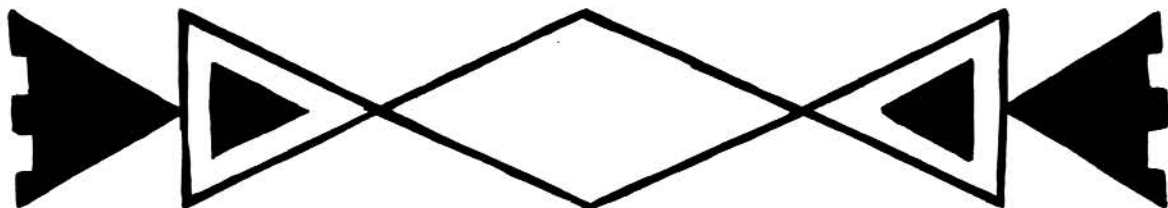


THE MEMORABLE CHIEFS

(Blackfeet)



Developed by the Blackfeet Indians

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THE MEMORABLE CHIEFS

(Blackfeet)

Many years ago before the coming of the non-Indian people to what we now refer to as the United States of America, the Piegans (Blackfeet Indian Tribe) had their own form of government. Much communication was carried out using gestures, sounds, signals, sign language and drawings which portrayed a story or message. They also used physical materials such as rocks and sticks. This type of communication was not used only on an individual basis, but also with large groups.

At that time, one tribe had several encampments. Each of these encampments had leaders or chiefs. The tribe did not need a long document that included hundreds and hundreds of pages to direct the people. People lived by honesty, trust, sincerity and spiritual guidance.

The people followed the wisdom of their leaders. These leaders or chiefs were males and held positions of authority. The females also had duties and a rightful place in the tribe.

To qualify for a chief, a warrior had to perform many tasks. The chief's position could also be handed down from a chief to his son. The son would have to do something outstanding. He had to prove himself first before he could receive a chieftainship.

The chief would teach his son what to do. He would train the son through childhood. The son would follow the chief around and gain from the chief's experience. Many times the chief would lay a number of sticks down in a row on one side. As the son accomplished a task, a stick would be put over on the other side. This same process was followed until all the suggested tasks were done.

Usually the eldest son would be in line for the chieftainship. If he could not accomplish these tasks or was not interested, a younger son would be trained. The tasks were very difficult, and it took days, even years to accomplish them all. One task might be that a son would have to go alone in the wilderness for many days. He had to provide his own protection, shelter and food. Another task might be that a boy would fast (go without food) for days. He might go to the mountains, cliffs, among the trees, or maybe on a raft floating around on a lake. This seeking a vision or power was a type of bond between son and father.

The Piegan used the sun and moon for their calendar. They set up their meetings according to the full moon. When there was a full moon, the chiefs came together at the head chief's lodge. If it was a nice day, they met in front of the lodge. If the day was bad, they met inside.

There were several encampments for the tribe. Each encampment had about

two hundred lodges in it and ranged about a half-mile apart. Each one had four chiefs. One of these chiefs was the head of that particular encampment. All the chiefs came together to meet with the head chief at his lodge. The head chief held the position as chief of all the Piegan Tribe.

These meetings of the chiefs might be held to decide to move closer to the buffalo so the encampment could obtain food better. They might also decide to send scouts (upcoming chiefs) to search for the food or buffalo herds. These scouts would come back and report to the Chief's council. The chiefs of each encampment would then go back to meet with their group to decide further directions.

There was also a person called the camp crier. This person went out every morning early to let the people know what was going to take place. Another person went out every evening for the same purpose. There were men ready for immediate messages. These camp criers could run for miles at a time.

The chief's meetings were held with great honor and respect. They were always giving thanks and consideration to a higher power. They came dressed in their best regalia. They took time to make decisions because their decisions were made on behalf of the thousands of Piegan people.