

Buffalo Head Dance

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The musical score consists of three staves of music in a 2/4 time signature. The melody is written in a simple, rhythmic style with eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across multiple notes. The lyrics are: "Ay - yay wee yay yah wee yay yah hah, Ay - yay wee yay yah wee yay yah hah, Yay - yay wee yay yah wee yay yah hah, wee yay hay, wee yay hay, hah yah, wee yay hay, wee yay hay, ah yay hah".

The song of the Buffalo Head Dance is one of a number of Mesquakie Indian songs which have been sung by Jim Poweshiek and recorded by Lorrain E. Watters, musical director of Des Moines city schools. Mr. Watters writes the Indian words and syllables in a simple phonetic way which enables the average singer to reproduce the correct sounds with accuracy. Children of the Des Moines elementary schools, under his supervision, sing the song reproduced here, and others, with fine musical results. The music and motion as combined in Mesquakie use, have been used without alteration, by Professor Louis E. Hutto, as dances in his teaching of physical education.

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SOME METHODS OF COLLECTING INDIAN LORE

BY EDGAR R. HARLAN

[Mr. Harlan was invited by the American Association for the Advancement of Science to speak at its meeting in Des Moines on December 28, 1929, and had present some of the Mesquakies in the following response.]

The topic that excuses my being here is "Some Methods of Collecting Indian Lore." I would like to have you interpret "Indian" as simply "Mesquakie"—one of the Algonquin families rather tardy in losing its identity as a prehistoric people. * * * * * There may be something that would be called cheap or theatrical in my way, but if there is, then it is cheap and theatrical for you to go to the home of any friend and there enter into conversation with him and he with you. There has been seventy years of experience in this state between the ancestors of these men and of myself, and between themselves and me. As there are only about three hundred ninety Mesquakies located in almost the geographic center of our state of nearly three million people, it has seemed to me worth while to become acquainted with them, and with the members of this tribe that are still with us and still retaining their traditions. I know no better way than to enjoy their companionship, especially as there is in their hospitality nothing that requires you to do anything that you do not want to do. Theirs is a hospitality and friendship of the pioneers of our own race. And what rule of evidence is not complied with in gathering facts through interpretation by one born to the tongue and tradition of the culture foreign to ours?

I want to introduce you first to George Young Bear, a graduate of Haskell Institute, who is the interpreter for his people. There is no reason why he might not live and work among us. His feeling toward his own people is such that,

rather than go out, for instance, and earn six or seven dollars daily at the Ford plant, he is more content to remain among his people.

Young Bear is the son of Pushetonequa, last of the chiefs of the Mesquakie tribe and is sixty-two years old.

And Jim Poweshiek, who is the father of this young man Jonas.

Young Bear is about my age (60). I do not know of any one with a clearer mind. He understands our words rather well, but not well enough to be certain that he can express himself. For instance, we fool him by saying that a house burns, or burns up or burns down. He knows what it means, but is timid in selecting among our words. It is just as clear as can be that in dealing with our Mesquakie friends they are so careful as to seem reticent. But their prudence is, after all, just common sense. Poweshiek and Young Bear are related, and are of the Bear clan.

The Indian work of our Historical, Memorial and Art Department is not yet headed by an expert, like Mr. Stiles of the Archives, or Professor Steppan of the Museum. Miss Rhode does the part of the work that I am unable to do. Jonas is one of our housekeeping force, but affords us Mesquakie contact not otherwise possible.

In this season it is a satisfaction to go out trapping with one of the older Indians. Then I am forced to use my vocabulary of some twenty of their words. The Indian uses his vocabulary of perhaps a hundred English words. By the time a week is gone I have hints of things the Indian wants to know, or I have gained something from him that I wanted to know. * * * * * Yet there can have been uncertainty or incompleteness. Within the last few years there have been in these trapping trips I suppose as many as a hundred things that would make a good story. I have these in memorandum form, not now to be published or used, for the reason that I am not quite certain whether memoranda made by me is too defective a conversation to be worth your reading. Though possibly a good news story, it has not the fact content you, as scientists, would care to use. * * * * * As I make myself individually responsible for the record that shall be left in the Historical Department, I adhere to the following precepts:

RULES

1. We consort only with Mesquakies of age who are respected highly among Mesquakies of all ages and shades of interest.
2. We avail ourselves of "talks" only with Mesquakies who exchange freely with us at table and our respective homes.
3. We notice only such themes as are voluntarily opened up by the Mesquakies themselves.
4. We record only those talks in which two or more Mesquakies participate as speakers or auditors.
5. We use no interpreter that is not designated by the speakers.
6. We take stenographic notes only when desired by speakers, and these, extended, are by the interpreter read back to the speaker to be corrected or suppressed.
7. Our collection of such talks will not be published while there remains a flow from these sources.

