicine Pipes came back. They were all complete. The rest weren't. They had only the second part of what the Glenbow had.

We were negotiating with the museum director in Edmonton to have the Kit Fox Bundle returned. It had belonged to Nat Owl Child, and Richard Right Hand was going to take it. The Iitskinaiksi had a meeting about a month before we were going to transfer, and the museum director showed up. He came down to Siksika with the Kit Fox Bundle. Adam Delaney was running that meeting.

Adam said, "You tell that guy to stay out there. Don't let him come in until we're ready."

Soon everybody got there and the room was full. Adam said, "I'm going to tell you guys something. I'm the only one who has the right to talk to that museum director. You guys are not Iitskinaiksi because you haven't gone through the transfers. You're just sitting there. You're preparing to be Iitskinaiksi. When he comes in here, I don't want any of you to talk. I'm going to do all the talking. When I'm done with him, I'm going to tell him to leave."

When the director came in, oh my God, he had an earful.

When Adam was done talking, the director said, "Adam, can I say something?" Adam looked at him and said, "I told you I'm done with you. Now get up and get out of here!" To us, it was harsh. We were trying to negotiate to get the bundles back, and here was our grandfather blasting this guy, blaming him for everything.

The museum director went out, didn't bring the bundle in, and he went back up to Edmonton. He took the bundle with him. Later, he sent word that he was not going to discuss the bundle until we went to see him in Edmonton. He made it very clear that he didn't want Adam anywhere near him. About two weeks later, I went to the provincial museum with Irvine, Raymond, and Chris. The director said to us, "Oh, you guys trapped me." We told him, "No, we didn't. You ran into trouble. And we're not Iitskinaiksi. We can't say anything because we're not Iitskinaiksi yet. And we were told we can't say anything. We're here to negotiate."

He replied, "I'll negotiate with you guys. But I don't want to have anything to do with Adam." So we negotiated with him on our own and got the bundles back.

Before Adam was involved, Mrs. McHugh and—I can't remember who the other Old Lady was—painted Chris and me because we had the Leader's Bundle. They opened it up with Chris and me sitting right there and said, "If you guys are going into this, you need to have the rights to this bundle." There were some things that happened before Adam came that, to his way of thinking, were not appropriate. He believed that we were not supposed to be able to touch the bundles until we were transferred the rights to become Iitskinaiksi. But, for the Old Ladies, everything was day-to-day at their age. They didn't want to miss any chances with it. These people thought, "If you're not an actual Iitskinaiksi, we're going to paint you to be like a Iitskinaiksi." The Kainai didn't think that way. They didn't believe in that. Here at Siksika, we had shortcuts. That's basically what they did with us that day. When we went to Edmonton and negotiated the Kit Fox Bundle, we used that transfer to handle it.

The bundles have power and can really play tricks on you. One time, we found a bundle, and the museum staff gave us some unbleached cotton to wrap it in. Then they said, "Well, you can't take it home today. You'll have to come back and get it." We were kind of upset and we left. Later, the museum staff members were looking for it—I don't know what they were going to do with it—and it was missing! The museum director immediately assumed we had taken the bundle with us without them knowing: "Oh! They stole it. They took the Kit Fox Bundle home."

When we phoned back to say we were coming to pick it up, they told us that they could not find it and that the museum director was accusing us of stealing it. He had not looked for it himself. When we arrived at the museum and went to the storage area, we found the bundle just where we had left it. We took the bundle home that day.

#### COMING HOME TO THE FIRST AAKO'KA'TSSIN

Adam said, "Let the Old Folks have their regular retreat. When they are done, we will take over and there will be an Aako'ka'tssin." So that's what happened. The peace, the calmness in camp was amazing. It was the last day of retreat; tomorrow would be the Aako'ka'tssin.

When we moved into camp, Adam said, "Okay. We'll use your tipi—you're going to have to move out. But we need another tipi, too." The late Florence Scout, from Kainai, was with us too, looking after the Maoto'kiiksi. She pointed out that they also needed a tipi in which to keep their bundles. Adam said to us, "Well, you guys have been handling these bundles. Go get them!" There was Adam and his wife and Charlene and Roger Prairie Chicken from Kainai. Although Charlene and Roger were visiting some friends, Adam did not waste time waiting for people to show up late. He told us to go and get the bundles.

Two vehicles went to get them. One vehicle was full of Iitskinaiksi bundles. One vehicle was full of Maoto'kiiksi bundles. They brought them all down and backed up the one vehicle to the front of my tipi. By that time, Roger and Charlene had arrived and started carrying the bundles into the tipi.

When the bundles came in, Adam said, "Once we get started, I don't want anybody to come in. You have to have somebody sitting outside your tipi. There might be somebody show up and just come in." So we guarded those two tipis and they went to work. Florence was on the other side of the camp circle in Raymond's tipi. Then the four—actually five, because there was Franklin Sheldon, Roger and Charlene's partner—who were in my tipi went to work. It was almost dark by the time they were done.

They had to open every bundle and find everything. Then they had to put them back the way they were. Finally, Adam said, "Everything is ready for tomorrow." That night, we went into the Iitskinaiksi lodge. It was the first time we put up our lodge. We went in, and he started showing us what to do. It was so much work, but the adrenaline was flowing. We were excited. We didn't get tired. But Adam was getting tired. He would come to my tipi, lie down, and go to sleep.

We were all following Adam's instructions. We would be sitting in the centre lodge until three or four o'clock in the morning. Then Adam would say, "Okay you guys are done. Go get some rest." We'd all go to our camps and get some sleep. First thing in the morning he'd be going around camp calling, "Get up. The day is short. You guys got things to do. Get up." He'd be going around camp getting us up.

The transfer started the next day at about seven o'clock in the morning. By noon, he was rushing us: "The day's going to be short. Hurry up and get things going." We were done by evening time. I went into my tipi to sleep. It was still only six o'clock in the evening, but I was tired. My cousin used to camp beside

us. In the evening, she would cook us a meal, bring it into my camp, and we would eat.

The next day, we were going to dance. Once again, Adam showed each of us, individually, how to put our bundles together, how to put the headdresses on and everything. He said, "Now we're going to leave. We're going to leave." And he called my name: "Come stand by the door." There were only nine bundles at the first transfer, so we just had a single tipi, not the two tipis together that we usually have. He said, "Here, Naatootisiini, come here." So I went to the door. He said, "We're going to lead." There was Roger's father, Alan Prairie Chicken, and also Winston Day Chief, Joe Spotted Bull, and Bruce Wolf Child. Adam told me, "When you come out of the tipi, you will call them." And he showed me where they were parked. "You face directly towards where they are sitting. You're going to call their name. After you've called them in, then you call me and I'll come in here and make sure everything is ready. Then I'll go back out."

When everybody had their headdresses and everything on, I came out. It was so amazing. There are two valleys that merge at Blackfoot Crossing. The camp wasn't big. I went out and I called each of the four drummers. And it echoed in each of the four directions! If one was parked to the north, I looked out there and called the person by name, inviting him to help us through the day by drumming for us. You could just hear that echo. And then I'd turn the other way, and the same thing. It would echo back. There was power. When you are out there just talking, there is no echo. But that time, we had an echo.

The Elders that I called started coming. Adam just stood there and looked to the left and all the way around. He had a lump in his throat. He cried. He put his head down. Today, when I talk about it, I get goose bumps.

Adam said, "Well, my work is done. It was a tough work. Right now is the beginning of something new. We never had this in the history of our people. This is all brand new. Now it's up to you guys to bring it back." It was very powerful. Then we started, and he went back out of our lodge. He said, "I'm going to be out here. I'm going to watch you guys from out here. Now it's their job—the drummers. But I'm going to be out here."

They started singing and we started dancing inside. Then it was time to come out. The only people who were sitting out there were the Old Ladies whom we had approached and asked for their approval the year before. You should have seen the tears in their eyes when we came out. They didn't expect this to

happen. Mrs. Poor Eagle stood up when we came by. I will always remember that. After we passed, then she sat down. We could hear her in the distance, praying, saying how glad she was that this was coming back.

When the drumming stopped, it was just calm. Mrs. Poor Eagle was telling the people sitting there, "I never dreamed to have this, to be here at this day. I thought it was never going to come back. And here it is. I'm seeing the Iitskinaiksi again."

Then we went around camp and got on the horses. There was a camp of Full Gospels a little ways away from us. They had a good crowd and very loud music. When we stopped on the south side of our camp circle, the music from the Bible camp stopped. It had been so loud and now it stopped. We looked over, and everyone at the camp was standing outside of their big tent. We got off the horses, danced, and remounted. By the time we made it back to the east side of the circle, the people from the church meeting were all parked there. When we went back into the centre of the camp, they all walked in and watched us dance. It was amazing.

When we first came out for the Iitskinaiksi dance, I thought there would be a lot of people sitting there in the camp circle waiting for us. But when we came out, we were the only ones there. That kind of bothered me. It didn't bother me to the point where I got emotional. But Adam did. He sat there and said, "You know, don't worry about what's happening here. It is kind of pitiful. But watch, in a few years time, things will turn around. It's not this age group that's going to support you. The younger people are the ones who are going to watch. They are the ones that are going to want to take over."

#### TELLING THE ALBERTA MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION ABOUT COMING HOME

I was invited by the Alberta Museums Association to speak about repatriation in Lethbridge at one of their annual conferences. This was shortly after our first Aako'ka'tssin. I did not know how to talk about it, so as I was travelling, I started praying, asking the Creator to help me to put it together.

When I started talking, I went back to the time when the missionaries first came. That was when our life started changing. Eventually, they started taking

our kids away—our ancestors' kids—and putting them in residential prisons. It was very hard for our people at that time. It tore apart a lot of families. I went from that time to the days when the bundles began to leave us, when people started abandoning our way of life. Once that started happening, people began abandoning their children, and the children started becoming wards of child welfare. The children started being adopted off reserve, being taken away. I talked about the effect that it had: the alcoholism and the abuse—physically, mentally, sexually. Any kind of abuse that you could think of—it happened here.

I was taken away from that as a young child. My dad and mother lived at the 1D Ranch on the Blood Reserve with my uncles, who ran the ranch. When I was there, I saw how strong our culture could be. I started going to the Kainai Aako'ka'tssin in 1969 or 1970. Coming back home to Siksika was like going into a war zone. Some days it was calm, and some days . . . It was lonely when I was a kid. Our family was broken up. I was hit with the abuse—alcoholism, abandonment, everything. We were poor. Everybody outside of the boundaries of the reserve had the luxury of turning on a switch to light up their homes, go to the sink and turn a tap for water, go to the bathroom, watch television, or open the cupboard and there's something to eat. This was the 1970s, you know. At that time, you would think that almost everybody in Alberta would have had these things.

Those are some of the things I talked about at the conference in Lethbridge. I talked about how all this affected the people of my generation. I talked about how it was going to be my generation that was going to change that. We were going to bring back our traditions and let our people have pride in their identity again. We were going to put the negative things that affected our generation behind us and just focus on bringing back our way of life.

I had mixed emotions about why I was trying to revive these traditions. At one stage, I was doing all this for the Elders of the day. Then I was doing it for the children. And I was doing it for my generation. As time went on, it changed, and I was doing it for the generation behind me and the generation behind them. And I see the good. If you look across the camp circle today to Kent Ayoungman, he has a son who is very knowledgeable about this way. My son is with me at the camp. They had not been born when all this was starting up. Whoever thought that I would have children who are going to carry on with this? Now, my son knows things about our way of life. If he visits another house whose family does not

know anything about it, he will tell them. I have heard how, when he goes to visit his relatives, he will tell them, “You can’t do this, you can’t say this. This is how it is.” He is teaching them. Those are some of the things that I experienced as a child growing up. I would go to the Aako’ka’tssin and be involved with Kainai and then come home to a community of my generation that did not see the Aako’ka’tssin anymore. The generation behind us was gone. So that is where the gap was. Now we were filling in the gap for our generation.

I talked about that to the museum conference, about bringing our children back into our homes and restoring them along with our families, our Elders, everything.

But we had not done any of this in 1994. I think that even the Spiritual Retreat would have been gone without the revival of the Iitskinaiksi. Mark Wolf Leg was given the Kano’tsisissin in the 1970s and was carrying that on. But it seemed to be dying out because the Old Men who were running the Kano’tsisissin with him were passing away. That ceremony would have eventually disappeared. When Mark passed away in 2007, there was no transfer of the Siksika Kano’tsisissin ceremony. We still have a Kano’tsisissin ceremony, but it isn’t the Siksika style. Those kinds of things take a generation to revive.

#### COMING HOME TO BUILD THE FUTURE AT SIKSIKA

Today, these sacred societies have come back, and it makes me feel good. I feel a restored peace. I feel a restored power, especially here in the Bow Valley. There’s so much power in this valley. As you walk along, you encounter an old camp, an old camp fire, an old sun lodge, an old Maoto’kiiksi lodge, or an old sweat lodge. Every direction you go in this valley, there is something that is hundreds, maybe thousands, of years old. Sometimes, when we come to put up camp, we might camp right on an old campsite without even knowing it.

The Elders that I talked to when I was growing up always told me to listen, never to argue or to complain, but to respect our traditional ways. There was a man who used to visit our reserve showing movies from the National Film Board. One time, he was going to show the film the Glenbow made, *Okan*, at my cousins’ house. There was an old couple sitting there. The man had some transferred rights. When we finished watching the movie and started talking, I asked

the Old Man, “What is the possibility of bringing that back?” His wife said, “Oh, there’s no possibility.” He just sat there and said nothing for a while. Then he said, “Yeah. There’s a possibility. But that possibility is not with us. Because we are the ones that threw it away, there’s no possibility of us bringing it back. It’s going to have to be the young people of this nation that’s going to bring it up. If you guys want it back, it’s your own responsibility.”

I was only about eleven years old when I asked him that question. He didn’t live to see this. He passed away maybe four years before we started this in 1994. But imagine if we had started ten years before!

I hope that in the future, our people will understand what it took for this to all come together. I saw the effects of it leaving us, and now I see the effects of it coming back. I see how it is restoring a lot of our culture. If you go into the schools and ask the students, “What do you think about this?” they will tell you. Not all of them know anything about it. But the majority of them have been taught. They respect it and they like it.

The return of these bundles has done miracles for the community. Our children were not learning about the respect, the traditional respect. Now they’re learning. They’re learning in school. When I was in school, the teachers would say, “Our O’kaan is on the video. We’re going to watch the video.” That’s all we knew about O’kaan. Now they say, “Go to the O’kaan, the Aako’ka’tssin. Take your children.”

Look around this Aako’ka’tssin camp today. There are hardly any adults here, but there are a lot of children here. They are learning first-hand about what the ceremonies are all about. Yesterday, when these Old Ladies, the Maoto’kiiksi, were putting up their lodge, the children were just watching. They know that out of respect they can’t go over there. They were all playing around the camp.

They are having a sweat over there, across the camp. The children are playing over here, but they won’t go over there. They are taught how to respect our traditions.

These are some of the things that our children are starting to know. When we started seventeen years ago, we said we would focus on our children, on the unborn. They are the ones who are going to take over. Our Elders at that time said, “We’re just going to sit back. We’re going to watch. And if you need any help, we’re on the way.” Today, most of them are gone. They have just about all passed away. We have maybe four of them left.

When you come here and watch these Iitskinaiksi dance, you'll see that about 80 percent of the people watching are under thirty. That's what makes me feel good.

Around the time we were starting, we had Elders who had songs—every song that needed to be learned. They kept telling us, “You guys need to learn these songs. You come, even come with a recorder, and I'll sing them to you. I'll transfer them to you. We'll sit down. We'll sing. But we'll record everything.” Chris and I must have recorded all those Elders. Now, they are all gone, and we are the ones holding these songs. Today, when the Iitskinaiksi are going to dance, there are only three of us who can sing those songs. There's Chris, myself, and Clement Leather.

When I look back to that day, I remember Adam saying, “I feel for you guys. It's going to be a tough fight. It's going to be a tough journey.” When he talked, then that emotion hit me. I had a lump in my throat.

That was a very powerful time.

# 7

## *Reviving Our Ways at Siksika*

CHRIS MCHUGH

*One night, when I was about eighteen years old, I was talking with my grandmother. I had recently been to the Short Medicine Pipe dance in Brocket and was impressed that the ceremonies were still alive. I suggested that we should have a sweat lodge for our bundle.*

*One of the Old Lady's fears was that somebody from Kainai or Piikani would come and claim the bundle since it was not being used. She said, "No. You are not going to sweat it."*

*That night, as she got ready for bed, she began to hemorrhage. She called to me, "Chris, you better call the ambulance." So I called the ambulance, and they took her to Calgary. By the next morning, she had lost her sight and she could not even remember who I was. It was like she wasn't even all there.*

The doctors were saying that she was going to pass away at any time. They advised us to get ready. Every night, I was smudging and praying for my grandmother. That was the first time she had been away, and it was the first time I had really been without her. I began thinking about what I was going to do now that I was going to be by myself and decided I needed to keep her around a little bit longer. So I started praying.

