

AN ORIGINAL STUDY OF MESQUAKIE (FOX) LIFE¹

III

Wednesday Evening, August 29, 1928.

INDIAN LIFE SCHOOL

(Talk between Dr. Melvin R. Gilmore and E. R. Harlan on the one part and Young Bear and Jim Poweshiek on the other, George Young Bear, interpreter.)

Mr. Harlan: There are two or three new matters that we heard of after we were through work last night. One of these Dr. Gilmore answered, but we did not get it into the record, and that is, How was the flute made that Jim played last night, and what is it made of? A lady asked Dr. Gilmore last night, after we separated, what the flute is made of, who made it, and where.

Jim Poweshiek and Young Bear confer, Jim speaks:

The art of making the flute is an ancient art with our tribe. We do not know who first made the flute. They have been played for generations. Our people love these flutes and cherish them. In making these flutes we must first find the finest red cedar. It must not have too many knots. It must be straight and true. Cut it to a certain length, then leave it for a while to dry, to be sure that it does not twist. The red cedar, when it commences to dry, begins to twist. They then begin to shape out the flute to a desired length, and after that the piece is split through the center. They then mark out the hollow—they scrape out the hollow, and at the end they cut out a few knots (places) for the sound (control) and after that they have a wax from the honey, and put it along the edge, then they put these together. They take a piece of iron or some other hard instrument, and put this plate in between. They try it in a fixed tune, for each time they have to cut some more if it does not sound right. When it sounds right they cut out the key hole. For the key hole they burn the hole through. There are six holes. And again they try for

¹ For previous days' records of these studies, see *ANNALS* of October, 1933, page 116, and of January, 1934, page 221.

some time, until it can be used to sing the songs. So that is the way they make the flute.

Mr. Harlan: Now let us ask if Jim made this flute that he plays.

Jim: Yes, I made the flute.

Mr. Harlan: How long ago did you make it? How old were you when you made your first flute?

Jim: When I was about fifteen years old I began to hear the love songs on the flute by all the young men. Each of the young men had a flute and as I did not have a flute I asked for one, and they made me one. Of course the first flute they made for me was a small flute. When I got this flute I tried to learn to play, but found out it took a long time to learn to play the different songs, and many of these songs that I learned are the very songs that I still play. There are hundreds of these songs and in those days every one played—all of the young men had flutes, and so I had the first of the flutes because there were some of the old men who could make these flutes for their young men, and so after I learned how to play I wanted to learn how to make one. The first one I made was a small flute, and of course in a short time I broke that, and started to make another. Since that I have been making flutes, and from time to time I give them away, or sell or trade them, so I never have the same flute for long.

Dr. Gilmore: In the first place he said the two pieces were fastened with the wax—not the bees' wax, but the other material that the bees used to gum up the opening in the hives, which the bees get from various sources. It is a resinous substance gotten from buds of trees—cottonwood buds and other buds. That is the kind of sticking material used. So here comes the first question, What was used before the white men came, for the bees were not here? What was used before honeybees were here? I suppose glue was used, and here I will pause to ask our friends what was used before bees came to America?

Jim: In making these flutes there were different ways of using—I understand, for instance, there were the horns they take from a deer and other animals that have horns, and they shape these out for whatever they want to make. If they

want to make a flute, they take different shapes of horns, and there are different ways of making the flutes and different sizes and different things they have to use—they never fail to make these things, because they know how to do things that we now think would be impossible, and so understand the rule that was used—they make the glue out of that, and also they make a glue out of the head of a turtle, and that's the way, before they made the glue from the bee's wax, and this glue whenever it is used, you put it on once and it stays on. Of course, you cannot take it off—you just have to break it off, because it holds fast and is permanent. I still have some of this glue left that was made about a hundred years ago.

