

Treasures of the Bloods

Swept up in curiosity about the North American Native peoples, a pinched-looking middle-aged English woman set out for adventure in Alberta in 1890, collecting important artifacts we still treasure today.

by **Arni Brownstone**

CAREFULLY AVOIDING "STUFFY" PULLMAN in favour of immigrant class, the two prim English-women were searching for adventure as their train rattled across the Canadian prairies in the summer of 1890. Frances Baynes Kirby, the 42-year-old widow of an

Anglican clergyman, conceived of the trip after seeing a Buffalo Bill show in the "old country," a show that left her feeling "tremendously curious about Western Indians." She persuaded 22-year-old Violet Winifred Wood, the daughter of another English clergyman, to accompany her. When they





Buckle Saddle. Blood. Plates of buckskin padded with hair & beaded at each end. Lvl. by Mrs. Brandt Fern.	Chief White Calf.
War Club. Blood. Has stone head & beaded handle. Lvl. by Mrs. Brandt Fern.	Blood Reserve Can.
Knife and Case. Blood. Case of buckskin beaded. Lvl. by Mrs. Brandt Fern.	Chief White Calf.
Water Bags. Blood. Beaded. Buckskin. Used to keep face painted etc. on. Lvl. by Mrs. Brandt Fern.	Blood Reserve Can.



COURTESY OF THEODORE NEWBOLD.

Above: Detail (altered) of Tefft Collection catalogue attributed to Jesse J. Cornplanter, Mohawk illustrator, 1904. **Middle:** Installation photograph of the Indian section of the Canadian Historical Exhibition, 1899. White Calf's saddle is near the center, his knife sheath toward the left corner. **Right:** Lizzie Davis wearing regalia collected by Frances from the Bloods.

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1898 ANNUAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT OF ONTARIO, PLATE IX.

pulled into Gleichen, a town on the Blackfoot (Siksika) Reserve in Alberta, they had reached their destination.

As the travellers stepped onto the station's wooden platform, there would have been Blackfoot women hawking polished buffalo horns and beadwork, dressed conservatively in full-length skirts, somber tartan shawls, and kerchiefs—the English ladies' first encounter with Western Indians.

From the moment she entered Blackfoot country, Frances Kirby's interest in Native culture only deepened. That interest inspired her to make a significant collection of artifacts from the Bloods (Kainai), a division of the Blackfoot tribe, including three pieces—a "war saddle," a club, and a sheathed "scalping knife"—that had once belonged to White Calf, the last Blood war chief.

The following account retraces the part these objects played in White Calf's life and their circuitous journey from Frances's hands to their eventual residence in the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

In 1877, when they signed Treaty Seven, the Blood Indians surrendered most of their land to the Dominion of Canada and began their difficult adjustment from a nomadic life to one on the reserve. All this coincided with the demise of the buffalo, and Blackfoot life changed dramatically. The nomadic days were still alive to many Blackfoot, and nowhere were those days more deeply etched than in the mind of White Calf.

Head of the Marrows band, White Calf was among the treaty's signatories, along with co-head chief Red Crow. By 1883, when the older Blood leaders had passed on, the Bloods considered White Calf and Red Crow as two of the most influential men on the reserve.

Even after signing the treaty, there were several incidents that led the Bloods to a state of war alert and, according to ancient custom, Red Crow would have to step aside for White Calf, who was the war chief. Most notably, in 1882 White Calf led a war party of 90 to 200 warriors, the number varying from one report to another, to avenge the theft of their horses by the Crees. The Bloods killed and scalped one enemy with no losses of their own, a victory that added considerably to White Calf's popularity.

Later that same year, co-head chief Running Rabbit took permanent residence in Montana and his position opened up. White Calf, a tall muscular man and a very persuasive speaker with strong leadership qualities may have seemed a natural for the post. But Red Crow was aggressively protec-

tive of his position and felt that sharing the headship with White Calf would undermine his power and perhaps upset relations with the Indian Agent.

The Methodist missionary John MacLean described White Calf as "hating the language, customs and religion of the white man. As he sees the gradual decrease of his people, and their dependence upon the Government for support after the departure of the buffalo, and the encroachments and haughty spirit of the white men, and seeing them transformed into a band of peaceful farmers, he mourns the loss of the martial days." Indian Agent William B. Pocklington noted that "being very much gifted as a talker, [White Calf] would use his influence to put bad thoughts into the heads of the young men on the Reserve," perhaps influencing them to raid horses rather than grow vegetables. White Calf persistently led the Bloods in their grievances over inadequate food rations, for which Pocklington nicknamed him "Prince of grumblers." Ultimately it was both Red Crow and the Indian agents who prevented White Calf from succeeding in his aspiration to become a head chief.