A few days later, I went back to the hospital with one of my relations. My grandmother was sitting up, and, by this time, she was beginning to recognize people and know what was going on. My relations were sitting there, planning my grandmother's funeral. My grandmother could hear them. When my aunt walked out, I asked the Old Lady, "Do you want me to do something so you can get out of here?" She said, "Yeah, I don't like it here. They are planning my funeral and they aren't even in another room. I want you to help me get out of here."

I went home and I got some old clothes—Leslie McMaster was the one who told me the Sun likes old things. I put moccasins on—it was winter and there was snow on the ground—I walked out from the old house to the trees in our old garden not far from the old house. I walked in the snow. There was a Y-tree in the garden and I took those clothes and I prayed to the Creator: "Help my grandmother get out of the hospital. All the sickness in her body—take it away. Help her to live for a few more years. Do that for me and I'll take"—in my mind I was thinking I would revive the Iitskinaiksi, but I thought I better not say that. I was only eighteen years old—who is going to follow me? So I thought for a few minutes and said, "If you do that for me, I will take my grandmother's bundle to Kainai and join the Iitskinaiksi at Kainai." I put the clothes up there and I walked back home.

A couple of days later, they transferred my grandmother from Calgary to the Strathmore Hospital. They called and said she wanted to see me, so I went to the hospital. She was sitting up. She said, "I had a dream that this woman came to me and told me, 'I am the head of the Sun Dance. Tell your son to burn sage for four days and you will get better. If he wants that bundle, tell him to go ahead and take it.'" So I did that. Every morning and every night, I went out and I got sage and I prayed for my grandmother. Not long after that, she came out of the hospital.

She lived for ten more years after that. She saw me dance out with the Iitskinaiksi. That is how I came to try really hard to revive the Iitskinaiksi.

In 1996, I was initiated as the leader of the Iitskinaiksi at Siksika, with Herman Yellow Old Woman and Daphne McHugh as my partners. We kept that bundle for eleven years. At the time, the society had not been active for a long time. In fact, we were the first Iitskinaiksi leaders in thirty-one years.

The McHugh family had kept Amopistaan, the Iitskinaiksi Leader's Bundle, since 1960, when Black Rider had transferred it to my grandfather. It would have left the reserve—many museums had offered a great deal of money for Amopistaan—but my grandfather refused to sell it. Adam Delaney and Mookaakin (Pat Weasel Head), from Kainai, asked to borrow it in the 1970s, but, again, my grandfather didn't let it go. My family had it all the way up until it was transferred to me.

I had taken care of Amopistaan from the time I was fourteen years old. I had been “painted on it” by Leslie McMaster, which gave me the rights to care for it. When I was about sixteen years old, Henry Sun Walk did a kind of a transfer, but a lot of the Old People didn't recognize it. I always wondered how I could get properly initiated so that I would be a true bundle keeper.

I wasn't alone in wondering how to have a bundle properly transferred. In the early 1990s, a number of us whose families had kept the Iitskinaiksi bundles were searching for ways to have rights transferred properly to us so that we could rejuvenate the Iitskinaiksi. At this time, it just so happened that Nat Owl Child was trying to get his Iitskinaiksi bundle, Sinopahsipista'an, back from the Provincial Museum of Alberta, to whom he had sold it in the 1960s. Nat asked Richard Right Hand to help him. Richard used to drive Nat to town all the time, so they would talk about it. Richard told him, “Well, I will help you.”

In 1992 or 1993, I was part of a meeting at Richard's house with Phil Stepney, who was then the director of the Provincial Museum of Alberta. The remaining members of the old Iitskinaiksi were there, including my grandmother, Victoria McHugh, along with Henry Sun Walk, Nat Owl Child, and Ed Wolf Child, Sr. We had as many of the past members as we could get. Allan Pard and Jerry Potts from Piikani and Bruce Wolf Child and Frank Weasel Head from Kainai were also present. This was the beginning of a two-year process to get the Iitskinaiksi started again.

Stepney took a very hard stance and didn't want us to take the bundles back permanently. His position was that Nat could borrow the bundles and take them back to the museum when we had finished the ceremony. The members

of the old Iitskinaiksi had to consider if this would be enough. Would we be content with just borrowing the bundles, or should we try to have the bundles returned permanently? They were trying to figure out exactly what to do.

I can understand, from a non-Native point of view, how the museum was trying to preserve the bundles. But from a spiritual point of view, it is a scary concept to dance with a bundle and then throw it back in a museum. The Old People really didn't know what to do.

At the same time, Allan, Jerry, Frank, and Bruce Wolf Child were talking in Blackfoot, telling us that we should revive the society. They were laying out all the steps we needed to go through. I asked Old Man Sun Walk if he knew that process, but he said that, in their time, the Iitskinaiksi had already started to change and the Siksika weren't doing the ceremonies the same way as the Kainai. So we debated whether or not to ask the Kainai for help. In fact, I think that debate as to whether we would ask Kainai ceremonialists to help us went on right until we transferred.

Those of us who were interested in bringing back the Iitskinaiksi listened to the Old People, and we talked among ourselves for quite a while. I also talked about it with other people. At one point, Fred Breaker went to his mother and a few of the other Iitskinaiksi members and asked, "Well, what do you think if we bring it back up?" All the people who had actually been members of the Iitskinaiksi were really in favour of us starting it again. Other people were not as supportive. There was a group of Elders who had never belonged to any society, as well as a couple of Elders who were considered to be the main "medicine men" at Siksika, who didn't want us to go ahead. They were doing things that, according to our traditions, they were not qualified to do. If we revived the Iitskinaiksi, it would have been shown to everybody that they weren't qualified. So they were fighting pretty hard for us not to revive the society.

That is when the negative talk started. At one Elders' meeting, they had an open argument over whether or not we should revive the Iitskinaiksi. In the end, they couldn't do anything because my grandmother, Victoria McHugh, had the Leader's Bundle, and she was, technically, still the head woman of the Iitskinaiksi. No matter what anybody said, the buck stopped with her.

She was very much in favour of reviving the society. She told me at one time, "Well, if you guys can't get anything going and I have nobody that I can

give this to, then you will have to bury me with it.” There was a lot going on behind the scenes.

We went around to all the children of the people who had the bundles to see how many were interested. The first time around, I think I got eighteen members. We had a meeting and quite a few showed up. That is when we promised to bring it back. We started to look for an Elder, and that is when we really started to learn about the intricate protocols of Iitskinaiksi: who is qualified to do this, who is qualified to do that. The one person who was qualified to do everything was pretty heavily into drinking, and his memory was starting to fail so that he didn’t remember too much of what we had to do. As well, he had a poor reputation among many of the Elders, even though he was the most qualified of all of them.

Another Old Man who could have really helped was very old and also starting to have problems with his memory. We missed out on those two Elders.

We were searching and searching, but we couldn’t figure out which Elders were qualified to help us. Then one day, it just so happened that Herman Yellow Old Woman was at his mother’s house when Adam Delaney, a past leader of Iitskinaiksi at Kainai, stopped by. They talked about our efforts to get Iitskinaiksi started at Siksika. Herman and I discussed what Adam had told him, and we decided to have a meeting and invite Adam to give us advice. That is when he told us everything we would have to do. It was not decided at that time that I would be the leader. Adam just said, “Well, these are the qualifications to be the leader.” When he started to name the qualifications, I didn’t really know whether I was going to be the leader or just a member.

In the end, no one else stepped up to the plate, so I just took it. Then the negative talk began. People began saying things such as, “Ahh, don’t join the Iitskinaiksi, you’re going to die. Don’t join the Iitskinaiksi, bad things are going to happen to you. It’s a dangerous society. Just let it die. It is devil worship.” Quite a few of our members bowed under the pressure and backed out. That meant that we had to visit people again and recruit new members.

Once we had a sufficient number of people, we invited Adam back. The first time we had a meeting, he just told us the basics. The next time, we had a meeting at my old house. He said, “Well, you guys have to get the bundles now. I can’t be involved in that because I’m not from Siksika. Those are Siksika’s bundles. I can’t be involved until you guys are actually ready to go.”

So I went to my grandmother and I went to Henry Sun Walk and some other people and asked for their help. Then we telephoned the Glenbow and asked if we could come up and discuss having the bundles returned. We agreed on a date, and a large group of us travelled to Calgary. I tried to bring as many of the new group as possible, as well as all of the members who remained from the old society. We all came into the office areas at the Glenbow, and I can still remember certain parts of the conversation. We were all sitting at a table, and I said we wanted to discuss getting the bundles back. I don't recall why, but the curator, Gerry Conaty, left for a moment without answering us. We were sitting there thinking, "Well, what are we going to do?" When he walked out of the room, I filled my pipe and put it under my blanket. Then, when he came back, I said, "I'll give you this pipe if you give us back our bundles." This is our traditional way of asking for a bundle transfer. But Gerry knows our ways, and he replied, "I'm not the holder of these bundles. I don't have the traditional rights to transfer to you. But I will help you guys take these back home. I'll smoke that pipe with you so that we can work together." We smoked that pipe. And he really did help us, too. Judging from the other repatriations that I have done, that was the fastest that we ever got bundles back.

It wasn't very long before Gerry called us back again. I came with my grandmother, Edna Stud Horse or Turtle (that was her name), Pius Three Suns and his wife, Irvine Scalplock, and Raymond Crow Chief and his wife. There may have been some others I don't remember. The plan was that the ladies would pack the bundles and we would take them home. But when we got there, Pius and his wife didn't want to touch any of them. They were afraid to touch them. The Old Lady and Mrs. Stud Horse started to pack the bundles, but after packing two of them, they became very tired and could not pack anymore. So they painted my face, and I packed the rest of those bundles. I remember packing Moses McGuire's bundle and I remember packing that Drummer's Bundle. There were quite a few of them. On that day, we walked out with nine Iitskinaiksi bundles, not including the square bags that go with them to hold personal items. When I asked the curator, Gerry Conaty, "Is this the most bundles that ever came out of here in one day?" he said, "Yes! This is the most bundles that ever came out of the Glenbow Museum in one day." We took those bundles out and we brought them home. Old Sun College had emptied one room in the museum on the third floor just for the bundles. We put the liners in there

just like a tipi and hung the bundles just like they would be in a tipi. From that time on, our society held meetings in that room.

When we were at the Glenbow, there were two bundles that were not shown to us. They were misidentified in the museum records as Natoas bundles, but they were really Iitskinaiksi bundles. In fact, they turned out to be two of the most famous Iitskinaiksi bundles at Siksika. Each of those bundles has a long story of how they had saved people who had made vows to them. We went back to the museum, and we brought those bundles home.

Throughout 1995, after we got the bundles from the Glenbow, we were still trying as hard as we could to find the Black Rider's Bundle. In fact, we couldn't find either of the Rider's Bundles. Years later we learnt that that Mrs. Big Tobacco had transferred her Rider's Bundle to the Kainai.

We tried everything to locate the Black Rider's Bundle. We even contacted the person who had collected most of our bundles for Glenbow and the Provincial Museum of Alberta and asked him, "Well, where did it go?" He told us, "It's in Edmonton. I bought it and I know where I put it. It's in Edmonton."

We went to the provincial museum but were told that they did not have it. After some discussion, we finally said, "Well, the collector told us that it is here." The curator then went into the collection storage and brought out something that had been documented as a Rider's Pipe. But it wasn't the Rider's Pipe at all. It was the Black Rider's Bundle that had been sold. The people who Henry Sun Walk had transferred it to had then sold it.

Once again, the museum wanted us to just borrow the bundle. We discovered that they had Nat Owl Child's bundle as well. We had many discussions with one of the museum's senior managers, but he would not change his mind. He just wouldn't do it. He wouldn't give up any of the bundles. That put us in a difficult position. We needed Adam Delaney's help to get started, and he kept telling us, "When you guys have the bundles, then we'll help. Right now we can't do anything for you. It's got to come from the Iitskinaiksi at Siksika."

Then, one day we were watching a video titled *Blackfoot—100 Years*, made by Ralph Klein when he was a journalist. In one scene, Nat Owl Child was praying for Klein. It occurred to us that we should ask Nat for help. He and Klein were very good friends. My grandmother also remembered how Klein often visited her place. "Now that Ralph is premier," she said, "you should ask if he will help us get the bundles."

Richard Right Hand called the premier's office and made an appointment for us to meet with Klein. Five of us—myself, Richard, Leo Pretty Young Man, Adam Delaney, and Nat Owl Child—met with him and explained our dilemma. Ralph Klein was fully supportive of giving the bundles back and told us, "I'm going to give them all back. Rent a truck and just come up and take them all and bring them home." As I remember it, the original agreement, they were just going to give them up.

It turned out to be more political than that and not very straightforward at all. Nevertheless, we did end up with all the bundles we needed to start the Iitskinaiksi.

Now that we had all the bundles and everything was ready to start again, many of our members began getting scared again. Some of the Old People thought we were just going to play around with the bundles. Many people had built up a fantasy of the old Iitskinaiksi—that they were flawless people. My grandmother was the past leader of the Iitskinaiksi and she, more than anyone else, will tell you they were not flawless people. They had problems in their society, just as we have problems today. They've always had problems. The Iitskinaiksi is a way for people to become *better* people.

But we were faced with an insurmountable vision that people had of the old Iitskinaiksi, and they didn't want us to revive the society. In fact, it seemed that a lot of people made it their job to try and stop us. Many of us became scared, and even the most devoted ones among us who were ready to go into the Iitskinaiksi began to think about backing out.

I sat with group and told them, "How about this. I'll go and sleep. I'll go for a vision. Let's see what the Creator says." And I did that on two separate occasions. The first time was when the society was just about falling apart. I asked Les McMaster to watch over me and went to where they used to have the old Aako'ka'tssin. There's an open area inside the trees. I slept there for four days and four nights. On the third night, a man dressed in black came to me. He said, "What's wrong with you guys? I made everything so easy for you to take all the bundles back. I made everything for you guys." He said, "If you guys don't want it, I'll give them to somebody else."

When he said that, I began arguing with him. I said, "We are. We're trying. We're trying." Then a woman with red hair came behind me and said, "Don't get mad at him, Old Man. They're trying, they're trying to do it." At that time, I didn't

know enough about our ways to really understand who was talking. Well, in our stories, the man dressed in black is the Sun and the woman with red hair is the Moon. I related that story to the members, and that message the Creator gave us pulled a lot of them through and gave them the courage to revive the Iitskinaiksi.

The second time I went for a vision occurred just as we were about to be initiated. Again, there was a lot of talk about whether we were going about it in the proper way. We were using Kainai Elders, and people would say, "Siksika is really different, the way they do the Iitskinaiksi compared to Kainai. It is really, really different." And it's true, there are some differences. But they are not great differences once you really understand our ways. If you really know Iitskinaiksi, the Kainai and the Siksika have just minor differences. As long as you know that, you can make adaptations so that the ceremonies are properly done.

But people were really focusing on the differences. I think it was because Siksika people are very patriotic. Kainai are like that too. So are Piikani. Our people are really known for that. "Nobody is better than Siksika. Why do we have to get these Kainaikoan? Why do we have to have this?" Even today it happens. We still battle with that all the time. "It's not real if Kainai run it. When Siksika run it, then it will be real."

But we needed somebody who could run the ceremony, lead the transfer, for us. So I asked the members, "What do you think we should do?" The Old Lady, my grandmother, was saying, "Well, if I really have to, I'll paint you myself on it." But I knew it wasn't going to be the right way, so I ask the members what they thought we should do.

That's when I decided to go and sleep. I wanted a real answer. In my dream, I saw my grandfather, who was the past leader of the Iitskinaiksi. He used to be a councillor, and he was buried in the councillor's blue suit. In my dream, he was standing there in that councillor's suit, and he said to me, "We could have kept everything going if we'd hired Kainai to help us. But we were too proud to use them. That's why the Iitskinaiksi went down at Siksika."

Right there, I said, "Okay. Well, I got my answer. Just use them." That is how it started. That is pretty much how we made it to our transfer. The Iitskinaiksi was started all over again. And that's pretty much the beginnings of our repatriations.

Now that we had brought those bundles back and were confident about using Kainai as Elders, we met once again with Adam Delaney. In fact, we had quite a few meetings with him, right up to the summer of 1996. Once Adam saw

that the bundles were in place, he said, "Okay. The first thing that I have to do is ask your grandmother for permission to work with you. Because she is still the leader and I'm not from Siksika. I can't just come here and work." He was using a couple of the Iitskinaiksi at Kainai for advice, and they had told him, "You have to ask for permission to work up there. Because you've never owned a bundle in Siksika, so you have to ask for permission." So he asked her and she gave her permission to help us to get started.

Then, he started telling us what we were going to do. He said, "Okay. The old Iitskinaiksi are going to dance two days. Then you guys are going to dance. That's the way we'll do it." I went back and told the Old Lady, "Adam said the proper way is that you guys are going to dance for two days and then you transfer to us and we're going to dance." And the Old Lady—she was in constant pain by then—replied, "Good God! I can't even hardly walk. How do you expect me to dance?" She said, "No. You guys just do everything. I'll give you everything."

I went back to Adam and told him what the Old Lady had said. He gave me a hard look and was quiet for a while. Finally, he said, "Okay. But first you have to go through that *maaatoopsa'psi* to smoke that pipe." He said, "But I can't be involved right there because that's the changeover from the old society to the new. You will have to get somebody from here to give your grandmother the pipe."