Dr. Gilmore: The muzzles of the buffalo were used, and I think part of the forehead, and the feet, and other parts, just as they make glue now, and it would be interesting I think, to mention that he still has some that was made nearly a hundred years ago. I can tell how it was made from the tribes I know of. This flute was made in the old time by splitting the stick and gouging it out, because they had no way to bore the barrel hole. He mentioned a piece of iron was put under. The air passed down through the mouth piece and over the partition and down through the flute. It is directly over the partition. That cut was made down here and the cut was shaved so there was a passage for the air. Now for the air to pass over, there was a little flat piece with an oblong opening in it, set on that opening which has been cut on the top of the flute from the mouth piece down to the barrel of the flute, and here there is a piece of iron, or rather, I suppose it was lead, so it could be easily worked. Lead was used by all the tribes I know. What was commonly used, was the shoulder blade of the rabbit. That was cut to fit this last place, and an oblong cut was made in it, then this "rider" was set on the plate made from the shoulder blade of the rabbit, and was tied on with a thong and that thong passed over the shoulder of the "rider" and closed the air from the outside, so it must pass through the oblong opening. That was what was used in the old time. The shoulder blade was used by all the tribes I know.

Jim: I did not mention that this piece of iron was used only on the flute that has been made lately, and these old people

had to use that bone before the coming of the white men and iron, they did not use any of the metal on their flutes. In the spring of each year the bark slips easily from all the trees and they take the bark from the hickory tree and they dry this bark and in the winter time they make their flutes, and from this bark which is now very dry and hard they shape out the flat piece, and this of course is very hard, and hard to break, and they make the flutes from this, and when they glue this on, of course it lasts longer than anything else, and in making these flutes, in every one of them in the old time bark was used. I have never heard of any one making the flutes by using the bones, but used nothing but the bark in old times instead of iron.

Dr. Gilmore: That is a new point of information that I had never heard before. The tribes I know used only the piece of bone.

Mr. Harlan: This is exactly the type of experience I had hoped for, for your information. My want of skill in getting this sort of information is letting it go by default, and this whole thing is good. It is a fine contribution to the information we and these teachers are seeking.

Dr. Gilmore: All the tribes I know in the Missouri region used the bones, and that is still from the prairie country. They can get the bark material at this place here better than they can in the prairies. The hickory might be so common among the tribes that you know, but the tribes I know didn't have that, but they did have the jack rabbits, so this material that could be obtained suggested itself there with the Pawnees, the Otoes, the Dakotas, the Arickaras, the Crows, and some other tribes in the prairie region. Of course they did not have the hickory except along the Missouri, but the prairie form of manufacture and building were, you understand, different from the tribes of the woodland. The tepee is a prairie form of dwelling, and the wickiup is the woodland form of dwelling.

Now we have spoken of sticking the two pieces together and described how the glue was made. He mentioned that he has a specimen of the glue, made a hundred years ago, and some of the people would be interested to know how that glue

was made and carried about and made ready for use. As I have learned it, they boil the material, and skim off the skum from that, then keep skimming it off until it is a clear liquid. And after it is clear of all skum, sticks were prepared about the size of a pencil, which they dipped into the glue and turned it about and gathered a little glue on the end, let it harden, and so continued dipping and cooling it until they had a sizable lump on the end of the stick. It was convenient to carry about for future use. The way they used it would be to heat a vessel of water hot and dip the glue stick into it, when the hardened glue which touched the hot water would be liquid, ready for use, and when they laid the stick down it was hard and smooth, as it was before. That's the way the tribe carried the glue, and put it away for future use. I want to ask Jim if that is the way they did it.

Jim: In making the glue from the horns of the deer, that's the only way they made their glue. They did not have any glue from buffaloes, so in making the glue they boiled it and would take a stick, and of course while it is boiling they dipped this stick in, and took it out and cooled it off until it hardens, and they get as much as they want for their own use, then whenever they wanted to use it it was a hard substance, then they take the substance and moisten it—sometimes they spit on it and sometimes they stick it in their mouths, and then hold it by the fire until it melts, and then rub it on whatever they want to use it on and then they glue this together, so that's the way they make the glue.

Dr. Gilmore: Substantially the same plan of making the glue sticks and the form of using them as I described. There is one more thing about the use of the glue. The glue could be moistened, as he said or by hot water. To make a nice smooth workmanlike job of finishing the glued parts a certain powder was used to take up the surplus glue, and that powder was made from gypsum. The tribe that I am acquainted with found gypsum on the plains—the Pawnees and the Omahas got it in Kansas. It is a stone that when heated will become a white powder, and that white powder would take up the surplus glue, and I supposed these eastern people had some means of finishing off the glued materials also. Perhaps they

had some powder—I do not know whether gypsum or what, but they must have had some way of finishing up the glued work.

Perhaps it might be interesting for all of you to know something about the method of procedure in finding out information of the old time.