The next decade saw many changes in Blood culture, changes that seem to have passed White Calf by, leaving him diminished in the eyes of his people. By 1891, Agent Pocklington noted that "Old Talking Machine . . . lost a good deal of his influence" among the Bloods. Then, on September 11, 1897, Agent Wilson unceremoniously noted in the August report to

his superior that "Old Minor Chief White Calf who has been sick for a few months suffering from some internal complaint died during the month." So died the last of the Blood war chiefs, relegated to the back pages of history, leaving no photographic likenesses and little record of his life in the buffalo days.

What did remain, however, were the three artifacts that had belonged to White Calf, collected by Frances Kirby during her journeys to Blackfoot country in Alberta.

Soon after arriving in Gleichen in 1890, Frances's traveling companion, Violet, met Reverend J. J. Tims, the Anglican missionary to the Blackfoot. Ten days later they were engaged. Frances gave the bride away on October 30, 1890, and went back to England. Two years later, she returned to Gleichen, on June 7. In the interim, she must have had a falling out with Violet. For the duration of the visit, Violet lived in the Mission House on the Blood Reserve, while Frances stayed 130 miles to the north, lodging at the homes of people connected to the Blackfoot Reserve—the Farm Instructor, the Indian Agent, and several missionaries—all of whom appear in Violet's official wedding photograph. While at the mission with her infant, Violet wrote almost daily to her husband while he renovated their home on the reserve in Gleichen. She kept her husband up-to-date on Frances, hardly losing an opportunity to take a jab at her former friend. "What a bother Mrs. Kirby is. I was hoping that she was safely out of the country by this time. . . that woman is a perfect nuisance."



Above: Frances and John Ojijatekha Brant-Sero. *Toronto Globe* October 16, 1897.

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Frances returned to England around August 15, perhaps with some of her collection of Indian artifacts already in hand. Some years after being back in England, Frances met John Ojijatekha (the Burning Flower) Brant-Sero, a Mohawk Indian from the Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve in Ontario. By then, Frances was 48, some 19 years older than Ojijatekha. Photographs show her to have a tight, pinched appearance, while his open, generous features once earned him third place in an international "beauty show for gentlemen" as they were then called, in England.

On June 29, 1896, the unlikely pair were married. That same year they moved to Canada, taking up residence at Pinder Lodge, a large property on the outskirts of Hamilton. According to the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* they quickly "cut a wide swath in society." Their social tour de force was a huge party they threw in celebration of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897, attended by 600 members of the Iroquois Nation, including the chiefs.

During the two years after this event, the couple remained in the public eye. Ojijatekha combined his acting skills, honed on the dramatic stage in England, with his scholarly knowledge to mount theatrical presentations about Iroquoian culture for local audiences. He lectured in both Mohawk and

English. Frances sometimes played piano while Lizzie Davis, the daughter of a Mohawk chief, sang, dressed in the costume of a Plains Indian woman. For several months, Ojijatekha assisted David Boyle, founding director of the Provincial Museum of Ontario, in his important field study of Iroquoian culture, published in the 1898 *Annual Archaeological Report of Ontario*. Boyle became his great mentor with whom, in Ojijatekha's words, he had formed "a genial bond of tenderness."

In 1899 Ojijatekha was elected second secretary of the Ontario Historical Society, an appointment that drew some criticism from the Six Nations community. These activities brought little money to the Brant-Seros and combined with Ojijatekha's high living style, Frances's savings were soon depleted and the couple were plagued by money problems.

In January 1898 they wrote to David Boyle, offering to sell their collection of Blackfoot artifacts. The list of some 60 artifacts collected by Frances was titled: "OJIJATEKHA Collection of RELICS mostly Illustrative of the Blackfoot and Blood Indians in the Canadian North West Work in Beads and Skin." At the end of the list is a note: "The above collection was gathered by Mrs. Brant-Sero from the Indians themselves during two visits to the Northwest, afterwards taking them to England. The collection is valued at £500. Pinder Lodge, Hamilton, Ont., Jan. 6/98."