I asked Old Man Sun Walk to be the go-between. I sat outside and the Old Lady stayed in her house, and I sent my pipe to her through the Old Man. She smoked it and she filled the pipe and then I smoked outside. That's when she said, "Okay. I'll give you all of the Iitskinaiksi bundles. I'll give you everything."

Next we attended the Elders' Retreat planning meeting and told them of our plan, "Okay, this is what's going to happen. The Iitskinaiksi are going to transfer. The old Iitskinaiksi are going to transfer to the new society." At first, we really had a rough time. A lot of people in the Culture Department were making money from the Elders' Retreat, and they really didn't like it when we took it over. Others were supportive and said, "Okay. When is the spiritual week going to begin?" They called it an Elder's Retreat rather than the Aako'ka'tssin. We used the dates that they had already set for the camp rather than setting our own. We picked up Old Man Sun Walk and went down to Blackfoot Crossing to mark out the camp. There are certain protocols and procedures that we use to mark where we will camp for the Aako'ka'tssin. The way that Sun Walk marked out the camp and the procedures that he told us to use are exactly the same as we use today.

After we marked out the place, we started setting up our camps. We put up the centre tipi where the Iitskinaiksi would hold their ceremonies. Adam Delaney arrived with Roger Prairie Chicken and several other Kainai. I can't remember who all came. Adam asked the Old Lady "Are you going to run the transfer?" And she replied, "No. I can't sit there. I'm too old. Ask somebody if they will just transfer it for me." Roger Prairie Chicken acted as the proxy for the Old Lady and transferred the Leader's Bundle to me. That is how the Iitskinaiksi started again at Siksika. It was 1996.

#### FURTHER REPATRIATIONS

Herman got a call from Medicine Hat Museum. He told me, "Chris, there's a couple of bundles over at Medicine Hat. Come with me and let's just go take a look." So we went over there and took a look at them. They turned out to be three Maoto'kiiksi bundles. We sat there and explained to the lady, "This is what those bundles are. We are trying to revive our Aako'ka'tssin. Can we have them back?" The lady was very hesitant. But when we explained to them what the Glenbow was doing, they became more than willing to let us have the bundles.

I think the Glenbow kind of set the stage for repatriation in other Alberta museums. I always give the credit to the Glenbow Museum on that one. I honestly do believe that they did set the stage for us repatriating our bundles, because as soon as we told Medicine Hat that the Glenbow was doing permanent loans, they turned around right away. We started to explain to them what they had and the importance of it; then they turned around right away. We just made one more visit back and we signed the papers and we took them out.

I also repatriated the Ben Calf Robe Beaver Bundle from the Glenbow (fig. 28). It was very strange how that happened. One night, I had a dream that Herman Yellow Old Woman put this beaver around my neck. It was a gigantic beaver. And it was a necklace but it was on my back. I woke up and thought, "What was that about?" I had already kept a Beaver Bundle that I had repatriated from the Smithsonian Institution—the Head Carrier Beaver Bundle. I transferred that bundle to Leonard Bastien around 2001. So I was a past Beaver Bundle holder. Quite often, I had thought about that Ben Calf Robe Bundle—ever since seeing it when we were bringing out the Iitskinaiksi bundles.



Figure 28. Ben Calf Robe (Siksika), 1952. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-5345-1).

As a child, I remember reading Ben Calf Robe's book and thinking, "Beaver Bundles—I wonder if they will ever come back."

For a long time, I thought, "No, it can never come back." Then, when I heard that Mike Swims Under and others were transferring Beaver Bundles, I thought, "Maybe I should try and get this bundle back." But I didn't pursue it until I had that dream.

That bundle had been sitting in the museum for a long time. Quite a few people had looked at it, but nobody had made a real commitment to get it. I met with Herman Yellow Old Woman, who was a Siksika representative on the government's repatriation advisory committee, and asked him, "How would it be if I wrote you a letter to repatriate that Ben Calf Robe Bundle?" He said, "Yeah, go for it. Go ahead and just get it. Get that bundle." I wrote a letter and gave it to him. And there again the Glenbow has always been so good about the bundles, about the ceremonial items. Not even two weeks later, I walked out with that bundle. And this spring coming up [2012], we'll be having our first tobacco dance in many decades. That will be attributed to the Glenbow Museum.

The only other Alberta repatriation that I was involved with was when I put up O'kaan with Allan Pard's daughter and we repatriated a Natoas bundle from the Glenbow. That was another time when the Glenbow was very good to me. I didn't even make any calls myself. Allan did the talking. We came in, looked at it, and took it home. And she still holds it today.

Of all the museums, I think the Glenbow is probably the most proactive in helping the Blackfoot people to retain a living culture. That is one of the things that museums don't preserve. If we don't have the bundles, then we can't get the transfers to make anything that looks like the bundles. So I guess in that way, the Glenbow really helped with the revival of our culture. And they still are today. I would be so bold as to say better than any museum in Alberta.

#### CARING FOR BUNDLES

I brought home the Little Light Beaver Bundle and the Raw Eater Beaver Bundle from the Royal Ontario Museum, but they were very difficult to work with. They treat it as though they own the bundle, as if the bundles are possessions that belong to the museum. They would rather save the object than the actual

ceremony that goes with the object. They can't really see that the ceremony is far more important than the physical object itself.

Most curators don't see the importance that these bundles have in the community. They think we can just make a replica if one has left the community. They don't realize that it's a really big thing to make a bundle. It's a big time thing. And that's why, today, most people won't even think about making a new bundle. It takes a special kind of training to make a bundle. And I'm not just talking about knowledge in our ways. There is more to it.

What a lot of people don't realize is that in our culture, you have to have a spiritual connection. The first kind of "medicine man" is just a bundle holder. His whole job is just to smudge. The second kind of "medicine man" is someone who can help other people, but he can't help himself. And that's where a lot of people are today, at that point. The third kind has what is called *naatosi*. That kind of medicine man can help other people, and he can also be his own medicine man. Those are the only people who can legitimately make a bundle. But there are very, very few of those.

That's a little known fact about Blackfoot culture. Just because somebody kept a bundle and they transferred it, that doesn't qualify them to make a bundle. A person has to have that *naatosi*. He has to have the power of the thing to be his own medicine man. Only then does he have the power to make a new bundle.

I've had a few curators tell me, "Well, you guys don't know how to take care of these anymore." In fact, people at the provincial museum told me, "You guys don't know how to take care of these" while the Black Rider's Bundle was right in front of me with mould and in disarray. I turned to them with the best answer I could give them: "My grandmother has the Iitskinaiksi Leader's Bundle at home. It's never been in a museum and it's in way better shape than that. So I don't know who takes care of these bundles better."

In our culture, we look after the bundles. We smudge them every day. We are very careful with them. Children are taught never to touch them, to be careful with ceremonial objects. So I don't know why museums think that we don't care for them.

That is where repatriation is very, very important. The revival of our culture, even though it has been going on for quite a while, is still young in comparison with the time it was eroding. Siksika Iitskinaiksi has only transferred once since we revived it. Piikani revived their O'kaan and Kana'tsomitaiksi

in the 1970s, and the people who revived it have just now become Elders. Our culture's still kind of young. Repatriation is so important because we can't just reproduce the bundle. We can't do that.

At the same time, a lot of us are lacking the skills. I'm not a craft person. The Old Lady taught me to bead moccasins, but I couldn't bead any to save my life. A lot of us lack these skills. So that's where repatriation is so important. If we can get these things back, we can sustain our culture.

#### REPATRIATING FROM THE UNITED STATES

Every time that I've repatriated from the Smithsonian Institution, people from the museum would meet me in Great Falls, Montana, and I'd drive down and bring the bundles back across the border. Each time that I crossed the border, the Canada Border Services agents would ask me, "Do you have any ceremonial items in the car?" And I'd say, "Yes, we do." And they'd say, "Go." We never had any problems with the border. I was required to have a letter from the tribal government in Browning stating that the bundle had been repatriated to them and that they were transferring it to me.

Even though Americans have had repatriation legislation since 1990, it is still a very long process. Right now, I'm running an O'kaan for Browning and I'm still looking for a Natoas bundle. I'm debating whether to borrow one that is not from Browning just to use in this one ceremony. That is not because there are no Natoas bundles in the United States. I've visited five different museums and they all agreed to repatriate the ones that they have. But it will take three years before they can be released. The process is very long. I'd like to introduce the Glenbow's concept of "permanent loan" to the American museums. That, at least, would allow us to bring the bundles home while we worked through the legal paperwork.

#### THE IMPACT OF REPATRIATION ON THE COMMUNITY

Siksika is the last of the Blackfoot communities to start repatriating our sacred bundles. We are only now slowly beginning to see the results in the community.

If we had not got the bundles back from the museums and started the Iitskinaiksi again, I don't think we would have any Blackfoot culture at Siksika. Now the people are starting to know Iitskinaiksi protocols; the society is starting to come back in a good way. And it is popular with the young people. Our traditional culture has pretty much jumped one whole generation. People who are sixty years old and older want nothing to do with it. They are afraid of it. They still haven't decided if it's bad or good. So our culture pretty much jumped that entire generation. We have really old people whose parents were members of the Iitskinaiksi, and we have their grandchildren. That generation is really starting to know a lot about our culture. And the people who are coming to the ceremonies are starting to know more and more. I think we'll take our culture back once we have outgrown the residential school syndrome. The government apology for the residential schools helped us to revive our culture. The government acknowledged that it was wrong to take these things away from us, to outlaw our culture.

I see the traditions getting stronger and stronger and stronger. If we had not brought these bundles home, I think there would have been no culture or we would have adopted the Cree culture or we would have adopted the Sioux culture. That would have happened. But when we revived the Iitskinaiksi, we were able to stop all that movement toward the pan-Indian practices. To this day, we have very few of these other practices.

It is really making a positive impact. I can honestly say that because of the repatriation and us being able to bring the bundles home, the Blackfoot culture is *still* the Blackfoot culture.

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE

When we had the transfer of Iitskinaiksi, I actually didn't believe it was happening. I thought, "Well, we're painted now, is that it? This can't be real." I was waiting for someone to come and tell me it's not real. It can't be real. For a whole year, it wasn't real. I couldn't really believe it. For a long, long time, it had seemed so far out of reach. And then, finally, it became a reality. It took a while for it to settle in. Many of the Old People were against us, but when they realized that we were serious, they became some of our strongest followers.

There was a time, when I was leader of the Iitskinaiksi, that I almost brought all the bundles back into use. I didn't quite get them all. Some families still haven't brought their bundles into the Iitskinaiksi. They say, "Well, when the Siksika run themselves, then we'll bring our bundles in." We'll see what happens.

I still can't believe that we did what we did. I was only nineteen or twenty years old at the time. I wasn't the youngest ever, but I was one of the youngest. But it was scary. Some members were disowned by their families, many of whom had strong Christian beliefs. It was a scary thing, but we did it. We all did it together.

But in the end, it turned out good. And now, when the present members transfer, we will become the Elders and we'll see how that goes. That is the next step in bringing our culture back.



# 8

## *Moving Toward Repatriation*

JOHN W. IVES

The events that led to the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (FNSCORA) began for me in 1990 when I was director of the Archaeological Survey of Alberta, a branch within the Historical Resources Division of the Department of Culture. The province was not in good financial shape; like other branches of the Historical Resources Division, we had absorbed a number of cuts in a situation in which most branch finances were tied up in salary, with a very small operational budget. When further significant government cutbacks came and additional staff members were lost, the Archaeological Survey of Alberta ceased to exist as an independent branch. A number of its regulatory functions were folded into the Historic Sites Service, while research staff involved in the professional evaluation of archaeological sites went to the Provincial Museum of Alberta (PMA), now the Royal Alberta Museum. There, I became an assistant

director of the museum, heading up a newly formed Archaeology and Ethnology Section. That role included responsibility for the curatorial program and collections involving First Nations ceremonial materials.

In that era, there was much interest in the loan of artifacts, especially sacred objects used in Blackfoot ceremonies. In consultation with some members of the Blackfoot community, the PMA had adopted a position in which it occasionally loaned sacred ceremonial objects (primarily medicine bundles and pipes), but the much preferred route was to provide access to these objects so that replicas of them could be produced; these replicas were intended to go back into Blackfoot ceremonial life. The reasoning, as I understood it, was that Blackfoot ceremonialists with the proper rights could transfer the power of an older bundle housed in a museum collection into a newly made bundle, leaving the historical object in the museum world. It was believed in some quarters that Blackfoot people had the cultural prerogative to create these types of ceremonial materials and that they could, and should, continue to do that.

#### ESTABLISHING A LOAN PROCEDURE

During the late 1980s and through the 1990s, the Provincial Museum of Alberta acquired a number of important Plains ethnological collections, sometimes including additional ceremonial objects, in what might be considered another order of repatriation—returning to the people of Canada collections that had been residing in private, foreign hands. These were major acquisitions requiring significant funds; much of this work took place in the office of the museum's director, Phil Stepney, and with the direct support of elected officials. Decisions regarding loans and repatriation by and large took place in a similar way. I had a limited role in these processes, not unlike any other member of the museum executive. Throughout the early 1990s, the PMA position remained firm. Occasional short-term loans took place, but the process of bundle replication definitely continued to be the museum's preferred alternative. At roughly the same time, the Glenbow Museum had begun a program of lending pipes and bundles to Blackfoot ceremonialists on a longer-term basis.

Blackfoot disenchantment with the existing state of affairs resulted in a number of visits and representations to the Provincial Museum of Alberta

in the mid-1990s. By late 1997, Blackfoot representatives raised specific concerns directly with Premier Ralph Klein's office; this resulted in a request from the premier's office that the PMA (by then a part of Alberta Community Development) review its policy toward sacred ceremonial objects. By early 1998, the premier had also indicated that there must be a uniform way of dealing with ceremonial objects in museum collections in Alberta, one that both the Glenbow and the Provincial Museum of Alberta would follow, and that artifacts important to Aboriginal ceremonial societies would be loaned to First Nations communities.

It was at this point that I was asked by Alberta Community Development Deputy Minister Julian Nowicki and Assistant Deputy Minister William J. Byrne to play a direct role in bringing forward a coherent loan initiative. This involved consultation with respected ceremonialists in the three Blackfoot communities in Canada (Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika) in the first few months of 1998. For me personally, a defining moment in this process came during a luncheon meeting in Pincher Creek that the PMA's curator of ethnology, Susan Berry, had arranged with Piikani ceremonialists Allan Pard and Jerry Potts. Allan and Jerry had devoted a great deal of constructive thought to the issues. When I asked what it was that Blackfoot ceremonialists wanted to have happen in connection with loans, they advocated the creation of an advisory committee. The purpose of this committee would be to evaluate requests received by the PMA for the return of ceremonial objects. This committee would ensure that there was a community consensus for any loans the museum made, would assist with traditional arrangements to parallel the formal legal arrangements made with Blackfoot community institutions for loans, and would provide other advice as required. I explained these ideas to the deputy and assistant deputy ministers upon our return to Edmonton and was told to provide ministerial briefing material seeking permission to implement them.

Working toward these objectives involved intense activity during the spring of 1998. Each of the Blackfoot communities passed a band council resolution supporting the loans procedure and the committee's advisory role and nominating recognized ceremonialists to the committee. The initial members of the Blackfoot Confederacy Advisory Committee on Museum Relations were Frank Weasel Head, Narcisse Blood, and Martin Heavy Head from Kainai; Allan Pard, Jerry Potts, and Reg and Rose Crowshoe from Piikani; and Herman Yellow

Old Woman and Irvine Scalplock from Siksika. At that time, cabinet ministers regularly appeared before different standing policy committees of members of the legislative assembly in connection with their ministry activities. The Standing Policy Committee for Community Services reviewed and supported the loan procedure, as did cabinet and the premier's office. Five full committee meetings were held in the year that followed, with numerous other consultations also taking place. The loan procedure called for each community to name a borrowing institution—initially, the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society, for Kainai, the Oldman River Cultural Centre, for Piikani, and the Siksika Nation Museum.

Nine bundles or other items of ceremonial regalia were loaned to Siksika and Kainai First Nations in that interval. Another singular memory I have from that time period involved a trip to meet Andrew Weasel Fat, Andy Blackwater, and other Blackfoot ceremonialists concerning the return of a Horn Society (*iitskinaiksi*) bundle. Later that summer, it re-entered Blackfoot ceremonial life during the Kainai O'kaan, or Sun Dance, as it is often termed.

#### PRELIMINARY NEGOTIATIONS

By 1999, it was clear that further winds of change were to affect loan and repatriation activity. The Glenbow Museum, through its CEO, Robert Janes, hosted a national meeting on loans and repatriation as these affected First Nations, museums, and archives. One of the more prominent questions debated in that Calgary setting involved the need for overarching federal legislation concerning repatriation issues in Canada. Such legislation would, in some fashion, parallel the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) enacted earlier in the 1990s by the US government. At the end of the two-day session hosted by the Glenbow, there seemed to be near consensus among participants that such federal legislation was not required and that better solutions were to be found by individual Canadian jurisdictions and institutions finding suitable procedures for their unique circumstances, most particularly with respect to loan procedures. Although there has periodically been discussion of federal legislation in this realm for Canada, nothing concrete has ever materialized.