I think there are not over twenty Mesquakies who are sixty years old. Whether there is a material difference in the lore of different clans I do not know.

When manuscripts come back corrected they are filed, and may remain there a long while before being used. I only hope that this state will have on record such facts of the North American Indian as shall not mislead or falsify.

Let us now try to make such a record. I never know what I will get when I start into an interview. If I get nothing, then you will get nothing. You cannot stage an interview with these folks. I doubt if you can with any other of the North American Indians. I assume we have established in their minds that we are sincere, and so I want simply to enter into a conversation with these men that has never before been entered into. There has been no opportunity.

I will ask George to ask his father if he could tell me something that he has said that he would tell me, but which he thinks would take about two hours. Let us go as far as we can. My present information is that Young Bear's mother was in the Black Hawk War, and I am at a place where I want to verify that.

George interprets Mr. Harlan's question to Young Bear. Young Bear replies, and

George interprets: First of all, he wants to show himself that

he is a member of one of the old races that you found living on this continent when your people came into this country—they were wearing these feathers—these ornaments. During the Black Hawk War my own grandmother and mother were living at that time, and they went through the Black Hawk War together. And from that time, when I was a young man, my mother would often relate her experience during those days. And since then those that can read have had the story of the Black Hawk War as written by your people, and many of these facts I dare say are untrue, because my mother has told me a different story.

We do not know what to think or what to believe. Your honorable men who wrote the facts about the war were indeed respectable and thought they stuck to the truth, but we think they are a little bit partial to their own side. They did not get into our side of the story. Therefore, some of the facts were exaggerated and some of them were untrue. In those times your people who were living among our people were different. They had a different attitude toward our people. During the recent years in my going about among your people I have noticed a remarkable change—a remarkable change in attitude toward us.

Black Hawk, one of our most noble men, who was respected by the entire tribe, stuck to the truth and stood by his rights. He told, time and again, to the white people that the lands in Illinois belonged to his tribe. They [the delegation] were sent away without authority from the tribe, but the white people insisted that it had authority from the tribe. They stuck to that and eventually there was a misunderstanding. Black Hawk was right. Our people did not sign away those lands. If you, each one of you, would take the trouble of going into the history more thoroughly from both sides, you will see that Black Hawk was right.

And, my good friends, to this day the Sac and Fox still believe that the lands in the Illinois belong to them. It is their land by right. I cannot say whether your people will ever believe that, but we still do, and for a long time in the future the Sac and Fox will believe the same. If you understand us, if you will listen carefully and try to think these things through,

you will come to a decision that Black Hawk—that our people were right.

My good friend Mr. Harlan has been so kind to me, and understanding, and so I took the liberty of telling him what I have. I promise him that some day I will tell him the whole story—which will take a long time. In the meantime, good friends, I want you to understand that we ask nothing but an understanding—your friendship—your good will toward us. We [Young Bear and Jim Poweshiek] are not descendants of Chief Black Hawk, for he was a Sauk, and we are Fox. We are direct descendants of Chief Poweshiek.

And, my friends, I am very glad to give you this little talk—and may this be the beginning of our sincere friendship—may we know each other. I know through the words, through the friendship of Mr. Harlan, that he has brought us before your people, and we find that we have won more friends. May the Great Spirit bless us all!

Mr. Harlan: [To the audience] I have the promise, as you have, that some day we will have that story. But METHOD is what you have assigned to me, and this is the way I have proceeded, in our long years of acquaintance.

[To Young Bear] Until the moment of this meeting I did not know whether we could have the story and have Jim play his flute. Those of us who still have respect for Longfellow's poetry will remember that Hiawatha set eight or ten nations on their toes. It was gathered largely from Schoolcraft, himself defective in just the degree of any interpreter not acquainted with both Indian and English cultures. George Young Bear uses the English language, as you see, with facility the equal of the average white man, having also his own language and all that lies back of that language, can give us more completely and perfectly what his father or Poweshiek says than could possibly be true of an English interpreter. * * * * * If Schoolcraft through Longfellow gave us what our generation received, then what Schoolcraft never had, and what Longfellow never sang, is what still remains in the soul of the Indian. So it seems to me interesting to have Jim here with his flute. I want to ask him to play one of his melodies. I would rather have one that can be sung as well as played on the flute.