Boyle turned down the offer, noting that, "the collection is certainly a very good one . . . but I am fully assured that a



COURTESY OF THE GLENBOW ARCHIVES (NA-1645-1)

similar, or even superior one may be made for less than half the price asked."

In February 1900, Ojijatekha wrote to Boyle of his plan to go to Chicago to make a decent living, and asked him to explain to Frances that it was a question of business, not a matter of running away. "It is my intention to leave Canada for the States in search of a market for my brains and talent," he wrote. In the same month, Frances also wrote Boyle, expressing her concern over her husband's departure, noting that he was "as queer as Dick's hatband that went round nine times and would not tie." Whatever his wife's opinion, Ojijatekha became something of a celebrity during his four-month stay in Chicago. Although he worked as a "special" reporter with the *Evening Post* and received offers to give a lecture series at the Field Museum, Ojijatekha was still unable to make ends meet.

At the Field Museum of Chicago, Stephen C. Simms, assistant curator of Ethnology and later the museum's director, suggested that Franz Boas, curator of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History, might be interested in hiring Ojijatekha as a fieldworker among the Iroquois. Although Ojijatekha sent Boas a lengthy proposal probably in 1900, he noted that certain doors might be closed to him: "My experience and sympathies with my own people make my fitness for field work of some value, however, there does not appear to be any demands for educated Indians in the higher walks."

Above: The official photograph of the wedding of Reverend J. W. Tims and Violet Wood, taken on October 30, 1890, St. Andrew's Church, Gleichen. L-R back row: P. E. Stocken; Teacher Sanderson; Canon W. R. Haynes; Reverend Doctor A. W. F. Cooper; Reverend Stanley Stocken; Miss Lizzie Perkes; Reverend Frank Swainson; Mrs. M. Begg; Magnus Begg; William F. Baker, farm instructor. L-R front row: Mrs. Swainson; Reverend and Mrs. J. W. Tims; Mrs. Kirby; Mrs. W. M. Baker and her two children.

Although Boas seemed genuinely interested in Ojijatekha's offer, he could see no immediate opportunity for the American Museum of Natural History to embark on a field study of the Iroquois. Since there is nothing to connect him directly with the sale of Frances's collection to that institution in 1910, it seems likely that what Ojijatekha did do was put Simms in touch with Frances. On February 6, 1900, she wrote to Boyle that Simms and a Chicago dealer, T. R. Roddy, were interested in acquiring the collection. Just six weeks later, the secretary of the Wentworth Historical Society noted that Frances was "compelled to sell her collection of Indian curios & said to be very valuable to get money to take her to England." The Field Museum had turned down the offer of the collection, likely because they already held two significant collections from the Bloods. So most probably Frances sold her collection to Roddy.

Sometime between 1900 and 1904, Roddy appears to



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have then sold Frances's material to a major American collector, Erastus Tefft, since in 1904 Tefft produced an elegant handmade catalogue of his collection, which included artifacts first acquired by Frances. White Calf's artifacts were illustrated with annotations.

Then, in 1910, Tefft sold his collection to New York's American Museum of Natural History. Among the 1300 Indian objects were some 30 Blood and Blackfoot artifacts, which, according to the documentation, were originally collected by "Mrs. Brant-Sero." Outside of the AMNH collection, only a single additional object from Frances's original 60-piece collection has been located: a pair of woman's beaded leggings, deposited by Tefft in the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution. Some 30 items on Boyle's original list have yet to be located. A number of the missing artifacts are among those discernible in the several installation photographs of the Canadian Historical Exhibition, Indian section, held in 1899 at Victoria University in Toronto.

An article on the Brant-Seros's 1897 jubilee celebration that ran in the *Toronto Globe* showing two photographs of Ojijatekha clad in Indian regalia suggests another possibility. In his hand Ojijatekha holds a woman's awl case "trimmed with scalp locks," which is now in the American Museum of Natural History. But the moccasins, looped necklace, belt, and leggings he is wearing, all of northern Plains Indian manufacture, have not been located. Perhaps

Ojijatekha kept these and other items as props for the numerous public lectures and performances he continued to offer in Europe and North America until his death in 1914.