I say "near" consensus because I do have a clear recollection of Kainai ceremonialist Frank Weasel Head quietly but firmly dissenting from this majority

position: as I recall, Frank saw a need for a real legislative sanction to underlie loan and repatriation activities. These sentiments were soon to become significant with respect to Alberta's legislation.

We had thus arrived at a juncture where both of the major institutions holding First Nations ceremonial objects in Alberta, the Glenbow and the PMA, were loaning more and more bundles, pipes, and other artifacts to Blackfoot communities in Canada. These objects were re-entering active Blackfoot ceremonial life, where Blackfoot cultural precepts guided their transfer among participants in ceremonial societies. There were, however, several powerful considerations in this situation that had not been addressed. The loan process had the advantage of leaving the institutions, and therefore the Alberta government, in a position of responsibility toward the sacred and ceremonial objects, particularly should something go amiss. Loans in the museum world are ordinarily renewed on a periodical (often annual) basis. Yet, as Blackfoot people regained the use of loaned sacred and ceremonial objects, even the foreshortened formality of renewing loans proved to be difficult, no doubt serving as an unwelcome reminder of the unclear status of these important artifacts.

Another consideration might be said to involve "due process." As loans and repatriations proceeded across Canada and the United States, there were occasions when cultural property was returned to First Nation or Native American communities under rather casual, if well-intentioned, circumstances or in situations in which there could be some dispute about who should receive the artifact. In some cases, sacred ceremonial objects were provided to communities who had an interest in them, even though the communities from which the objects had come had not been consulted and in no way approved of such actions. Various scenarios could and did lead to litigation, especially in the United States. Institutions and governments had a tremendous responsibility to carry out loan and repatriation activities through careful deliberation and consultation, and there were genuine and important liability issues connected with such actions. From the Blackfoot perspective, the 49th parallel artificially separated the North Piikani (Apatohsippiikani), in Alberta, from the South Piikani (Ammskaapipiikani), in the Browning area of Montana, and there was every expectation that the use and transfer of sacred and ceremonial objects would also involve crossing the international border.

In all of my time working in the museum sphere, I did not meet curators or administrators who thought of ethnological collections primarily in terms of their monetary value. By “monetary value,” I mean that there was, and is, an international market for ethnological artifacts generally and sacred ceremonial objects in particular. Values of several hundred thousand dollars are not at all uncommon. Because the history of these artifacts had caused them to reside in a Western legal realm, they were also, as assets of the Crown, governed by formal auditing principles, among other things. By 1999, millions of dollars of these “assets” were circulating in Blackfoot ceremonial life, with widespread recognition that they would not be returning to government or museum collections.

The 1999 report to the Standing Policy Committee for Community Services concerning activities of the Blackfoot Confederacy Advisory Committee on Museum Relations clearly articulated these critical issues, also indicating that the ultimate Blackfoot desire was the outright repatriation of sacred and ceremonial objects. In this same interval, the Glenbow executive indicated that their institution was determined to move forward with repatriation of both the sacred ceremonial objects they had on loan and others remaining in their collections. Although the Glenbow wanted to proceed in this fashion, it was, in fact, the Government of Alberta that owned the great majority of the sacred and ceremonial objects that the Glenbow wished to repatriate. There were a number of intense discussions and communications surrounding this proposed course of action, at times shedding far more heat than light. The Glenbow had enlisted the aid of the premier’s office in this regard, and the premier was indeed highly supportive of this goal.

At the very end of 1999, matters came to a head within government. Alberta Community Development, the ministry then responsible for historical resources and the PMA, sought input from the Office of the Attorney General. This resulted in a clear affirmation that the Government of Alberta held the great majority of the Glenbow artifacts in public trust and that the Glenbow simply did not have the latitude to sever ties with these objects in the way that outright repatriation would entail. This ultimately resulted in a key meeting in the legislature. I accompanied Assistant Deputy Minister William J. Byrne to a preliminary gathering with the minister of Alberta Community Development, Stan Woloshyn, and Deputy Minister Donald Ford, reviewing key elements

of the repatriation file. Byrne and I did not attend the meeting immediately following between the premier, the minister, and the deputy minister, but my understanding a few moments after that meeting was that Premier Klein had been advised that the Glenbow simply could not proceed independently with repatriation. Klein was unhappy with the outcome but had no desire to proceed in a fashion that would transgress these legal constraints. He wanted to know what could be done to move constructively beyond the impasse that existed. The answer to that question was to create legislation that would allow both the Glenbow and the PMA to engage in actual repatriation, in which the government and museums would sever their ties to Blackfoot sacred and ceremonial objects, allowing them to circulate freely in Blackfoot ceremonial life.

#### DRAFTING ALBERTA'S REPATRIATION ACT

By the first week of 2000, we were actively engaged in framing the purpose and principles of proposed repatriation legislation, preparing for a consultative process. There was urgency to this work because the premier had committed to attending a ceremony on 14 January 2000 at the Glenbow Museum. There, he intended to sign a formal commitment that the Government of Alberta would fully repatriate 251 sacred and ceremonial objects that the Glenbow had already loaned or intended to loan. This commitment was to involve changes in the provincial legislation governing the Glenbow-Alberta Institute (allowing repatriation of the Glenbow artifacts), and the premier further intended to announce that the Government of Alberta would begin a consultation process that would result in broader legislation for the repatriation of sacred ceremonial objects to Alberta's First Nations from both institutions. At the ceremony on 14 January, Premier Klein spoke passionately about this from notes that several of us had prepared, making these very commitments; he also extemporized at some length in Blackfoot. At the conclusion of his remarks, Bruce Wolf Child sang an honour song for the premier.

Events had begun to move at an extraordinary pace, but they were soon to accelerate even more dramatically. The Glenbow ceremony had taken place on a Friday afternoon. Over the weekend, Minister Woloshyn had reflected upon the situation and determined that not only would the Glenbow-Alberta

Institute legislation be so amended for the next sitting of the legislature but that Alberta would proceed directly to drafting its own repatriation legislation. We had been intending to begin a consultation process regarding such legislation that we imagined might take a year. The following Monday, we suddenly found ourselves carrying out new instructions not only to prepare amendments to the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Act but also to provide comprehensive repatriation legislation that was to be read as Bill 2 in the legislative session beginning 1 March, now less than six weeks away.

Drafting legislation is by no means a simple process, but in the case of what was to become the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, the complexities were formidable. Advancing the time frame so dramatically meant that a consultative process became virtually impossible—all our efforts had to be directed toward framing the proposed legislation if we were to have any hope of being ready for 1 March. While the fundamentals of the situation were quite well known among Blackfoot communities in the area covered by Treaty 7, other First Nations there and in Treaties 6 and 8 had less familiarity with the issues. In fact, some communities were specifically asking that we not visit repatriation upon them at this particular time, as they had other pressing priorities.

Whereas we had been contemplating legislation that might have had a breadth comparable to NAGPRA, the foreshortened time frame meant that certain other matters simply could not be dealt with. NAGPRA speaks also to the reburial of ancient human remains and associated grave goods, for example. There was simply insufficient time to deal with these matters, and, in fact, it seemed to us that, at least from a Blackfoot ceremonial perspective, dealing with sacred ceremonial objects and human remains issues in the same piece of legislation could be construed as highly inappropriate. The time frame therefore narrowed the scope of the legislation.

Like other legislation, however, the act was intended to create enabling powers: most legislation receives its specific procedural form from regulations enacted pursuant to an act. The key was to ensure that those enabling powers were enshrined in the draft legislation, leaving further procedural detail to be worked out in regulations geared to individual First Nations, tribal councils, treaty organizations, or other future options that would meet community needs.

Yet this was not straightforward in terms of Canadian legal precepts, where the doctrine of interjurisdictional immunity holds sway. In accordance with this legal precept, matters exclusively concerning Aboriginal people can be dealt with only by the Crown in right of Canada; provincial legislation should not impinge upon this federal prerogative. A number of practical issues surfaced in this realm. While there was a strong desire to return sacred ceremonial objects to First Nations, there was little appetite to make these returns to individuals. Returning them to a First Nation with collective rights in the use of the objects—certainly the case for Blackfoot peoples—made a great deal of sense, but then, in terms of the Indian Act, chiefs and councils could not receive property in this way. So there needed to be some way to convey legal rights in the sacred ceremonial objects to other entities with a capacity to guide the process. Ultimately, entities like the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society came to serve in this role, as they had in the pre-existing loan process.

Our work thus required input from government officials working in a variety of areas, including law, Aboriginal Affairs, and historical resources. I was given the responsibility for guiding the drafting process, although a number of individuals in the Historical Resources and Cultural Facilities Division were involved, including Assistant Deputy Minister William J. Byrne, Susan Berry (Curator of Ethnology, PMA), and Jack Brink (Curator of Archaeology, PMA). We worked intensively through lengthy meetings, developing principles and the requisite enabling powers for the draft legislation.

In beginning this process, I remember a key conversation initiated by Susan Berry. This concerned the need for the legislation to address the pivotal issue of practice. One of the more influential consequences of the important dialogue between First Nations and Historical Resources Division staff members was the clear recognition—instilled into the senior levels of government over the years—that museum possession of sacred ceremonial objects actively impeded the collective conduct of Blackfoot ceremonial life. That is, certain pipes and bundles were required to fulfill roles in various ceremonial activities; their absence interfered with the renaissance in Blackfoot traditional and cultural life that had been going on since the 1970s. Moreover, through our committee work, we had come to see clearly that the practice of this ceremonial life had social, economic, linguistic, and cultural consequences rippling far beyond the immediate matter of repatriation. Pledging to receive pipes or

bundles involved important—at times, life-changing—commitments in all those spheres of life for Blackfoot people engaging in ceremonial practices. Our task was to identify and enshrine principles like this in the legislation. We worked toward specific objectives with a deadline looming, but, in retrospect, it seems to me that we were applying principles that paralleled notions of practice and treaty rights that the Supreme Court of Canada has clearly articulated for other spheres of activity.

With an outline of objectives, we began the next step in the process, that of working directly with legislative counsel. Staff members of this part of the attorney general's office specialize in turning "drafting instructions" for legislation (the principles and enabling powers we were specifying) into legal phraseology. This is a demanding process, because casual wording or imperfectly expressed definitions and procedures ultimately lead to flawed legislation that will neither survive legal tests nor meet practical objectives. Legislative counsel staff members have the task of probing and challenging definitions, assumptions, and procedures with this in mind, finally providing wording to deal with all the eventualities that can reasonably be foreseen. A final phase of the process saw a return to the initial higher-minded principles now being articulated in the preamble to the legislation. Actual legislation is the outcome of a collaborative process involving all of these parties and processes.

This phase of our work had to be completed well in advance of 1 March so that senior government officials, cabinet ministers, and the premier himself could approve of the legislation in its draft form. We also needed to alert First Nations across the province that this legislation would receive reading in the forthcoming session of the legislature. At the time, the government did not share draft legislation with stakeholders. Susan Berry and I had the delicate task of approaching treaty organizations and communities to explain in general terms what was about to take place and to solicit broader support for the legislation. This was vital in its own right, but it was equally important because the reading of this legislation was clearly going to be an event of some pomp and pageantry in the legislature, involving many First Nations representatives. We greatly appreciated the consideration of individuals such as Norman Calliou, then the executive director for the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations, in letting us speak with elected officials and Elders in these rather general terms.

LAUNCHING THE ACT AND FRAMING REGULATIONS

Much of our effort then turned toward planning for what was clearly going to be a moment of great symbolic as well as practical importance. While one might attempt a chronology of events surrounding the tabling of First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act on 1 March 2000 in the legislature, in truth, my present sense of that time is more like a kaleidoscope of intense activities. Just prior to 1 March, celebrations and ceremonies were to begin in the Provincial Museum of Alberta. There was, for example, to be a pipe ceremony making use of the circle in the Gallery of Aboriginal Culture. This was to be attended by a variety of Elders and ceremonialists, as well as by Pearl Calahasen, then the minister of Aboriginal Affairs, who would provide first reading of the proposed act in the legislature. There was a hurried but important meeting in the museum cafeteria involving respected ceremonialists from across the province, in which it was agreed that a distinguished Frog Lake Elder, (the late) Pete Waskahat, would preside over the pipe ceremony and offer a blessing for the events to follow. Briefing notes, guest lists, speaking notes, media briefings, and a prayer for the speaker of the legislative assembly, Ken Kowalski, all had to be drafted for approval. There was a swirl of media activity for which press releases and talking points for participants were required. And there needed to be coordination for yet other important events, such as the honour song to be sung by Martin Heavy Head for the premier as he led ministers into the chamber for the opening of the session. Amidst the considerable pageantry of the day, there were also occasional moments to reflect quietly with individuals in both government and First Nations circles who had worked toward this moment. The First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act received its second reading a few days later; in May, it received royal assent.

In a way, the final chapters of the legislation remain to be written. The act receives its full force through regulations written pursuant to its powers, and this capacity to generate regulations has yet to be fully exploited in relation to other Alberta First Nations. In the Blackfoot case, these regulations (Blackfoot First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Regulation, Alta Reg 96/2004) were developed in what turned out to be a longer interval between 2001 and 2004, a length of time I regretted. Several factors contributed to this delay. Many of us who had been transferred into the provincial museum in

the 1990s had now returned to the divisional headquarters as part of a newly formed Historic Resources Management Branch, reconstituted because it was apparent that earlier changes were impeding Alberta's regulatory work for historical resources more generally. The pace of work remained furious, with the museum finishing a series of high-profile millennium exhibits. The regulatory work connected with the historical resource management sphere soared as Alberta entered another boom period. The Government of Alberta also began coming to terms with its responsibilities to consult with First Nations about the impact of development on treaty rights, a critical and time-consuming process that would play out in the first decade of the new millennium.<sup>1</sup>

Another factor was the inherent complexity of the drafting process, which now needed to specify yet more exact details of the return process, again subject to the necessary scrutiny of legislative counsel. More profoundly, there existed a genuine tension between the public needs of legislation and the private world of Blackfoot ceremonial life. From a government perspective, there was a need for open disclosure of its intended action for any given repatriation to ensure that it was following an appropriate course of action that would allow others to intervene if they had an interest.

With respect to a means for public disclosure, we looked to parallels with the provincial designation process. When the minister decides to designate an archaeological site or a historic building, for example, notice of this action is posted in the *Alberta Gazette*, allowing others to express an interest or concern. Similar provisions exist in the Blackfoot repatriation regulation, but, of course, these needs do not necessarily parallel Blackfoot cultural precepts. At one point, Frank Weasel Head, Rhonda Delorme (undertaking consultation on the regulations at the time), and I sat in Old St. Stephen's College, the divisional headquarters on the University of Alberta campus, and talked about a draft of the regulations. Frank had difficulty with the intrusiveness of the regulations, such as the announcement process. So I said to Frank words to the effect, "As much as possible we would like the regulations to be sensitive to Blackfoot cultural interests and not tread in areas that are private, so let us rework that." And he said words to the effect, "I'm tempted to say just go ahead with it as it is, because I can see you are willing to change it." It was almost as though my offer to change the draft was sufficient for something bound to have imperfections in ensuring the transit of a sacred ceremonial object from residing in the museum

world as a government “asset” back into the Blackfoot ceremonial world. In any case, these and other factors conspired to delay the implementation of the Blackfoot regulations until 2004.

Return of Blackfoot sacred ceremonial objects through the loan process did continue apace in this interval, however, with loans becoming repatriations when the Blackfoot regulations came into force. The First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act provides the continuing capacity for other First Nations communities or tribal organizations to enter into consultations about drafting regulations for Alberta collections of sacred ceremonial objects significant to them.

#### SOME REFLECTIONS ON ALBERTA’S REPATRIATION LEGISLATION

In 2002, I had the good fortune to be invited as a guest speaker for an Australian conference involving archaeologists and linguists. This was held in the rarified surroundings of the new National Museum of Australia in Canberra. Knowing that similar issues existed in that country, I created an opportunity to meet with Australian museum colleagues working on repatriation matters. In traveling to that meeting, however, I found myself on a long taxi ride to warehouse office space on the periphery of Canberra. When I inquired as to why my colleagues were so far away from their museum, they responded, “Oh, you know, repatriation work . . . pariahs of the museum world.”

In some instances for those of us working in the museum world, misconceptions about repatriation would arise. In the wake of the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, for example, media commentary from other institutions in Canada wondered why Alberta thought it had any prerogative to legislate with respect to their collections. This was simply not the case: the Alberta repatriation legislation dealt strictly with collections that the Alberta government had acquired. It was not uncommon to be asked in other circumstances how NAGPRA worked for collections in Alberta, as though the Alberta legislation was subsidiary to the American legislation. It is true that First Nations in Alberta can be affected by NAGPRA in cases where American institutions might hold objects of cultural patrimony that originated in this country. NAGPRA has no effect with respect to collections owned by

the Government of Alberta, however, and the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act is not in any way connected with NAGPRA.

I also recall being asked what the government would do if a repatriated sacred ceremonial object were to somehow go astray, for any of a variety of reasons failing to re-enter ceremonial life. This question betrays a fundamental misapprehension of the legislation: the effect of repatriation is to convey the Crown's title in the object to the First Nation. This ends the government's connection with the sacred ceremonial object—the government no longer has a say in its fate. Repatriation marks the beginning of renewed First Nations responsibility for the sacred ceremonial object. I will conclude by exploring this theme briefly, because I believe that in such actions lie seeds for hope about future directions in the relationship between First Nations and broader Canadian society.

