

Excerpts from the diary of John G. Carter.

1908. SUN DANCE.

115.(o) ROCKY BOY'S BAND. HELENA, MONT.

Time of Dance. July 5, 6 and 7, 1908. (Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.) Indians. Rocky Boy's Band, consisting of Chippewa, Plains Cree, and Red River Half Breeds, or Metis. Linguistic Stock, Algonquin. Culture, Buffalo hunting, plains culture, dominant.

Location of camp. On the north side of Helena Avenue, west of the junction of South Rodney street with Helena Avenue.

The camp: Consisted of wall tents, not pitched in a camp circle. Most of the wall tents were in an irregular line and faced east. The tents were old, and the camp was dirty, and the people very poor. The camp numbered about two hundred or two hundred and fifty men, women and children. There were many mixed bloods, the Metis being mixed bloods consisting of French Canadians, mingled with the blood of many tribes, principally Chippewa, Cree, and Assiniboin, and some Mandan, Arickari and Minitari. There was one squaw man in camp, a scotchman. The people are poor, ragged, shabby and dirty. They constitute a wandering and unattached band of poor Indians and mixed bloods, under the leadership of Rocky Boy, a Chippewa. They live off of the offal thrown out by different slaughter houses throughout the Eastern part of Montana, and by money obtained from sale of small Indian trinkets, and by casual and occasional labor. On this occasion they were paid by the Committee in charge of the Helena Fourth of July celebration to put on an Indian show and a Sun Dance, and are allowed to charge admission, twenty five cents or two bits, to the Sun Dance. The Cree element in the camp brought the Sun Dance to this band. The Chippewa never had the Sun Dance, and the Metis are neither white men nor Indians, in the strict sense of the word, but a people apart, and are nominally, at least, Roman Catholics. Director of Sun Dance: Is Little Bear, a Cree Indian, and a member of Rocky Boy's band. It is believed that Little Bear's helpers, or assistants were drawn from the Cree element in the camp, but that the Chippewa and Canadian or Red River Half Breeds, the yetis, took part in the Sun Dance as dancers.

Not observed: The ceremonies of the Secret lodge, and the selection and cutting down of the center pole were not observed. The formation of the camp and the erection of the secret lodge was not observed. I did not have an interpreter or an informant or informants for this ceremony, but talked to a few of the Indians, and later met the head men with Little Bear and Rocky Boy in council.

Observed: The bringing in of the center pole and materials to build the lodge, and the raising of the center pole and the erection of the lodge. The opening of the lodge, and the Sun Dance.

Photographs: None were taken. Some sketches were taken.

Transportation of these Indians. No Red River carts observed. They have horses, and ordinary dead ax wagons. Not a great many of either, but just enough for them to get around. They have some dogs.

Costumes. Women mostly dressed in old calico and the men wear overalls, old cloth trousers, and shirts. White men's hats are worn. Men and women wear plain moccasins. Such bead work as is in evidence is of the flower Chippewa design, and not the geometric design used by the plains tribes. Men for the most part wear the hair long, and in braids. Younger men have the hair cut short.

Location of Sun Dance lodge. The lodge was located south of the camp, and close to Helena Avenue. The tents of the camp were north of the lodge. The entrance of the lodge faced south. Secret lodge location was not observed, but it is probable that it was north and west of the Sun Dance lodge. A board fence was built around the Sun Dance lodge, and admission was charged beginning with the opening of the dance. The fence was completed as the lodge was completed. At the same time.



There is a large fire in the lodge, north and slightly to the east of the center pole, and midway between the center pole and the dancers' screen. To the east of the center pole are seated the drummers and singers. South of these, after the opening of the lodge, are seated women who assist in the singing from time to time. On the night of the opening of the lodge a small fire was built to the south and east of the center pole, about half way between the center pole and the entrance of the lodge. There were some calico offerings on the center pole, hung like banners, but these were few in number, due to the poverty of these people. A dried hide, folded down the middle of the back lies to the east of the entrance. A helper procures live coals from the fire to the south of the center pole and lays a trail of coals from the east of the entrance of the lodge, near the outer wall, to the place where the drummers are seated. Little Bear comes forward and picks up the dried hide, the neck of the hide toward the drummers, and holding the hide between him and the center pole. His right hand holds the hide near the neck, and his left hand holds it near the tail. He carries the hide slowly over the trail of coals until he comes near the drummers. He then recites a prayer in a loud voice, and offers the hide to the drummers. He makes a second prayer and again offers the hide to the drummers, and then a third prayer, and a third time offers the hide to the drummers. He makes a fourth prayer, and throws the hide among the drummers, who beat the hide and raise a shout. They also beat a roll on their hand drums and shouted after each of the first three offerings of the hide to them. After beating the hide and shouting for a time, the drummers begin a song. After singing and drumming for a time the dancers rise in their places, and moving up and down, blow their whistles toward the Thunder-birds nest. Soon the dancers are all on their feet, dancing and whistling in unison, and in time with the drum beat. Women dancers are behind the screen in the eastern part of the lodge. The dancers are not naked, as are the Assiniboin dancers, but wear their shirts. There is not much face paint, and there is no body paint visible. There are no head ornaments, and the dancers carry nothing in their hands. It is not known if the dance continued all night or not.

The dance. During the dance no gift giving or other activities were noted in the Sun Dance lodge. It is not known whether the fast was rigidly observed or not. Rocky Boy's band of Indians are extremely poor. The Sun Dance was not a ceremony used by the Chippewa and Red River Half Breed members of the band. The construction of the lodge, and its interior arrangement is identical to that of the Assiniboin lodge at Fort Belknap as observed in 1906 and 1907. But the Assiniboin lodge had a center pole carving, and the Rocky Boy lodge run by Little Bear the Cree used a paint design on the center pole composed of black and red bands of paint, six such bands, alternately. In talking to a young member of the band he laughed and said that the white people wanted the Indians to ride naked in the Fourth of July parade up main street. This the band refused to do, not caring to take off their shirts. They wore their shirts in the Sun Dance as well. These Indians apparently do not care to go about in their hides, as do other Indians. It may be the French Canadian in them.

Council with Rocky Boy's Band. On Wednesday, July 8, Rocky Boy, Little Bear, the Scotch squaw man, some Red River mixed bloods, and other members of the band came to our house in Helena, at 644 Bearborn Avenue and held a council on the front lawn with my father. I attended the council. They want the United States to give them a reservation and an agent, or else to provide them with a place on some existing reservation. They are tired of wandering, and find living hard.