Similarly, the photograph of Lizzie Davis in the *Ontario Archaeological Report* shows her wearing a dress, leggings, and moccasins, with a knife sheath and pipe bag held in the belt, and bow and arrows in hand, all from Frances's collection. Some of Lizzie's regalia can be seen in the 1899 exhibition photographs and are preserved today in the American Museum of Natural History.

As for when Frances originally made her collection, there are only two pieces of direct evidence. One is a single entry in the Canadian Historical Exhibition catalogue: "pair of earrings bought direct, and taken from the ears of a beautiful Indian woman, 1890." The other is on Tefft's list, "Coll. by Mrs. Brant-Sero, 1895, Blood Reserve." While existing documentation indicates that Frances did make three trips to Blackfoot country, information corroborating a visit to the Blood Reserve has yet to surface.

The three White Calf artifacts that Frances collected are today of particular interest; we know something about White Calf and his times—the early days of transition to reserve life, which Frances and Violet would have witnessed. One of the White Calf artifacts from Frances's collection was a "pad saddle," probably the oldest of two major types of Plains Indian saddle, used only by men. Its form—a soft hide enve-



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lope, partitioned lengthwise along the centre, with both compartments stuffed with the resilient hollow hairs of moose or deer—was likely adopted from the word *Cojinillos*, literally "little Pillows" or saddle pads, which the Spanish were trading to the Indians of New Mexico by at least 1703. White Calf's saddle was decorated with beadwork.

On Tefft's list it is described as a "war saddle." In Blackfoot warfare there were two types of raiding parties: "scalp raids," which focused on killing and taking scalps, and "horse raids." Capture was the primary method of obtaining horses, and the incessant raiding of neighbouring tribes was at the core of the intense warfare that characterized the region during much of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Horse-raiding parties traditionally travelled to the enemy on foot. The Bloods' closest enemies, the Crows, were a 16 to 28 day walk away. Returning with captured horses meant riding bareback, without breechcloths to prevent blistering, for two or three arduous days and nights, almost without rest.

Beginning around 1870, White authorities clamped down on inter-tribal horse raiding and, to avoid the law, raiding parties began setting forth on horseback. This practice became progressively more common toward the close of inter-tribal horse raiding in 1885/1886. As horse raiders equipped themselves with only the bare essentials, however, it is unlikely that they used decorated saddles like White Calf's.

Left to right: The pad saddle attributed to White Calf, decorated with floral and geometric beadwork. White Calf's club with beaded decoration and fringed hide handle. White Calf's knife and sheath. The zigzag motif may represent lightning, held in awe for the speed and power with which it strikes.

Scalp raids, on the other hand, though infrequent, often involved hundreds of warriors riding to the enemy on horseback, accompanied by considerable pageantry. "Each man rigs himself [and his horse] up in his grandest attire," noted Robert N. Wilson, who ran a trading post in the town of Stand off on the Blood Reserve for more than 50 years and also served as an Indian Agent from 1898 to 1911. In 1891, Red Crow, the co-head chief of the Bloods, told Wilson of a huge Blackfoot party on the warpath. White Calf, leading a group of scouts, returned with a report on the location of Cree enemies. Said Red Crow: "The news spread rapidly through the camp, and soon in all directions were to be seen men catching and saddling their war horses. A great war dance was indulged in by the mounted men, until all were ready. Then off they started, hundreds and hundreds in number—a fine sight."

While the passage confirms that horses were saddled for the dance and the journey to the enemy camp, it doesn't mention whether saddles were used in battle. Typically, a Blackfoot war party would organize a ferocious initial assault on

horseback to shock the enemy into disarray. As they attacked, they constantly wove their bodies from side to side, or bent low over the horse's neck to make a difficult target. Apparently, riding bareback allowed them to perform these manoeuvres with greater dexterity, and a number of accounts describe Plains Indians discarding their saddles before the charge. A variety of ceremonies called for both horse and rider to dress in full war regalia: sham battles, mounted parades, the Riding Big Dance performed immediately before striking out on a scalp raid, or during the annual Sun Dance.

White Calf's club is another fascinating piece in the Brant-Sero collection. Performing brave deeds was a primary means for Blackfoot men to gain social esteem, and greater bravery was associated with hand-to-hand combat than with the use of weapons that could kill efficiently from a distance. In the late 19th century, Blackfoot warriors used elliptical or bi-conical stone-headed clubs with long shafts, often called "coup sticks" because they could be used to strike a powerful blow. A longer shaft, it seems, was used for fighting on horseback. In a running battle, a warrior used his club to knock the enemy from his mount. Although many Blackfoot war exploits have been recorded in both words and pictographs, references to clubs are few and far between.