My Australian colleagues, in the response quoted above, were no doubt referring to the way repatriation issues evoke much stronger emotions than simple misconceptions. Certainly, for many in the museum world, the axiom would be that things come *into* museums—they do not go *out*. Often, powerful emotions would come crowded together. There were meetings in which individuals on either side of the table might speak with anger or intransigence. I recollect one such incident where, rather than being provoked by angry words from the museum side of the table, a Blackfoot ceremonialist instead expressed the Horn Society perspective with great dignity and perseverance in a way that moved me considerably.

On the day that one of the first bundles was to be loaned under the new process, an occasion on which a Blackfoot couple came directly to the museum, I sensed in the museum a mood of suspicion in some quarters and sadness in others. Having, in some cases, curated these objects for virtually their entire careers, staff members had honest concerns about the course of action upon which we were all departing. One of the understandings I came to have was that Blackfoot people have a strong sense of reverence for medicine bundles and pipes, very like the attitude that one would exhibit toward children, albeit very powerful children. As we walked down the hallway that morning, the wife of the elderly couple transporting the bundle gently cradled it in her arms; when we walked through the museum entrance into the sunlight, her husband burst into an honour song. The contrasting emotions, culminating in reverence, pride

and joy, made for a moment I will not forget. I returned to my desk and wrote a brief email to the assistant deputy minister indicating that the bundle was on its way—the premier had asked specifically to be informed when this had taken place.

While it is true that there was apprehension at the Provincial Museum of Alberta about the consequences of loans and repatriation, it is important to point out that a decade later, none of those fears has been realized. Insofar as I know, the various bundles, pipes, and other forms of ceremonial regalia continue to be governed by Blackfoot protocols and to circulate in the various ceremonial societies. During the 1990s, an Alberta cabinet minister had mused about how some people were “having more rights than others,” an allusion that certainly included First Nations aspirations. Considerable discussion can indeed go on concerning rights in the absence of that other, critical dimension—responsibilities. There is compelling research in this regard, showing that even where Native American and First Nations communities have access to considerable resource wealth, communities and tribal administrations generally do poorly when they are not responsible for their own affairs.<sup>2</sup> Correspondingly, a number of economically disadvantaged Native American and First Nations communities have done very well while in command of their own affairs, the key ingredient clearly being that of taking independent responsibility. In my view, the legislation has been a vital instance of a government yielding and First Nations assuming a responsibility of paramount cultural significance.

I am sure that for many First Nations people, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act might be seen simply as redress for previous wrongs. Some thoughtful First Nations observers have probed beyond this and have seen in repatriation opportunities for reconciliation between the larger Canadian society and First Nations communities. My views about subsequent consultation with First Nations were very much affected by learning from the repatriation process. In my own work, I was to move quickly to the matter of government consultation with First Nations about the impact of development on treaty rights and traditional uses of the landscape. Decisions from the Supreme Court of Canada were creating important change in this area, and industry, too, was clamouring for government to set a direction in its consultation policies toward First Nations. In this newer context, much of

our heritage work concerned cultural landscapes and places of historical and traditional importance.

I was privileged to be able to continue working in this realm with Narcisse Blood, one of the Kainai ceremonialists who had been directly involved in the loan and repatriation work. At times, Narcisse spoke of his interest in “reverse archaeology”—the possibility of archaeologists and First Nations together returning archaeological artifacts excavated from what could be regarded as sacred ceremonial contexts, such as Medicine Wheels. This struck a chord with me because I did regret that the pace of the repatriation process may have caused us all to miss an important opportunity for reconciliation in the realm of ethnological collections.

Many difficult decisions—and, in some cases, even the actions of “bad actors”—resulted in sacred ceremonial objects entering North American museums. Yet in reviewing the history of the PMA’s acquisition of sacred ceremonial objects, I was struck by the many diligent and thoughtful actions, on the part of both the Elders of that day (the 1960s and early 1970s in Alberta) and museum staff members. It is perhaps not well known that, in seven instances, Blackfoot sacred ceremonial objects were not simply purchased by the PMA. They were formally received through transfer ceremonies, with museum staff members standing in appropriate roles for the transfer process. Time did not permit formal transfer of the sacred ceremonial objects back to the Blackfoot, and I understand that, at least for some, such an action may not have been welcome. Still, such transfer, through Blackfoot protocol, of those particular sacred ceremonial objects back to the societies involved would have brought highly symbolic closure and created further opportunities for greater mutual understanding.

In 2006, another unfortunate instance of vandalism affected Okotoks, or what is referred to as the Big Rock, south of Calgary, a place of great cultural significance in Blackfoot oral tradition. At the time, we were developing consultation protocols concerning cultural landscapes, protocols very much informed by our repatriation experiences. After the vandalism incident, I turned to Allan Pard, who was by then working as a senior manager in Aboriginal Affairs for the Alberta government, and Narcisse Blood for direction on what to do, since we intended eventually to try removing the offending spray paint. Allan and Narcisse felt that there would first need to be a cleansing ceremony; they presided over this ceremony on a brilliant fall afternoon. It was attended by former Chief Roy Fox of Kainai, the reeve, the MLA, the vice-principal of the Okotoks



Figure 29. A cleansing ceremony at Okotoks in September 2006, presided over by Iitskinaiksi (Horn Society) grandfathers Allan Pard and Narcisse Blood, after an incident of vandalism. Photograph courtesy of John Ives.

high school, staff members of our Historical Resources Division, the couple who had reported the vandalism, University of Calgary professors, the president of the Archaeological Society of Alberta, and a representative of the RCMP. Unbidden, the officer came in red serge (fig. 29).

For me, and I suppose for many of us, we may sometimes go to and from our daily work without a great deal of reflection. That particular evening, I said to my wife that I had taken part in something important that day. The ceremony created a deep sense of goodwill among all its participants. Narcisse spoke thoughtfully about the task before us, indicating that although Okotoks represented a place critically important to Blackfoot heritage, it was a place that could be protected only by creating in mainstream society a wider understanding of its significance.<sup>3</sup>

However difficult were the circumstances that saw so many sacred ceremonial objects enter museum collections, and whatever imperfections the repatriation legislation and process may have, the end result is something in which we should see hope. Reconciliation goes beyond redress: it also creates understanding. And understanding carries with it the prospect for respect. These ideals must continue to be cultivated in emerging new relationships between First Nations and broader Canadian society.

#### NOTES

- 1 The legal landscape for consultation of this sort continues to evolve in the present decade, particularly with the Supreme Court of Canada ruling of 24 June 2014 in *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia* (2014 SCC 44).
- 2 See, for example, Stephen Cornell, "Indigenous Peoples, Poverty, and Self-Determination in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States," in *Indigenous Peoples and Poverty: An International Perspective*, edited by Robyn Eversole, John-Andrew McNeish, and Alberto D. Cimaromore, pp. 199–225 (London: Zed Books, 2005).
- 3 I was struck by the precise parallels between his remarks and those of then Justice Beverly McLachlin in her commentary on another matter involving First Nations heritage before the Supreme Court of Canada. In *Kitkatla Band v. British Columbia* (Minister of Small Business, Tourism and Culture), 2002 SCC 31, [2002] 2 S.C.R. 146, now Chief Justice McLachlin wrote that First Nations' heritage "must be protected, not only as an essential part of the collective material memory which belongs to the history and identity of First Nations, but also as part of the shared heritage of all British Columbians."

# 9

## *The Blackfoot Repatriation: A Personal Epilogue*

ROBERT R. JANES

In 1990, at the request of the Weasel Moccasin family, the Glenbow first returned a sacred bundle, in the form of a loan to the Kainai Nation. It was a quiet, uncelebrated, and precedent-setting event in the museum's history. Hugh Dempsey, then the Glenbow's chief curator, and I made the decision to return the bundle through a series of discussions in the fall of 1990. Dempsey made the arrangements with the Weasel Moccasin family, and we proceeded with no senior management discussion, policy development, or board approval. In retrospect, our low-profile approach in these untested waters was sensible, since repatriation was either contentious or ignored among mainstream Canadian museums at the time. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Canadian Museums Association (CMA) Task Force on Museums and First

Peoples first met in 1990, and their work was just beginning (see Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Association 1992, 1–11).

The task force would eventually recommend the repatriation of all Aboriginal human remains in museums, as well as other approaches including restitution, transfer of title, replication, and co-management of Aboriginal cultural patrimony. None of these, however, was part of mainstream museum practice when the Glenbow loaned the sacred bundle to the Weasel Moccasin family. As co-chair of the Central Working Committee of the AFN/CMA task force, I sensed from many of my colleagues that sharing museum authority, responsibility, and collections with Aboriginal peoples was fraught with risk and even constituted a slippery slope with unknown consequences. Nonetheless, the task force persevered, and its progressive recommendations are a matter of record, even if they have not been fully embraced by most museums in Canada.

In this essay, I provide an epilogue on the repatriation work at the Glenbow and its importance in the Glenbow's history as a public institution, with the intention of revealing more of the context and motivation for this work than normally appears in the public record. This includes an overview of the various personal and professional considerations underlying the decisions that were made, as well as a description of the vagaries of what actually happened.

#### PERSONAL READINESS

Museums, as organizations, develop distinctive traits and characteristics over time, and these, in turn, have their origins in the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the people who lead, manage, and work in these institutions. The result is a complex interplay of personal and professional experiences and knowledge, a process that unfolds continuously throughout the museum at all levels. Given the tradition of positivism that largely guides the thinking of those who are academically trained, it is commonplace to assume objectivity in all actions and events that transpire in learned settings, museums included. I suggest that this assumption of objectivity is, for the most part, false and limiting: there is much more personality and subjectivity at play than one might care to admit. This is certainly the case with respect both to the origin and development of repatriation at the Glenbow and to my role in these events. My values and

beliefs concerning the interaction between museums and communities are best understood within the context of the perspective I brought with me when I became the president and CEO of the museum in 1989. I had a certain mental readiness and willingness to listen that can be traced back to both professional and personal experiences.

My education and early experiences as an archaeologist were seminal ingredients in my later work in museums, and this essay is a welcome opportunity to recognize their value. I earned an undergraduate degree in anthropology and a doctorate in archaeology. Perhaps the most important guiding principle that I recall from my university experience was attributed to the eminent anthropologist Sol Tax, who was said to have had “the respect not to decide for others what is in their best interests” (Hinshaw 1971, vii). This fundamental principle requires that we allow people the dignity to make their own decisions about those things that affect their lives. This cogent advice has remained with me as a lodestar, although my fealty to this imperative has been uneven, especially as the CEO of the Glenbow, when I had no choice but to make certain decisions on behalf of the organization.

In the course of doing the archaeological research for my PhD, I spent a considerable amount of time in the Northwest Territories. Early on in my research, it occurred to me that, even though I was devoting five years of my life to researching and writing a dissertation on the archaeology and ethnohistory of the Dene (Northern Athapaskans) of the western Northwest Territories, I had actually never met one of these individuals. This was the early 1970s, and most scholars assumed that the archaeological record alone was a sufficient source of knowledge: there was no need to interact with the people whose legacy it was. My field research included doing archaeological survey work for what was then the National Museum of Man, in Ottawa (now the Canadian Museum of History, in Gatineau, Québec), as part of a mitigation program in advance of the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline.

Our field crews consisted entirely of students and archaeologists from museums and universities in southern Canada, who were never encouraged or advised to gather information from the residents and Elders who lived in the small villages along the colossal Mackenzie River. This region has been inhabited for millennia by one of the world’s last great hunting cultures, and the local and traditional knowledge of the contemporary inhabitants was obviously of

inestimable value in the search for the archaeological record. Instead of consulting with them, however, we ignored such knowledge, steadfastly committed to, and blinded by, the positivism and ethnocentrism that accompany academic and scientific training. I struggled to ignore this as we travelled the length of the river, observing the Dene going about their lives while we remained secure in our detached, scientific bubble.

After two summer field seasons, I was distinctly uncomfortable with this method of doing research. In retrospect, our approach to field research was not dissimilar to the British Royal Navy's sojourns into the Canadian Arctic in search of the Northwest Passage. Materially self-contained and largely dismissive of the accumulated knowledge of the Indigenous peoples, Franklin and his crew blundered their way into oblivion. The decision was clear—I had to meet the people whose archaeology I was studying. Unlike Franklin and his men, my hardship was mental, not physical (starvation and exposure), and I left graduate school temporarily to spend six months in the bush near the Arctic Circle—northeast of Tulita (formerly Fort Norman) in the Northwest Territories. Living with seven families of North Slavey Dene in a large hunting camp on Willow Lake, my wife, Priscilla, and I were humbled daily by the ease with which they navigated intricate lakes and rivers without benefit of map or compass (much less GPS), endured the cold of all-night beaver hunts, created beautiful beadwork, fished and hunted for their food, and taught their children the formidable challenges of life in the bush (Janes 1983a).

The Willow Lakers' personal and social values stressed individual autonomy, egalitarianism, decision making by consensus, and limitations on the exercise of power. They welcomed us with generosity and humility, and I observed all of these traditional values as the Willow Lakers went about their lives. We gained a profound respect for the importance of cultural diversity embodied in the Dene way of life—their world view, values, and competencies—having been given an intimate glimpse of their masterly adaptation to one of the most unforgiving environments in the world. At the same time, the Willow Lake Dene were not pristine hunters suspended in time—they were individuals and families who were playing out their lives in the midst of profound cultural and environmental change. These lessons gained from life on the land were to shape, unwittingly, not only my archaeological research but also my approach to organizational life and museum practice.

PROFESSIONAL READINESS

Having finished graduate school in 1976, my personal and scholarly interests in the Dene and the Northwest Territories led me to apply for the position of founding director of the Northwest Territories' first professional museum—the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC), in Yellowknife. Thus began my next apprenticeship in learning outside the dictates of convention. In the mid-1970s, about 60 percent of the Northwest Territories' population was Native born, that is, Métis, Dene, or Inuit. These individuals held key positions in the bureaucracy, as well as ministerial posts as members of the legislative assembly, and, as director of the PWNHC, I therefore reported to various Aboriginal individuals. Unlike the marginalization experienced by so many Aboriginal people in urban settings, these Indigenous northerners were the ones who wore the “three-piece suits,” who were elected to the legislative assembly, and who made many of the decisions governing life in the Northwest Territories.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the provincial and federal governments in the rest of Canada, the territorial government is based not on political parties but on consensus building among the elected members of the legislative assembly. This led naturally to the practice of consulting the diverse population of the region as an integral part of decision making. Equally as important at that time was the activism among Aboriginal political organizations, who were insisting upon their rights and responsibilities and the need for self-determination. The eventual founding of Canada's newest territory, Nunavut, is testimony to this early activism and the desire for full participation.

Living and working in this unusual environment, where nine Aboriginal languages are simultaneously translated during the proceedings of the territorial legislature, also left me with an unorthodox understanding of collections—at least with respect to the normative thinking of mainstream museum professionals. I have always been fascinated by the potent quality of objects and their mute stories, and this undoubtedly underlies my lifelong commitment to museums. But working from 1976 to 1989 as the director of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre introduced me to various complexities and considerations that had not yet occurred to me as an aspiring museum professional. In the entire Northwest Territories, for example, there were sixty-five communities, only about twenty-five of which could be reached by road. Visiting the

remainder required boat or aircraft. Many of these communities wanted museums to preserve and highlight their cultural traditions but not in a manner that conformed to professional museum practice—that is, not in a permanent collection in an environmentally controlled building.

Mainstream museum practice dictated, however, that a proper museum had to have environmental controls, because without them the collections would deteriorate. It was my duty to convey this requirement to communities, which I did with full conviction until I began to listen more carefully. It soon became clear to me that the majority of people in the Northwest Territories' remote communities were not interested in adhering to professional museum practice, not out of disrespect but because of their particular world view and the consequences of geographic isolation. They used objects from their cultural patrimony every day, while also celebrating the traditions and value of these objects. It was not uncommon for hunting tools to be "curated" and used for generations (Janes 1983a, 99–100). In addition, replicas of bygone material culture were thought to be perfectly satisfactory for museum exhibitions. In many cases, the preservation and celebration of intangible cultural heritage—music, dance, and storytelling—were the focus of concern, not the preservation of objects.

With the advice and guidance of Dene and Inuit Elders, I, too, developed a more informed understanding of the role of objects in the lives of these peoples. My apprenticeship was a rich one, unfolding wherever I travelled in this vast region. For example, the Inuit Cultural Institute in what is now Arviat, Nunavut, wanted to establish what was described as "a museum-based learning centre," and I served on their advisory committee as a museum "expert." One of the Inuit Elders at a planning meeting, the renowned Eric Anoee, listened attentively to the long list of concerns that my colleague and I had about the preservation and interpretation of objects and specimens in their learning centre. He replied succinctly, "We are not a materialistic people; we live by muscle, mind and spirit" (Heath 1997, 156).