George interprets Mr. Harlan's question to Jim, and Jim both plays and sings the Moccasin Track song.

Mr. Harlan: And such as this is simply the indication of all it may imply. If that was a song, it either says words or has implications, as if when some one on the street whistles Yankee Doodle I would unconsciously fall in step.

A year or so ago we had an Indian Life School, in which we had some twenty or thirty teachers from the Des Moines schools. We took advantage of the occasion to inquire how these flutes were made. (Reads construction of flute from record.)

Mr. Harlan: Now will you sing that song?

Jim sings.

Mr. Harlan: And will you tell us what it says?

Jim tells the story of the song, and George interprets: This is one of our tribal love songs. It was taught to me by the old people when I was still a small boy learning to play the flute. In those days the Indian youths, in the spring of the year, would wander out into the forest, into the hills, and carry the flutes with them, and there play these melodies while alone, and there, when their sweethearts heard them play, would go to them. This song represents that at one time an Indian scout, a young man who was very much in love with a maiden, was called upon by their chief to go out and do the scout duty. The scout duty is very uncertain. When they are called upon to go out they go out for many moons. They never know whether they will ever come back into the village of their people. Therefore, when this Indian scout was called upon, with a heavy heart he had to go out to do his duty, because he had to leave his sweetheart. Nevertheless, it was his duty to go out as a scout, and so when his time came there was a sad parting. He went forth with a heavy step, and there, out in the wilderness, perhaps among the hostile tribes, among the wild beasts, he was out in constant danger, always thinking of the sweetheart he had left in the village. Eventually the relief [substitute scout] came—a scout came to him—and he traveled as fast as he could back to the village. And on his way, being so exhausted by his travel, he came upon a sparkling stream, and there he knelt down in the sand to refresh himself, and there in the sand he saw a moccasin track. Naturally he thought of her. And so the song is called the Moccasin Track song.

Mr. Harlan: You are familiar, George, with our literature to some extent. Do you know whether this song or story is in any of our so-called Indian lore?

George: So far as I know, the story has never been recorded.

Mr. Harlan: You are aware of others than that that are not in our books?

George: There are several of them that have been told to me by these men, and I am aware that they are not in the record.

Mr. Harlan: That is as far as I care to go. I wish to explain to your father that Mrs. Card has been making a stenographic record of this talk, and that it will be extended and returned to you. I have been able through you and with your help to get the story. We will be able to decide, with the help of the audience, whether our method is a correct method. If it is incorrect, this record will show what the defects are.

As illustrating the utility of this method we present herewith a Mesquakie melody in the script of Lorraine E. Watters (see frontispiece). The song as sung by Jim Poweshiek is transcribed by Prof. Watters, but differs from the Moccasin Track Song in that the voice, by a series of syllables, merely replaces the flute. The syllables, vocalized, supply the rhythm and melody as in the Moccasin Song, but do not attempt to narrate the Indian thought. Prof. Watters thus illustrates Indian emotion as nearly as emotion has been translated and rendered out of antiquity from the Italian and other cultures through the violin.

Poweshiek and Prof. Watters join in an explanation of this Buffalo Head score. Their collaboration in recording different Mesquakie songs has resulted in their use in Des Moines schools. In association with Mr. Louis E. Hutto, supervisor of physical education, they have used these songs in teaching pupils the Mesquakie dances. This is the most complete importation into public educational use of aboriginal culture of which I am aware. It admits of no fraud, pretense, nor misapprehension in the process from Mesquakie utterance to the faculties of third grade English pupils in their course of study of Indian life.

DISCUSSION

Dr. Irving Richman: There is being issued, as this company undoubtedly knows, a book on a large scale called the *Dictionary of American Biography*, and edited by Allen Johnson, three

volumes of which have appeared. It is the object of that extensive work to include the lives of all Americans of distinction, Indians especially, and it has fallen to my lot to write the account of Black Hawk for that biography, and I wish, George, you would say to your father that I have written that life, basing a good many things upon investigation of Mr. Harlan, and in that I found myself, with great satisfaction, able to say that the story as to Black Hawk, his relations with the whites, is substantially true, in spite of what white men themselves have said or written about him. And I would like to have that message conveyed to your father.