One of the few accounts was given by Shorty White Grass, an important Blackfoot (Piegan) warrior and ceremonialist who died on his reserve in Montana in 1908 at the age of 80. He recalled that an enemy Chief, seeing that death was inevitable and fearing death by a gun, entreated Big Nose, a Blackfoot, to kill him with a club instead. Despite the paucity of written accounts, museums contain many serviceable stone-headed clubs from the northern plains. Most have little decoration, while others, like the one attributed to White Calf, are ornate.

Clubs were likely used as weapons only on scalp raids and in pageants associated with war. It may be that towards the close of tribal warfare, clubs came to be regarded more and more as insignia of rank, to be carried on ceremonial occasions, particularly in dances. Today, traditional powwow dancers often carry a decorative club, which they raise when the drum gives an accented beat or "shot."

The third White Calf artifact is described in the Canadian Historical Exhibition catalogue as a "double edged scalping knife." The Blackfoot called this type of knife a "stabber" or "beaver tail knife." It was favoured in hand-to-hand fighting. In the 1940s elderly Blackfoot Indians explained to anthropologist John Ewers that the knife was used as a shock weapon. The warrior grasped the handle with the blade protruding from the heel of his fist and used either a powerful downward chopping motion to penetrate his opponent above the clavicle, or a sidewise slash into the stomach or between the ribs. The elders described how they used such knives in their youth to scalp the enemy by grasping his hair with the left hand, using the right hand to cut around his crown, and jerking off the hair with the skin attached, removing a section of scalp about 7.6 cm (3 inches) in diameter.

On horse raids, knives were indispensable. The most prized horses were war horses, or buffalo runners, which were kept securely tethered outside the tipi near the sleeping owner's bed. The raider would cut the halter at just the right length to quietly lead the horse away.

White Calf's sheath, with its characteristic lozenge-shaped tab, is a uniquely Blackfoot design. Typically, the sheath has two beaded sections separated by a length of hide, often decorated only with zigzag lines. Based on comparison with other items having similar beadwork styles, it is unlikely that White Calf's saddle, club, and sheath were made before 1875—five years after the last major scalp raid mounted by the Bloods.

Of all the documentation of the saddle and club, only on Tefft's list is the term "war" used to describe them. What we know about war practices at the time, however, suggests that any association of these artifacts with war was largely ceremonial. Long after the fighting days, war ceremonials continued, and it is entirely possible that Frances observed White Calf in a mounted parade or sham battle decked out with his club, saddle, and knife.

As Frances's collection changed hands, White Calf's name became increasingly prominent on the collection lists. His name is absent from the original list provided to Ojijatekha's mentor Boyle when he and Frances first attempted to sell the collection. Then, in the Historical Exhibition catalogue there is a single entry, "Blood Indian Pony Saddle (Blood Reserve). Belonged to Chief White Calf." By the time the items got to the AMNH, the accession list has the notation "obtained from White Calf . . . Blood Reserve" recorded for all three items.

No doubt many Indian artifacts have been falsely associated with famous chiefs in order to increase their monetary value or for vanity's sake. Although White Calf was undeniably important among his people, he did not achieve the kind of widespread notoriety that would have made his name particularly marketable. While we cannot be absolutely certain that the three artifacts did belong to White Calf, their existing documentation is cause to acknowledge this important, if overlooked, Blood tribal leader.

Of course, the collectors of White Calf's possessions were, themselves, intriguing characters. Until the end Ojijatekha remained a controversial, larger-than-life figure. He travelled extensively throughout Europe performing in wild west shows, not unlike the one that first inspired Frances to cross the Canadian Prairies. On March 18, 1914, Ojijatekha sent to Boyle's successor his translation of an important speech given in 1774 by the Mohawk Chief Logan. Two months later, the Provincial Museum received notice of Ojijatekha's death. Condolences were sent to Frances at the same address as Ojijatekha's last correspondence, indicating that the couple may have been together at the end. Whatever their quirks, the couple's interest in Western Indians has helped preserve a piece of history that might otherwise have been lost to antiquity. ■



John Ojijatekha Brant-Sero as he might have appeared in his public lectures. Toronto *Globe* October 16, 1897.