I listened, I learned, and I lost my preoccupation with the assumed permanence of objects. This was replaced with a growing concern about how objects that end up in museum collections are used and valued by the people and cultures who made them. My appreciation for the situational meaning of objects was to become a decisive ingredient in the decision to embark upon the

Blackfoot repatriation. My new perspective on traditional museum practice was a marked departure from conventional wisdom, and I felt compelled to share this thinking more broadly with the profession. I published several papers during this period (Janes 1982, 1983b, 1987) in an effort to explain my unorthodox perspective. My hope was to engender some debate about the limitations of the museum profession's normative understanding of objects, but instead a resounding silence ensued.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS: THE GLENBOW MUSEUM

Although our decision to return the first bundle was seminal in retrospect, various other factors and influences coalesced to bring about a change in conventional museum practice at the Glenbow. The Blackfoot were pushing for the return of sacred material, and the Glenbow was in a position either to listen deeply, and respond accordingly, or to maintain the status quo. The decision to listen to the Blackfoot and encourage them was, in part, a result of various organizational factors discussed below; these are also important in understanding the genesis of the eventual repatriation.

When I arrived as the new director of the Glenbow in 1989, attracted by its multidisciplinary composition and considerable reputation, there were major changes in the offing. I have written about the Glenbow's organizational changes elsewhere (see Janes 2013) and will summarize here only several salient points that are germane to understanding organizational readiness for change. The provincial funding agreement with the museum had come to an end at the time of my arrival, and there was no agreement in place to ensure ongoing provincial support. In fact, by 1992, provincial funding for the Glenbow had declined by 26 percent, which prompted the development of a strategic plan as a means of securing multi-year funding from the province. More on this later.

Although financial concerns were a major stimulus for change, several other factors contributed to a perceptible, albeit largely unspoken, need for change at the Glenbow. To begin with, the museum had been without a director for well over a year prior to my arrival, and all important decisions and initiatives had been put on hold. As a result, the museum was seriously drifting by the time I assumed the position. In addition, there was an undercurrent of staff

frustration with the size and rigidity of the Glenbow's management committee. The financial uncertainty with regard to the Alberta government, the organizational drifting pending the appointment of an executive director, and the feeling among staff that they were being overmanaged had combined to create dissatisfaction among the staff. Strategic planning was adopted to define and chart the organizational change required.

The strategic planning was inclusive and comprehensive, and it identified five key areas as a framework for the Glenbow's ongoing growth and vitality (see Janes 2013, 8–132). One of the key areas—the Glenbow mandate—included a commitment to Native involvement: “Glenbow will identify Canada's native peoples as key players in developing balanced programs and services, recognizing that this represents both a continuation and an enhancement of current programs and services for native communities” (Glenbow Museum 1991, 7). As vague and modest as this may seem, this constituted a formal recognition of the role of Native peoples in the work of the museum and signalled the opportunity and responsibility to “enhance” this work, whatever form or expression that might take.

As a final consideration in this assessment of organizational readiness, I must note that the Glenbow had a strong tradition of hierarchical management, which gave me a great deal of unquestioned authority and influence as the director, and later as the president and CEO when my title changed. This organizational context allowed me the opportunity to align my personal perspective with the status and resources of the Glenbow. In Gerry Conaty's words (pers. comm., 18 June 2012), “Glenbow's CEO has a great deal of authority and, unlike government museums, the personality of the CEO really does affect what the museum is and *does*.” It is only in retrospect, however, that I am able to acknowledge the benefits of this power relationship and its importance for the work we did with the Blackfoot. I have never been a strong adherent of hierarchical management and have been openly critical of it in my writing. In fact, I think that the societal worship of hierarchy and the lone CEO model of leadership are unquestioningly detrimental to organizational commitment and creativity. However, it is questionable whether repatriation would have unfolded as it did in the absence of an empathetic director with sufficient authority, since time, resources, and attention were required to build and sustain the growing relationship with the Blackfoot. This we did.

PRELUDE TO REPATRIATION

As noted above, I arrived at the Glenbow at a difficult time, but uncertain finances, organizational drifting, and a desire for change were not the only challenges. The museum's staff members were variously exhausted, exhilarated, and puzzled in the wake of "The Spirit Sings" exhibition. The relationship between museums in general and Aboriginal peoples was fragile—marked by controversy, protest, and accusation, as well as by a general dislike and mistrust of museums on the part of Aboriginal peoples. In the words of George Erasmus, former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations:

The Spirit Sings exhibition sparked a fair amount of controversy in Canada. It raised questions that museums had to deal with and a lot of questions that Native people had to address. . . . What kind of role should Native people play in the presentation of their own past, their own history? (Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Association 1992, 3)

"The Spirit Sings" served as the critical catalyst to launch the work of the Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Task Force mentioned earlier, but, meanwhile, museums were left to manage their Aboriginal relations as best they could. This became clear to me when, not long after I had started work at the Glenbow, two Blackfoot men came to my office to reveal a dream they had had that required them to acquire certain objects from the Glenbow's collections. I was taken aback by the novelty and sincerity of this request, and I had no experience to draw on. I knew about the overall importance of dreams in First Nations cosmology, but, in my experience, they had never been connected to the return of museum objects. I also had no reason to mistrust the legitimacy of this request. Having no precedents to draw on, I consulted with various members of the Glenbow staff, who were all of like mind. "We don't do that sort of thing," I was told.

This admonishment was at odds with my own curiosity and also precluded any further learning that might assist in repairing the fractious relationship between museums and First Nations. The Glenbow happened to be in the homeland of the Blackfoot and held world-renowned collections of their material

culture. Simply rejecting this request with no committed follow-up was facile and unreasonable, for all of these reasons. At the same time, the Glenbow did not have any processes, procedures, or collective thinking in place that could guide the decision making with respect to the return of First Nations objects. Nor did any other museum in Canada.

Coincidentally, we had also been searching for a curator of ethnology, and the decision was now clear to me. We needed an individual who not only was sensitive to the increasing ambiguity surrounding the stewardship of First Nations collections but was also energetic and well-trained and who possessed a track record that demonstrated a commitment to rethinking traditional museum practices. This person was Gerald Conaty, and he assumed the position in the fall of 1990. One of the most obvious requirements of sound leadership is to hire the best people you can find. This we did. The Glenbow was now committed to a new course of action, one based on the alignment of several key factors, including the recognition of Native involvement in the new strategic plan, the hiring of Conaty, and my personal and professional predilections.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP UNFOLDS

As mentioned above, the Glenbow's first loan of sacred material to the Blackfoot people took place in the fall of 1990. This was a loan, not a transfer of ownership. The Weasel Moccasin family was to keep the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle for four months to allow them time to undertake various ceremonies. After this period, the bundle was to be returned to the museum for four months before going back to the family. This cycle was to continue for as long as both parties agreed. Hugh Dempsey, then the Glenbow's assistant director of Collections, oversaw these arrangements, but the loan was not widely discussed in the museum. As noted earlier, we did not have any framework of procedures, values, and long-range plans to support and guide this initiative. This was a work in progress.

Although this early initiative was an unofficial and isolated one, it was important. It was both a catalyst and a demonstration of what the Glenbow could become as an institution if serious attention were paid to the meaning and importance of First Nations' needs and aspirations. This commitment

needed to be embedded not only in the Glenbow's purpose and strategic goals but also in everyday practice. There were unknown opportunities for the experimentation and innovation that would be necessary if we hoped to develop mutually constructive working relationships with First Nations, but, in order to accomplish this, we needed a senior curator with the willingness, passion, and time to create and maintain these relationships. This work began with the appointment of Gerald Conaty.

At the time, even the loan of sacred objects, much less the outright transfer of ownership, was new and experimental, both for the Glenbow and for the museum profession in general, given that the prevailing perspective on repatriation was conservative, if not reactionary. There was widespread concern that any repatriation would be precedent setting and would result in a "run on the collections," with unforeseen and calamitous consequences. Among the Glenbow's senior management, however, repatriation was not especially a topic of interest or concern, although some individuals were skeptical and viewed this work as a personal interest of mine. In retrospect, I don't think the nature and meaning of this pioneering work were widely recognized, either by those doing the work or, more broadly, throughout the Glenbow. This is not really surprising: events often take on meaning only in retrospect, when time and reflection are brought to bear. Although our commitment to developing enduring relationships with the Blackfoot was groundbreaking, it was not broadly celebrated by the institution in the same manner that a successful exhibition, program, or fundraising event would have been celebrated. I assume personal responsibility for this lack of internal promotion.

I also think that the Glenbow's Board of Governors would have resisted had we tried to transfer the ownership of objects and collections at the outset. In fact, it took roughly ten years of mutual education and trust building among the Blackfoot, the board, Gerry Conaty, various other members of the Glenbow staff, and me before we decided to repatriate the sacred material. Maintaining the trust and the confidence of the board, as well as building their awareness, was a task in its own right, since board membership changed regularly under a policy of limited and staggered terms. In 1990–91, we also developed the First Nations Advisory Council (FNAC), which provided a critically important context for our evolving work. The FNAC was made up of representatives from the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Nakoda (Stoney), Tsuu T'ina, and Cree First Nations

(see appendix 1). Their role was to guide the Glenbow in all aspects of our work that touched on First Nations issues. Two of the FNAC members did not agree with the idea of returning sacred material, since they were not involved in traditional ceremonies and were critical of the “old ways.” While we respectfully acknowledged their counsel in this instance, we chose not to follow it. Nonetheless, the FNAC was a formal recognition of the role of First Nations in a mainstream museum and of the importance of their guidance, knowledge, experience, and counsel in museum affairs.

Thus began a decade of building relationships in a variety of forms, including hiring Blackfoot staff in the ethnology section, allowing ritual smudging in the collection storage areas, and attending sacred ceremonies on the reserves. We also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society, a Kainai organization, concerning access to sacred material, the co-management of collections, and the repatriation of ceremonial items (fig. 30). Most importantly, we were getting to know Blackfoot individuals personally. Dozens of small and seemingly inconsequential interactions became the building blocks of mutual trust and respect. Underlying this process of learning and growth was my trust in Gerry Conaty—a prerequisite for the freedom, authority, and responsibility he required to nurture our relationships with the Blackfoot. His official title did not adequately herald his work: he was one of those informal leaders who have yet to be sufficiently acknowledged in the conduct of organizational life.

Our evolving relationship with the Blackfoot had much to do with risk taking—an uncommon activity in mainstream museums. We were not always successful. One of the early sore points was how to deal with individuals who had borrowed sacred items and then severed ties with the museum. After much reflection, we concluded that this was the price of learning and growing, and we consciously rejected the slippery slope argument—the reasoning that continues to be used by organizations and individuals to defend the status quo for fear that moving even slightly from one’s position risks the loss of everything. We endorsed a different perspective, namely, that “the abuse of a thing does not bar its use” (Hardin 1986, 62–63). Because one person failed to return a loan for renewal did not mean that we should stop making loans. Risk taking and failure are unavoidable when one embraces work that is new, unfamiliar, and free of established precedents.



Figure 30. A blanket exchange at the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Mookakin Cultural and Heritage Society (Kainai First Nation) and the Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 6 March 1998. Left to right: Robert G. Peters, chair of the Glenbow Board of Governors, Robert Janes, Premier Ralph Klein, and Narcisse Blood, chair of the Mookaakin Society. Photograph by Ron Marsh, courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

Our risk taking with the Blackfoot mirrored a similar attempt to encourage risk taking throughout the Glenbow as an organization. Staff members were encouraged and enabled to take risks in their daily work and to identify habits of thinking, routines, and ruts that discourage new ways of thinking and working. With this in mind, we installed a principle in our strategic plan stating that rules or procedures would not be enacted to protect people from making mistakes. Without this proviso, the lowest common denominator prevails. The permission to make mistakes was a key ingredient in our First Nations work, and it helped model the behaviour that is so necessary to a mindful and progressive museum.

It is revealing to reflect on the meaning and complexities of the Glenbow's evolving relationship with the Blackfoot. For example, it became apparent that the reason why the Blackfoot invited us to medicine bundle openings and other traditional ceremonies, such as the O'kaan and the Kano'tsisissin (All Smoke) ceremony, was to familiarize Glenbow staff with their way of life. The assumption was that if we became more familiar with the richness of their traditions, our trust and respect would grow, and this is precisely what happened. I was deeply moved when, in 1995, Daniel Weasel Moccasin and his family gave me one of Daniel's father's Blackfoot names. This further cemented my interest in this family, in Blackfoot ceremonies, and in the well-being of the whole Blackfoot Confederacy. Giving me the Blackfoot name of a renowned ceremonialist had guaranteed them a long-term ally. All of these events clearly indicate that although the Glenbow and the Blackfoot were working in concert with mutual interests, it was the Blackfoot who were actually driving the process.

In 1998, Daniel Weasel Moccasin had a severe stroke and was taken to Foothills Hospital in Calgary, where many of his family and friends travelled to be with him. They wanted to have ceremonial smudges for him, but, of course, the hospital's fire regulations prohibited fire or smoke of any kind for any purpose. I was told that this was a growing concern among both the family and the many visitors who came to see Daniel, and I advised Dr. Alastair Buchan, professor of stroke research and head of the Calgary Stroke Program at Foothills Hospital, of these particular circumstances. Buchan proved to be a compassionate practitioner, and he arranged for the hospital to turn off the sprinkler system for the duration of Daniel Weasel Moccasin's stay, allowing family and friends to smudge ceremonially in the hospital chapel.

At the same time, Buchan advised hospital security that this was a special situation and that the Blackfoot way of life was different and required respect, given that large numbers of Blackfoot were travelling to the hospital to pay their respects to the dying ceremonialist. I relate this story for the simple reason that Dr. Buchan's intervention on behalf of the Blackfoot was apparently unprecedented at this large university hospital. Such instances of goodwill, understanding, and mutual regard were occurring regularly, with no empirical explanation other than our relationship with the Blackfoot, which was by now well established. Leonard Bastien, then chief of the Piikani (Peigan) First Nation, offered a more compelling explanation:

Because all things possess a soul and can, therefore, communicate with your soul, I am inclined to believe that the souls of the many sacred articles and bundles within the Glenbow Museum touched Robert Janes and Gerry Conaty in a special way, whether they knew it or not. They have been changed in profound ways through their interactions with the Blood and Peigan people and their attendance at ceremonies. (Bastien and Bastien 1992, 6)

#### POSTERITY HAS ARRIVED

I still recall realizing how important the sacred objects from the Glenbow's collections are in the conduct of various Blackfoot ceremonies, and I also remember the Blackfoot repeatedly expressing their appreciation for being able to use them. The fact that these objects are instrumental in enhancing the well-being of their communities was the critical motivation in our decision to repatriate them. The museum profession is fond of saying that "museums keep things for posterity." By 1998, we had concluded that posterity had arrived—both for the Blackfoot and for the Glenbow. My personal perspective was grounded in a moral, or ethical, imperative, although I cannot speak for other Glenbow staff or the Board of Governors. Such considerations were not part of mainstream museum practice at the time. By "ethical," I have in mind principles such as justice, right conduct, and duty. I agree with Janet Marstine's (2011, 8) observation that "the new museum ethics stresses the agency to do good with museum resources." Although I often use the terms *ethics* and *morals* synonymously, it seems useful to think of morals as beliefs and values about the nature of right and wrong and ethics as the implementation of those beliefs in society and in one's life. In short, returning sacred objects was the right thing to do. The time had come.

I cannot recall whether there was a defining moment when Gerry Conaty and I decided that it was time to unconditionally transfer the ownership of sacred objects to the Blackfoot. In retrospect, the decision to act was born of our accumulated experiences with the Blackfoot and was grounded in our growing trust and respect for them and their culture. These feelings were the result of spending time among them at ceremonies, of eating together and

meeting together, but they were also the product of the less tangible influences described by Leonard Bastien above. To write of souls and the sacred, and of their silent impact on individuals, obviously transcends the positivist tradition, but I cite these influences here because I have no reason to doubt their existence.

By March 1999, the work had begun in earnest, with the establishment of a staff repatriation group and the preparation of a proposal to the Glenbow's Board of Governors. Because this initiative was a significant departure from established policy, the board's approval was required to begin the repatriation process. The members of the Glenbow's Board of Governors merit a great deal of credit: they listened deeply and responded accordingly. In April 1999, the Executive Committee of the board gave unanimous approval to our proposal to repatriate 251 sacred objects to the Blackfoot Confederacy. The decision to repatriate was unprecedented in the Glenbow's history, and, as it turned out, the Blackfoot repatriation became the largest unconditional repatriation of museum objects in Canadian history.

Having succeeded in gaining the board's support, I reluctantly advised them that the Alberta government's cultural bureaucracy was opposed to repatriation: I feared that the government's position would erode the board's support. Although the Glenbow is an independent nonprofit corporation, its collections have been owned by the provincial government since 1966. At that time, Eric Harvie, the museum's founder, donated his collection of art, artifacts, and historical documents to the people of Alberta, which marked the beginning of the Glenbow as a public institution.

