

How This Series of Books Came to Be

By Adolf Hungry-Wolf

Blackfoot history and cultural knowledge has traditionally been handed down from one generation to the next through oral means. Until recently, Blackfoot remained an unwritten language. Closest to Blackfeet writings were the pictographs some men painted on their robes, tipis and other articles. These illustrated important personal and tribal events.

Actually, the Blackfeet are a well documented people when viewed in the context of "Native American History." There are shelves full of books under the inaccurate library-index heading of 'Siksika Indians,' referring to all four divisions of the Blackfoot Confederacy, though in the Blackfoot language that name pertains only to one of them. Several of those long-ago published volumes contain accurate, in-depth descriptions of rituals and cultural ways that no one living today, in the well-populated Blackfoot Confederacy, could match. In addition, there are thousands of photographs under the same 'Siksika' heading in archives throughout North America, even in Europe. These photos show nearly every tribe member and important public activity among the Blackfeet over more than one hundred years, starting about the time the people settled on their western Montana reservation.

Much of this material is scholarly and scarce, the books out of print, with most of the papers and photos not readily accessible to ordinary members of the Blackfeet Tribe. Computers and modern technology are changing this and creating new opportunities for research, but there is always a need for more publications that Blackfeet students can hold in their hands to read and study about their ancestral culture.

Blackfeet parents and tribal elders have long lamented the lack of written and published materials about their own history and culture, especially as they watched their youths being more and more tempted and overwhelmed by writings and materials about virtually everything else in the world. This series of books may provide the most in-depth look that most Pikunni of today, and of the future, will have into the

lives of their tribal ancestors.

Since childhood I've been avidly reading and studying books about native people and their cultures, along with western history in general, using the knowledge to earn a couple of college degrees along the way. Among my favorites were books by James Willard Schultz, whose romanticized autobiography, "My Life as an Indian," told of his time among the Pikunni as a youth, marrying into the tribe, taking part in hunts and many other adventures.

George Bird Grinnell's classic "Blackfoot Lodge Tales" was another book that I read often. Schultz and Grinnell were close friends and companions, both for their book work and during wilderness adventures together in Pikunni country.

Other valuable resource books included Walter McClintock's "The Old North Trail," along with the exhaustive ethnological studies done by the Pikunni mixed-blood, David Duvall, then published by Dr. Clark Wissler through the American Museum of Natural History, in New York. The published work of John Ewers should also be mentioned, along with that of the noted artistic photographer Edward S. Curtis.

As a third-generation photographer myself, I've also had a lifelong interest in old pictures, especially those showing native people and their traditional lives in the west. While still in school I was lucky one time to buy, at an auction, a box of "old Indian pictures" for just a couple of dollars, no other bidders expressing interest in such items back then. The photos were mostly taken among the Blackfeet, during the late 1800's and early 1900's, though at the time I didn't know much about them, since they came with very little information.

I was then already working on my second book for publication, a photo history of some important railroads in California's gold rush country. To compile it, I travelled around looking for old photographs in archives, museums, and antique stores. Then I brought these photos to retired employees, neighbors and friends of those railroads, writing down whatever

they could recall for me. That book, 'Rails in the Mother Lode,' combined their stories, my archive research, a lot of old photos, and a selection of contemporary pictures that I took myself. Finding that box of Blackfoot photos got me to start thinking about a similar project. Thus I began this Blackfoot photo history series over forty years ago, though on a much smaller and less ambitious scale than the four big volumes that now exist. Here is how it changed and grew so large.

After graduating from university in 1966 I briefly tried teaching western history in high school, before deciding that I'd rather go outdoors and live history than to just stay in classrooms and talk about it. So I gave up city life and moved to a rugged homestead in the Canadian Rockies, near the edge of Blackfoot country. In 1967 I ended up at the North American Indian Days, in Browning, on the Blackfeet Reservation. Maybe I was looking for something of James Willard Schultz, as I met a few Pikunni elders who had actually known him. Those elders were friendly, welcoming me right from the start. That meant a lot to a young guy like me, who never really knew his own ancestral people, nor met any of his grandparents. When I showed some of the old Pikunni photos that I had brought with me, these elders were enthused, helping me to identify the people and scenes, and thereby encouraging my ideas for these books.

Feeling ambitious, I was eager to see a finished volume in a short time, as had happened with my railroad books. Therefore, I worked on it steadily for several years, in the late 60's and early 70's, doing less important book writings on the side, along with making craftwork to help support a growing family. Visits to Browning became frequent, as friends and ritual leaders began inviting me to their homes with my pictures, or to participate in their various ceremonies. Mary Ground was at the forefront of elders from that time who had a major influence on making Blackfoot culture my life's work. At her Medicine Pipe bundle cere-