George interprets Dr. Richman's remarks to his father.

Mr. Harlan: [To the audience] These people have so few contacts with people of intelligence, that anything, if you have the time to give, will help them.

Dr. O. B. Clark: Mr. Harlan, will you tell us to what extent, if any, these older men have attempted to learn the English language?

Mr. Harlan: George, will you respond?

George interprets to Young Bear, and Young Bear answers.

George interprets: The question is pretty hard to answer, as it varies, of course, in individuals. Some are masters of the English language, and some want to receive this higher education, and are still not master of the English language. But these older people, who never had the advantage, will have to learn the meaning through their own interpreters, and through their own neighbors—white neighbors. They are able only to learn the names of the articles that are necessary in their daily lives; and then, of course, other common words that they use every day, such as salutations, etc.

Mr. Harlan: With your approval, George, I will add to the answer to Doctor Clark from an experience I had with your father. When you were not at home, and I wanted to talk with him and his other sons who speak English were not there, I suggested that we get Bill Leaf or Harry Lincoln, and he sometimes smiles and says "That is all right to me." These two men never went to school, but they talk English as glibly as you or I. One day I tried to get at why these young men were avoided as interpreters, and Young Bear suggested that the easier an Indian talked English the faster he lied in both languages. I

believe the only way is to have the interpreter the speaker wants. I don't believe it is fair to get information any other way. * * * * *

Dr. P. E. Cox, of Nashville, Tennessee: I want to ask George if he will tell us whether or not his people have some rule or method by which they undertake to preserve the history of their ancestors.

George interprets to Young Bear, who answers.

George interprets: In everything that we do, everything which we believe is celebrated—we have ceremonies for these things. We do that—in our ceremonies and religion—and when it comes to preserving records, it goes verbally to the respective families and to the most of the men—elder men of the tribe, or leaders of each clan—and these men are told the events of the tribe—the most important events. As long as they live they keep these in their minds—not written, not recorded—not preserved only in their minds. But at some future time they pass this on to the next leader of their respective clans. And so it goes on from generation to generation. The next generation—I am very much afraid that this custom will be lost. The men that are before you at this time [himself and Jim Poweshiek]—there are only two that have been given this information. The younger men—we do not know what they will do if we give them this information—whether they will put this in written form. Undoubtedly they will—or they may not. If not, then they will be lost.

Young Bear speaks.

George interprets: It is very fine indeed when the white people take to recording events—the things that they see. And it is interesting that some of these friends of ours are taking the trouble of trying to get the information from our people so that it may be preserved. As I have observed our young people, they read—they have books in their homes, and they read of facts as they find them in the books, and through my talk with Mr. Harlan I find what a task our younger people have. It is indeed very hard to learn even one word of the English language. I have attempted to learn the English language. I go out and live among the white people, eat with them and live in the same house with them, and go on trails with them day after day, and still I am unable to speak the

English language. I presume it is the same way with any other language—for I know I have tried to teach Mr. Harlan our own language, and have never succeeded.

Mr. Harlan: Further answering Doctor Cox's suggestion that they preserve these things. By old people telling what they have learned, and the younger people getting what they can, there would be satisfactory preservation if the culture were to continue pure. But having their instructions mixed up with ours, then if their history would continue, it increases uncertainly forever. As it is now, I think the best way is my method. When President Harding died these Indians were guests of the city of Ottumwa. The city was holding a memorial to the late president. The Indians were to have a memorial of their own [incidentally, it would have been called by white people a great dance], but the people of Ottumwa asked the Mesquakies to participate with them. Within less than thirty minutes after I asked Young Bear he talked to these ten or fifteen thousand people, and his talk, after being interpreted by George and I relayed it to the crowd, was just as well received as Senator Frailey's magnificent oration. I asked Young Bear to write it in his script. He wrote a page about 3 x 5 inches long. Then I asked George to write his interpretation. I set both up and published it in the *ANNALS of Iowa* for April, 1924, Vol. XIV, pages 297-300.

STATE CAPITOL LOCATED

We learn that the commissioners appointed by Gov. Grimes located the capitol on Tuesday, the 22nd inst., agreeably to instructions, at Fort Des Moines. The precise site is on the east bank of the Des Moines River, opposite the main part of the town. Some disaffection exists at the Fort because it was not located in the fork of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers, where the town is situated.—*Muscatine Journal*, April 29, 1856. (In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.)

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