From the outset of our work with the Blackfoot, our thinking on the loan and repatriation of sacred objects was antithetical to the provincial government's perspective. To some extent, this gap in understanding was a reflection of the Glenbow's poor relationship with the provincial government, a legacy that I inherited from my predecessor and that proved immune to repair, despite the efforts we collectively made to improve it. This was doubly perplexing to me, since my counterpart for these negotiations was Assistant Deputy Minister William Byrne. Bill Byrne, whom I'd known for years, was a highly intelligent, deadly articulate, and accomplished administrator, with a PhD in archaeology from Yale University and a demonstrated track record in the innovative preservation of Alberta's heritage. Despite my degree of respect for Byrne, I was

unable to convince him and his colleagues of the need, wisdom, and timeliness of repatriating the Blackfoot material. Despite our sincere efforts to communicate, the provincial cultural officials were adamant that repatriation was not acceptable. The senior officials were inexplicably entrenched, and I concluded after over two years of meetings and telephone calls that repatriation would not occur during my tenure at the Glenbow, if ever.

The fact that provincial officials were simply not open to dialogue about the possibility of repatriation marked the most frustrating and disappointing episode in my ten years as CEO of the Glenbow. I still struggle to account for the intransigence of these officials. Generously, I attribute their position to a strict interpretation of their fiduciary responsibility for provincial collections: it was simply irresponsible to give back collections—where would it end? There may also have been a genuine feeling that the Blackfoot were being given preferential treatment, which, in fact, was true, inasmuch as we lived in their homeland. We were always explicit about this. I understand fiduciary responsibility, but it is brittle and intractable and does not serve changing societal needs. In a bureaucracy, however, the system is closed and slippery-slope reasoning is all pervasive.

Less generously, our differences may have stemmed from the contrast in our institutions. The Glenbow had severed its ties with the provincial government in 1996 and become an independent, nonprofit corporation. No longer a provincial Crown corporation, it was entrepreneurial and the most economically self-sufficient of the ten largest museums in Canada at that time, complete with an international public profile. The Glenbow's organizational goals, values, and method of operation were categorically different from those of other provincial museums, and, overall, we seldom agreed on anything with the Alberta government. A case in point was the province's rejection of our strategic plan mentioned earlier, and, with it, our request for multi-year funding from the province (Janes 2013, 29).

The Glenbow's relationship with the province was, in short, problematic. This led me to wonder how far Byrne's intransigence was born purely of a rigid commitment to stewardship. It didn't matter what we said; it didn't matter that we had developed substantive and trusting relationships with the Blackfoot; it didn't matter what we aspired to do as anthropologists and as museum workers. There was no forward motion, no progress in dialogue or understanding.

Government officials held the power because the province owned the Glenbow's collections (our administrative autonomy notwithstanding), and, according to them, they were exercising their fiduciary responsibility.

During this period, the province did, in fact, offer an alternative to our repatriation initiative. They suggested that key artifacts, such as medicine bundles, be replicated, using authentic, albeit contemporary, materials, and that these replicas be the focus of our efforts. The Provincial Museum of Alberta had just such an experiment underway with a Blackfoot ceremonialist when this proposal was made to us. Since it seemed a sensible alternative, we inquired among our Blackfoot colleagues about the advisability of such an approach. The consensus indicated that this was unknown territory—replicating a sacred object bereft of its original contents. In view of this uncertainty, we had neither the knowledge nor the authority to determine the wisdom of such an approach, and we declined to pursue the province's alternative.

By early 1999, it was abundantly clear that provincial cultural officials would simply not approve the repatriation of the Blackfoot objects. We had spent an inordinate amount of time and energy with these officials in an effort to promote our thinking and our plan, and it finally occurred to me that repatriation would never be possible unless we adopted a new approach, a new strategy, and different tactics. I advised the Glenbow's board of our failure to enlist the support of provincial officials, and a seemingly endless round of meetings and telephone calls with board members and the Executive Committee of the board ensued. The result was the decision to arrange a meeting with the premier of Alberta, Ralph Klein, so that we could make the case for repatriation directly. This meeting was facilitated by a Glenbow board member who had personal and political ties to the premier. This, of course, was a hazardous strategy—bypassing the bureaucratic hierarchy in search of a political solution. Having done their due diligence, however, including obtaining an opinion on the legality of deaccessioning the Blackfoot material, the board was committed to resolving this matter. We also met with representatives of the Blackfoot Confederacy in November 1999 to advise them of the strategy. On 22 December 1999, I was advised that the premier had agreed to the repatriation and would attend a formal ceremony at the Glenbow on 14 January 2000.

I can only speculate on the premier's decision to support our initiative in opposition to his officials. An important factor was undoubtedly his personal

relationships with a number of Blackfoot individuals. Premier Klein was also well aware of our relationship with the Blackfoot, having attended the official signing of the Glenbow's memorandum of understanding with the Mookaakin Society in 1998. All that remained was to plan a formal event and answer a call from a furious provincial official in early January who had just been told of the premier's decision. The formal repatriation signing ceremony was held at the Glenbow on 14 January 2000, preceded by a private ceremony with smudging, prayers, and the exchange of gifts between the Glenbow and the Blackfoot. The premier of Alberta and the chiefs and ceremonialists of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Piikani, Kainai, and Siksika) were in attendance, as were members of the press. A public reception at the museum followed. The repatriation ceremony was my last official duty as president and CEO of the Glenbow and marked not only the conclusion of unfinished business but also hopefully a legacy that will continue to benefit the Blackfoot people.

With the repatriation now official, provincial officials were given the task of developing the legislation and the regulations to support it, which they did. My intention here is not to embarrass or anger anyone but to record the events that brought about the repatriation legislation that the Province of Alberta eventually enacted. I regret that we were forced to disregard the provincial officials and gain the political support of the provincial premier, but there was no alternative. The corporate records of the Glenbow's Board of Governors and the essays in this volume authored by Blackfoot individuals attest to this.

#### THE LEGACY

The interest in Glenbow's work with the Blackfoot continues. Since leaving the Glenbow in 2000, I have responded to numerous inquiries and requests for interviews about the repatriation and about the Glenbow's relationship with the Blackfoot. At least a dozen dissertations and theses have been written, and, despite ongoing debates about repatriation, the international museum community recognizes the importance and originality of Glenbow's work. The museum's partnership with the Blackfoot and its institutional commitment to such collaborative relationships culminated in the opening of the exhibition "Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life" in 2001. The authority and responsibility for

the research and development of this groundbreaking exhibition rested with a group of eighteen Blackfoot Elders, who received technical support from Glenbow staff (see Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2001).

I firmly believe that our experience with repatriation contributed to the Glenbow's resilience as an organization. Resilience is about the ability to deal with change, and one source of resilience is diversity. The relationships we developed with the Blackfoot diversified our perspective, skills, values, and knowledge, as well as our museum practice. It made the Glenbow a stronger institution—irrespective of whether these relationships were valued by all senior managers and staff at the time. Repatriation has been profoundly important, but it is also only one way of developing authentic relationships with First Nations peoples. The enduring values of trust, respect, and interdependence, upon which authentic relationships are based, began to reveal themselves as we replaced our assumed museum authority with both vulnerability and humility. As an institution, the Glenbow changed: its staff became more mindful of the essential role of museums in society. The future of museums does not lie in a preoccupation with the financial bottom line or with efforts to make museums more popular. Rather, it lies in these institutions embedding their work so deeply in the communities they serve that museums will eventually embody and reflect the wisdom, courage, and vision that distinguish the lives of so many people everywhere. I will always be grateful to the Blackfoot for sharing their wisdom, courage, and vision and for guiding the Glenbow and me through this rare and wonderful opportunity.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Ainslie, Daryl Betenia, Beth Carter, Clifford Cranebear, Camille Owen, Nancy Cope, Gwenyth Claughton, Evy Werner, and Christine Chin. Gerry understood how much I valued his commitment to repatriation, and I thank the members of the Glenbow's Board of Governors who shared that commitment.

#### NOTE

- 1 At the time, the federal government still retained significant authority over territorial affairs. The devolution of political and administrative powers from the federal government to the Northwest Territories is in process, and a final Devolution Agreement is pending.

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# 10

## *Moving Forward*

GERALD T. CONATY

*This whole process that we've been involved in—the collaborative process between the Blackfoot people and museums and governments—stems from our need to restore the cultural confidence of our people. — Allan Pard*

The acculturation efforts by the Canadian government and religious organizations have not created a better way of life for Canada's First Peoples. When the treaties were made, the promise of education offered the hope that First Nations people would be provided with "tools" that would help them adjust to the changing way of life brought by newcomers. The Canadian treaty negotiators also offered to help people learn how to become farmers and ranchers and to provide food, clothing, and other assistance in times of economic difficulty.

Instead, Aboriginal children were confined to residential schools, where they were punished for practicing their culture or speaking their Native language and, generally, were made to feel inferior to non-Native people. Rather than assisting people as they adapted to a new way of life, many Indian Agents used their authority to undermine economic development on reserves. After being marginalized for many generations, First Nations people are looking for ways to reassert their identity and establish themselves in Canadian society.

The repatriation of sacred material to the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai is a story of hope and perseverance by the individuals involved and the communities they represent. When the bundles come home, they bring a renewed sense of pride and self-confidence to the families that keep them and, by extension, to the community. These feelings stem, in part, from the achievement of finding a lost part of the culture and overcoming obstacles to bring it home. The bundles bring with them these feelings of strength and well-being. As the bundles, sacred societies, and ceremonies are renewed, the strength of the cultural traditions is manifested and the determination of the people to ensure that their culture survives and thrives is highlighted.

This strength builds throughout the community in many ways. Frank Weasel Head connects the return home of bundles to important initiatives in education, health care, child welfare, and the justice system at Kainai. Similar experiences occur in other communities. These programs are all developed by local people in ways that work for the communities. This is a significant change from the past, when non-Native governments prescribed solutions that had been developed with little or no community consultation.

#### CHALLENGES IN WORKING WITH MUSEUMS

There nonetheless remain challenges to the ongoing effort to bring bundles home. Some of these arise inside the communities, while others originate beyond the boundaries of reserves and are even global in nature. Some of these challenges have been faced by generations of Niitsitapi who have chosen to follow their traditional culture and beliefs rather than embrace the ways of non-Native society, while others are the product of an increasingly globalized world with its tendency toward cultural homogenization.

Although repatriation is usually phrased in terms of First Nations and museums, as the chapters in this book have shown, the negotiations are really between individuals. Granted, legislation has been an important step in assuring the repatriation of sacred material. In the absence of such legislation, Niitsitapi found themselves at the mercy of the personalities of curators and senior museum administrators. If those individuals were sympathetic to requests for bundles, then repatriation was possible and, in some cases, expeditiously achieved. When museum staff members resisted the idea of repatriation, the bundles remained inaccessible. These instances have become fewer over the years, and even North American museums that are not accountable to legislation have generally adopted repatriation policies that reduce, to some extent, the impact of institutional idiosyncrasies. However, policies and legislation are, in the final result, products of the dominant society and are based on the liberal democratic principle that all citizens are equal and that no person or group should be shown special favour. As a result, repatriation can involve bureaucratic procedures that seem disrespectful of the items in questions and require that traditional processes and protocols be subordinated. Whereas the Blackfoot approached the discussions from a spiritual perspective, they were often confronted with museum personnel who, they said, maintained a scientific stance that seemed to have little regard for spirituality. They felt that they were being looked down upon for their beliefs and were made to feel inferior, whether or not this was the intention of the institution's staff. At the same time, the compromises that the Blackfoot were required to make in response to bureaucratic demands brought criticism from their communities and compounded the already stressful process of bringing a bundle home and reinitiating it into ceremonial life.

Niitsitapi have faced these challenges in the course of negotiating the return of bundles from public institutions in North America. However, European explorers and fur traders were present in western North America long before museums in the New World began their collecting programs. As a result, many important cultural items made their way into European collections during the nineteenth century. In 1995, the Austrian ethnologist and ethnohistorian Christian Feest expressed astonishment that museums would consider giving back artifacts. He also questioned the sincerity of many First Nations people who appealed for items and wondered how a museum in Europe could

distinguish between legitimate delegations and charlatans (Feest 1995). Nearly two decades later, these concerns are still expressed by European museums. Where repatriation has succeeded, it has deepened relationships, as each side has demonstrated a willingness to listen to and seek to understand the other. Not all museums have shown this willingness, but those that have are responsible for making a difference in Blackfoot lives.

The first step in recovering sacred items from European institutions is to determine what is in the collections. Thus far, institutions in the United Kingdom have generously shared their databases. (Few museums in other parts of Europe have been approached.) Once a list of sacred material has been provided, it is important that knowledgeable people examine the pieces first-hand to determine whether they were used in ceremonies. Other items in the collection should also be viewed in case sacred material has been misidentified. But visiting museums is an expensive undertaking. The Pitt Rivers Museum, at the University of Oxford, recently undertook a project that brought knowledgeable people to England to examine five traditional Blackfoot shirts that were given to Sir George Simpson by Niitsitapi leaders in the mid-1800s (Peers and Brown 2015). The shirts subsequently travelled to southern Alberta, where they were the focus of workshops and exhibits. Discussions are ongoing between museum personnel and Niitsitapi to determine when, or if, the shirts will return to Alberta. Although the project received very generous funding from the British Council in 2008, the deteriorating economic climate has led to a significant reduction in funding for museums in the United Kingdom. Such projects may therefore not be feasible in the foreseeable future.

Other museums may resist discussions of repatriation on philosophical rather than economic grounds. In 2002, the International Group of Organizers of Large-Scale Exhibitions (also called the Bizot Group) published the Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums. This collective of the world's major museums and art galleries reaffirmed their role as custodians of art and objects on behalf of humankind. They decried the illegal traffic in archaeological, artistic, and ethnic objects. They also asserted the right of museums to retain collections, even when source communities request their return. The argument is that museums, through their encyclopaedic collections, facilitate a comparison of cultures and the contemplation of human achievement.<sup>1</sup> Critics have pointed out that access to these museums is not, in

fact, universal (see Curtis 2008; Murphy 2008; Opoku 2008; Sandis 2008; see also Weasel Head, this volume). The collections are housed in very few places, and it is not always possible for people from source communities to visit their patrimony. Moreover, the decontextualization of the items obscures important aspects of their meaning. Nevertheless, adherents to the principles of the universal museum declaration resolutely refuse to consider repatriation.

On a recent visit to Great Britain, a group of Blackfoot were taken to the British Museum, where they viewed the exhibit of their cultural material. Allan Pard was struck by the small area devoted to First Peoples of North America and the even smaller space dedicated to his culture. "It is as if we really are not important in the general scheme of things," he commented. "I felt that the British Museum was repeating the same message we heard from the Indian agents and at residential school: we are not important; our culture is not important; we should give up and assimilate into the dominant society. If our cultural items are not important to the British Museum, they should return them to a place where they will be respected and valued."

#### CHALLENGES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Even when bundles are repatriated, there are challenges to keeping them and the ceremonies associated with them alive and vibrant. Many of the concepts that are implicit in the rituals are exceptionally difficult to express other than in the Blackfoot language. The processes of colonization and assimilation mounted a forceful assault on the language, as residential school students were forbidden to speak their own language and made to feel ashamed for knowing Blackfoot and frightened to use it, as doing so was cause for punishment. Many subsequently chose not to teach the language to their own children and grandchildren to save subsequent generations from such punishment and feelings of inadequacy. Today, the language is valued once again, and there are school programs directed at preserving it. However, the language is not used consistently in everyday life, and very few media (radio, television, print journalism) delivered content in Blackfoot. But a symbiotic support system exists between language and ceremony. It is notable, as Frank Weasel Head observed, that people who become involved in ceremonies often become more fluent speakers

of the language. If either is to survive, more people will have to become involved with language development and traditional ceremonial practices. This is especially true of the growing numbers of Kainai, Siksika, and Piikani who live off-reserve and are less likely to encounter the Blackfoot language in everyday circumstances.

The traditional knowledge that is bound up in the bundles, societies, and ceremonies is passed along through a lifetime of conversation, storytelling, and visiting. It would seem that this process is threatened by an increasingly fast-paced society that leaves little time for a slower style of teaching and learning. This trend is compounded by the growing population of Niitsitapi who live in urban areas and may visit their relatives on the reserve only occasionally. There is no “short course” on traditional knowledge that can be accessed through the Internet or only on weekends. The contributors to this book continually emphasize that keeping a bundle or belonging to a sacred society is a way of life that continues after the bundle has been transferred to another keeper. Balancing these traditions with the realities of contemporary life is not easy; it is a challenge both to the young people who wish to become involved and learn and to the older people who are looking to the next generation to carry on.

As we move further into a technology-driven world, the nuclear family is replacing the extended family, in which people continually visited one another, as the focus of Blackfoot life. The result is a loss of the constant, and necessary, building of relationships that permeated traditional lifestyles. If people can’t or won’t talk with one another, they soon lose the ability to support one another. Clans, societies, ceremonies were based on mutual support. This decay of relationships and support is a significant loss for the culture.

While traditional Niitsitapi *mokaki* (knowledgeable persons) may resist new technology as an appropriate teaching tool, other Native traditions have embraced it. As a result, non-Blackfoot traditions have spread and become popular in many communities. In addition, Native people have at times borrowed aspects of ritual and belief from a variety of other First Nations cultures—and, on occasion, from non-Native Christian and New Age practices as well—and amalgamated them to create “new” traditions, a process that is sometimes described as “pan-Indianism.” For many people, these new practices are valuable ways of coping with the challenges that life has put in their path. However, more conservative bundle keepers and ceremonial leaders might see

this process as an erosion of traditional Blackfoot beliefs—and therefore of traditional culture and identity. Having suffered the effects of Christian proselytizing themselves, they usually have no desire to claim that there is only one way for people to follow. They are, however, concerned that these “new” ways not encroach on ancient traditions or cause people to abandon aspects of their culture that are uniquely Blackfoot.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF REPATRIATION

These challenges are unlikely to be resolved any time soon. They are part of the ongoing efforts of Indigenous people worldwide to maintain their traditions, culture, and identity in the face of globalization, industrialization, and urbanization. It is important to us all that these efforts succeed. As Robert Janes points out in the preceding chapter (see also Janes 2009), diversity is a crucial component of resilience, and resilience is vital for the survival of any ecosystem, including human society. We need many ways of understanding the world to help us cope with the social, political, economic, and environmental changes that confront us. The continuation of Niitsitapi traditional culture adds an important component to that understanding, and the return of sacred objects is key to this continuation. Repatriation of sacred objects is therefore of concern to us all.

Adam Delaney, whose powerful personality stood behind many of the repatriation initiatives, often said, “When the White people came, they just shook us dramatically. It’s up to us, in our healing process as a people, to know who we are and where we came from. We need to understand that there is nothing wrong with being who we are.” Once people come to this conclusion, a lot of self-healing happens as they regain the self-esteem and self-confidence to take on the challenges of the world. Sacred material was initially given to the Blackfoot to help them overcome difficult situations. They are still important for that reason.

#### NOTE

- 1 For a critical assessment of these arguments, see Tom Flynn, “The Universal Museum: A Valid Model for the 21st Century?” (2004; available through Lulu.

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## APPENDIX 1

### *Terms of Reference for the Glenbow Museum's First Nations Advisory Council*

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE

##### *Mission*

Alberta is the heartland and homeland for many First Nations. Members of these First Nations have expressed concerns regarding the interpretation of their culture. Glenbow, as an institution which curates, exhibits, and interprets First Nations' material culture, has a moral responsibility to address these concerns. This process requires open and honest communication between the First Nations and the Museum. Glenbow has established a First Nations Advisory Council as an avenue of communication with First Nations. The mission of this Council is to:

- provide advice regarding the collection, care and handling of First Nations cultural material;
- provide advice to Glenbow Enterprises regarding items and images which are appropriate to market through Glenbow and to recommend alternatives to items or images which are determined to be unacceptable;

- advise and assist in the development of exhibits and programs which are concerned with First Nations culture and history;
- act as resources for people researching First Nations culture and history on behalf of Glenbow or who are using Glenbow's collection as a research base;
- serve as an active liaison between Glenbow and their communities; members will consult with their communities regarding issues at Glenbow and bring the concerns and ideas of their community to Glenbow's attention.

### *Composition*

The First Nations Advisory Council will be composed of:

- 1 staff member from each of the seven work units at Glenbow as well as a representative from the Public Relations and Marketing team
- the senior ethnologist, acting as secretary
- the Glenbow First Nations liaison officer, acting as chair
- 1 representative from each Treaty 7 First Nation (Blood, Peigan, Siksika, Tsuu T'ina, and Stoney); 1 Plains Cree representative; 1 northern Cree representative. Community representatives must be resident in the community they represent, be active in the community and be recognized by their community as representing that community.
- 1 representative of Glenbow's Board of Governors

Members of the Advisory Council will be appointed for a term of 4 years, renewable for 1 additional term.

### *Qualifications*

#### **1. Staff**

- genuine interest in First Nations culture and history
- willingness to discuss issues openly and respectfully

- commitment to developing awareness and understanding of First Nations concerns with staff and public
- willingness to become familiar with First Nations cultures and concerns
- willingness to contribute personal time and effort to the First Nations Advisory Council

2. First Nations

- genuine interest in museums and museums/First Nations issues
- willingness to discuss issues openly and respectfully
- commitment to developing awareness and understanding of Glenbow and its programs within the community or special interest group
- willingness to become familiar with Glenbow and Glenbow's concerns
- willingness to contribute personal time and effort to the First Nations Advisory Council
- must live in the community they represent or be an active member in the special interest group they represent

*Duties*

1. Non-Native Representatives

- attend all meetings of the Advisory Council. Any member missing 2 meetings within 1 year will be asked to resign their membership;
- liaise between the First Nations Advisory Council and their work unit;
- increased cross-cultural awareness should be transmitted to staff and to the public;
- voluntarily attend First Nations-related openings and events sponsored by Glenbow or First Nations;
- consult First Nations regarding policy development, programs, exhibitions and the curation of collections related to the First Nations.

2. First Nations Representatives

- attend all meetings of the Advisory Council. Any member missing 2 or more meetings will be asked to resign their membership;
- liaise between Glenbow and their community or special interest group;
- liaise voluntarily with researchers directed to communities by Glenbow (as per First Nations Policy);
- voluntarily attend First Nations-related openings and events sponsored by Glenbow;
- advise and assist in the development of policy, programmes, and exhibits relating to Glenbow and First Nations; where particular knowledge rests with other members of a community, the Council representative will assist Glenbow staff in discussions with the community;
- advise and assist in the curation of artifacts relating to First Nations culture and history;
- serve on various committees of the Board of Governors, as warranted.

3. Chair

- convenes meetings; compiles agenda
- arranges transportation and accommodation for travelling members
- arranges for minutes to be recorded and distributed
- moderates discussions

4. Secretary

- archives all minutes and correspondence
- serves as general assistant to the Chair

*Meetings*

- 4 per year (December, April, June, September)
- meetings will alternate, as feasible, between Glenbow and sites outside of Glenbow

*Appendix 1*

- travel, per diem and accommodation will be paid as per Glenbow's rates for staff travel; all entertainment, room service, telephone calls and other expenses are the responsibility of the individual
- each non-staff member of the Council will be paid an honorarium of \$150.00 per meeting that they attend
- honoraria and travel expenses (including per diem and accommodation) do not apply to openings and programs
- agendas will include items for information as well as items requiring action and may be submitted by any member of the Advisory Council

Approved by First Nations Advisory Council

4 October 1996



## APPENDIX 2

### *Memorandum of Understanding*

This Memorandum of Understanding is dated the 6 day of March, 1998.

BETWEEN

**THE MOOKAAKIN CULTURAL AND HERITAGE SOCIETY,**  
as represented by the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society  
Board of Directors

(hereinafter referred to as the “Mookaakin Society”)

AND

**THE GLENBOW-ALBERTA INSTITUTE,**  
as represented by the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Board of Governors

(hereinafter referred to as the “Glenbow Museum”)

**WHEREAS** the Mookaakin Society has been established by the Blood Tribe for the following purposes:

- (a) to promote and preserve the spiritual doctrines and observances of the Blood/Kainai people (the Blood/Kainai First Nation situated on the Blood Indian Reserve in Alberta) that have existed since time immemorial by organizing and providing instruction of those ways to the Blood/Kainai people, and whereby such instruction will be provided by the Blood/Kainai spiritual practitioners;
- (b) to promote and preserve the unique language and history of the Blood/Kainai people by organizing and providing language and history instruction to the Blood/Kainai people;
- (c) to encourage an appreciation by the general public of the spiritual doctrines and observances, language and history of the Blood/Kainai people by providing the public with general information regarding those ways, and by encouraging the participation of the public in those related events that are not considered to be spiritually sensitive in nature;
- (d) to encourage and actively pursue the repatriation of the objects and articles that facilitate the spiritual doctrines and observances of the Blood/Kainai people by providing the necessary resources to locate and retrieve such objects;
- (e) to promote the preservation, protection and enhancement of the spiritual customs, traditions and beliefs of the Blood/Kainai people by establishing and maintaining facilities for Blood/Kainai spiritual observances;
- (f) to foster the preservation, protection and enhancement of Blood/Kainai customs, traditions and beliefs by establishing and maintaining a facility to preserve the data, objects and articles of the Blood/Kainai peoples;
- (g) to do all such things as are incidental to or conducive to the attainment of the objects of the Mookaakin Society.

**WHEREAS** the Mookaakin Society is desirous of participating in a cooperative working relationship with the Glenbow Museum in respect of Blood Tribe/Blackfoot cultural patrimony that is stored at the Glenbow Museum; AND

**WHEREAS** the Glenbow Museum houses significant aspects of First Nations patrimony; AND

**WHEREAS** the Glenbow Museum respects the culture and traditions of First Nations and recognizes that First Nations programs and exhibits at the Glenbow Museum must reflect the First Nations point of view; AND

**WHEREAS** the Glenbow Museum recognizes the recommendations established by the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations Task Force in 1989 on developing a cooperative working relationship between museums in Canada and First Nations; AND

**WHEREAS** the Glenbow Museum is desirous of participating in a cooperative working relationship with the Mookaakin Society in respect of Blood/Blackfoot cultural patrimony that is housed at the Glenbow Museum, recognizing that legal title to this patrimony resides with the Province of Alberta; AND

**WHEREAS** the Mookaakin Society and the Glenbow Museum wish to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding that will allow both parties to cooperatively address matters relating to Blood/Blackfoot patrimony which is housed in the Glenbow Museum.

**THEREFORE** to facilitate a cooperative working relationship the parties agree:

1. That the Glenbow Museum will use its best efforts to include the participation of the Blood Tribe in the process of collecting, planning, research, implementation, presentations, and maintenances of all exhibits, programs and projects that pertain to the Blood/Blackfoot culture, and include the Blood Tribe in the interpretation, representation of information relating to Blood/Blackfoot culture, including archival documents, audio and visual

recordings and all other relevant collections which are housed at the Glenbow Museum, recognizing that the final responsibility for all such interpretation, representation, collecting, planning, research, implementation, presentation and maintenance of such material rests with the Glenbow Museum.

2. That the Glenbow Museum will develop a process that would allow the Blood Tribe access to spiritually sacred materials, cultural objects and relevant data, while respecting the concerns of the Glenbow Museum regarding the care, maintenance and preservation of the Glenbow Museum's collections.
3. That the Glenbow Museum, with the participation of representatives of the Blood Tribe, will develop a process regarding the treatment, use, presentation and disposition of spiritually sacred and ceremonial material, whereby such uses will be determined on moral and ethical grounds.
4. That the Glenbow Museum will develop a process to include a representative from the Blood Tribe in the development of museum policy, procedures, exhibitions, programs or projects pertaining to Blood/Blackfoot culture, custom and history by encouraging the participation of a representative from the Blood Tribe on the Glenbow Museum First Nations Advisory Council.
5. That both parties will jointly select the representative from the Blood Tribe who will participate on the Glenbow Museum First Nations Advisory Council.
6. That the Glenbow Museum will institute a system that will provide full disclosure to the Blood Tribe respecting information on the Blood/Blackfoot museum collections at the Glenbow Museum, or accessible by the Museum, and such a system will also be utilized to facilitate an exchange of historical knowledge respecting the history and use of Blood/Blackfoot objects, material or data.
7. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society will foster an exchange of knowledge, while maintaining a mutual appreciation of the Blood/Kainai perspective and cultural needs of the Blood Tribe, including the Museum's technical practices and methodologies concerning the preservation and management of Blood/Blackfoot collections.

8. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society will develop long term initiatives and procedures that will allow both parties to enter into discussions to develop Blood/Blackfoot cultural processes for the permanent transfer of spiritually sacred objects, recognizing that legal title to all such artifacts currently housed at or on loan from the Glenbow Museum rests with the Province of Alberta.
9. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society will support the research and repatriation of spiritually sacred objects that are housed in museums outside Canada by participating in discussions with the International Council of Museums and other professional agencies, including UNESCO.
10. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society will develop procedures, which include cultural and customary practices, to address conflicting requests by Blood/Blackfoot First Nations who wish to access spiritually sacred objects, material and data.
11. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society will develop professional and technical training initiatives respecting Blood Tribe/Kainai cultural and historical projects.
12. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society will establish internships that will assist the initiatives and activities of both the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society, which include the developments of collaborative projects in the areas of research, training, exhibitions and public relations that pertain to Blood/Blackfoot collections.
13. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society will jointly support the development and activities of their respective organizations and other related activities which may affect both organizations.
14. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society will share in the costs and benefits related to jointly initiated projects where such costs may include, but not limited to, training, public relations, research, treatments,

interpretation, exhibition and storage of Blood/Blackfoot cultural patrimony. Such costs will not be calculated retroactively, and all costs will be negotiated and the level of sharing thereof be agreed upon by the parties prior to the initiation of any such project.

15. That the Glenbow Museum will assist the Mookaakin Society with technical and advisory services in dealing with other museums and organizations in areas relating to the objects of this MOU, and the Glenbow Museum will facilitate access for the Mookaakin Foundation to other museums and organizations for such services related to this MOU.
16. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society shall amend this Memorandum of Understanding by mutual agreement, and such amendments will be made in writing and executed by both parties.
17. That the Glenbow Museum and the Mookaakin Society agree that this Memorandum of Understanding shall continue until such time that either party provides the other party with twelve (12) months written notice of termination of this Memorandum of Understanding.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties have executed this Memorandum of Understanding and by the hands of their duly authorized representatives.

MOOKAAKIN CULTURAL AND  
HERITAGE FOUNDATION



President

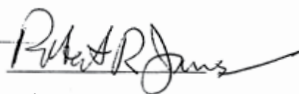


Witness

GLENBOW MUSEUM



President



Witness

## CONTRIBUTORS

Gerald T. Conaty earned his PhD in archaeology at Simon Fraser University. He joined the Glenbow Museum in 1990 as senior curator of ethnology and was, at the time of his death, the museum's director of Indigenous studies. He leaves as his legacy more than thirty articles and books, including *Powerful Images: Portrayals of Native America*, co-authored with Sarah E. Boehme. He also leaves this book, a tribute to his enduring relationships with the Blackfoot and to his commitment to mindful museum practice.

John W. (Jack) Ives is currently the Faculty of Arts Landrex Distinguished Professor and the executive director of the Institute of Prairie Archaeology at the University of Alberta. His research interests include the migration of Navajo and Apache peoples from subarctic Canada, terminal Pleistocene and early Holocene archaeological sites in western Canada, and the Besant-Sonota culture of the northern Plains. In his career with the Alberta government, Ives served with the Archaeological Survey of Alberta, the Royal Alberta Museum, and the Historic Resources Management Branch, with senior management responsibilities and extensive cross-ministry experience in Aboriginal policy initiatives. He was honoured to receive the name Awoutaan from distinguished Blackfoot ceremonialists Allan Pard and Blair First Rider.

Robert R. Janes is an independent scholar, a visiting research fellow at the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, and an adjunct professor of archaeology at the University of Calgary. From 2003 to 2014, he served as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*.

The founding director of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, in Yellowknife, and former director of the Glenbow Museum, in Calgary, he has devoted his career to championing museums as important social institutions capable of making a difference in the lives of individuals and their communities. He received the traditional Blackfoot name of Otahko ohkiptopii at a naming ceremony on the Kainai (Blood) Reserve in 1995.

Chris McHugh was born and raised on the Siksika Nation and continues to reside there with his family. He currently functions as the head Traditional Knowledge keeper for the Old Sun College on the Siksika Nation. Chris is a Blackfoot traditionalist and was the leader of the Horn Society (Iitskinaiksi) at Siksika, as well as a Sundance man, a Beaver Bundle keeper, and a Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle keeper. He is known for his ability to sing traditional ceremonial songs and powwow songs.

Allan Pard is from the Piikani Nation and continues to reside there with his family. He operated a cow-calf ranch for many years and is involved in Quarter Horse racing. Allan has served one term with the Piikani Chief and Council and is employed with the Alberta government, where he currently functions as a senior advisor for Aboriginal Relations. A supporter of Blackfoot traditions, Allan was a former member of the All Brave Dog society and the Horn Society (Iitskinaiksi) and a former keeper of the Rider's Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle and the Beaver Medicine Pipe Bundle.

Jerry Potts is a member of the Piikani Nation and a ceremonial pipe maker. Jerry was the former leader of the All Brave Dog Society and supported the revival of the Sundance at Piikani. He is also the present keeper of Piikani's Long Time Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle and was a past member of the Horn Society (Iitskinaiksi). Jerry served one term with the Piikani Chief and Council and works with Statistics Canada as a senior Aboriginal liaison officer.

Frank Weasel Head is from the Kainai Nation and was involved in farming and cattle ranching most of his life. He kept Quarter Horses and participated in his early days in match racing and in more recent times in Quarter Horse racing. He was also an avid rodeo contestant in the team roping and steer wrestling events. A Blackfoot traditionalist who has been an active participant in ceremonies, Frank has a thorough understanding of ceremonial protocols and currently functions as an Elder for the Iitskinaiksi (Horn Society) and the Thunder Medicine Pipe bundles. Prior to his retirement, he was employed as a

loans and field officer with the Indian Business Corporation. He and his family continue to reside on the Kainai Reserve.

Herman Yellow Old Woman is from the Siksika Nation and has served six years as a councillor with the Siksika Chief and Council. He has taught Blackfoot culture and language in the schools at Siksika and is currently employed as the cultural coordinator at the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Centre. Herman was a former leader of the Horn Society (Iitskinaiksi) and a past keeper of a Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle and is also a noted powwow and ceremonial singer.



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