(George interprets Dr. Gilmore's question, Jim answers, and Young Bear cuts in with information to Jim.) George interprets: In making the arrows, and the feathers you put on and also the point or the arrow head—well, the glue is mostly used, and in order to make this glue, why you do the same thing again as in making the flute, and you want to have a smooth surface. In order to do this it is done—of course some are experts in making the arrows, and some are not. Not every one can make the arrow—they have got to be taught, and so in making these arrows and applying the glue you first take the glue and moisten it—you stick that in your mouth, and then you hold it before the fire. Of course it must not be too hot, and before it gets too hot you have to very quickly apply it on the arrow. You do that all around that which you put the glue on, and then the bones of the deer are used to smooth it off so it would not be rough, and the glue that sticks on, the surface glue, is scraped off by the use of the same bone—taken out and made from the bones of the deer, and of course in making their points and putting the feathers in they do not only use the glue, but of course the glue fastens them first time, then it is tied with the guts and the muscles taken from the deer. They tie this on, and then also the glue is applied, and in this way the feather does not come off easily.

Mr. Harlan: Do they use a powder to keep it from being sticky?

(George interprets Mr. Harlan's question, Young Bear speaks to Jim)—Jim answers: In making the arrows and putting on the glue they did not use any powder of any kind, although our old people have often told us a certain powder should be used in smoothing out this glue, but we have never known just what it is. They shaped them out by the use of a rock, shaping them out, and so the glued pieces—they put on the same glue that holds it by tying it with the muscles and

all and those hold it. Of course they smoothed it—they also used a bone.

Mr. Harlan: I think that will be all we will ask him now. My friends [the teachers], you will see that when the Indians are asked a question to which you and I would answer yes or no, our Indian friends add a little information that they would otherwise fail to impart. Now we will ask Dr. Gilmore to continue his observations on the flute or whatever subject he sees fit. Our Indian friends as well as ourselves, are eager for his words.

Dr. Gilmore: Some of the company have come in since the description was given of how the flute is made. Jim said there were six holes made and you can see that. He said they were burned, and of course that is the way it was done, but in the old times they would have trouble drilling, I suppose, with a stone drill. Maybe he can tell about that. But another thing you will notice. If you touch the flute, you will find a place in the barrel for the passage of the air, and for finishing the wood, among the tribes I am acquainted with, a certain plant is used. They use a plant which is very full of silica. We call it horse tail, jointed grass, snake grass, and that plant is used for polishing, and I wonder what these people used for polishing in the old time, before they had sand paper, emery paper, etc. I would like to know if that plant was used. It is very hard, and when you are using it it will make your teeth grit—it is jointed grass.

(George interprets Dr. Gilmore's talk. Young Bear speaks to Jim.) Jim talks: In the old time there was nothing that was impossible for them, because before the time when the white men came to our people and brought the implements they used to make their things, our people did not have these implements, and they had to make them themselves. Of course, to make them they must first think these things out and try to make things, so it would not be hard to make whatever they wish to make, and so it is with everything. In making arrows and bows some one must first know the kind of tools they want to use to make whatever they wish to make, and so in finding things out, in making these tools, it was not the thought or the making of the people, but through the Great Spirit.

They first pray to the Great Spirit, and the Great Spirit blesses them and in that way they find out the things they want to make, and in making these flutes they want to make the surface smooth—well, in those days they used the rocks, and the flint, etc. Sometimes they used sand and ashes, and such things as that.

Dr. Gilmore: You people [the teachers] here tonight are swinging in and looking in on the way and getting some information of the way they [the Indians] learn, and on that matter of the use of gypsum in polishing, the bureau of ethnology published an erroneous statement in their report of the polishing of arrows, the smoothing off of surplus glue. The writer there said they used mica in polishing—that they burned it to a powder, and the powder was used to take off the surplus. Now you know mica will not burn, and that the material burned to make the white powder was gypsum, instead of mica.

Mr. Harlan: I wonder if we may not have George explain to the Indians what Dr. Gilmore tells of a mistake in one of our books.

Dr. Gilmore: The point is that the investigators need to know more.

Mr. Harlan: The conversation began on the flute. Any other person who is trained like Dr. Gilmore would have had the information on the flute only, but now this party of teachers has gained authentic information through his pursuing the matter into the different materials and different points. Without his expert knowledge we would have remained without this complete information from the Mesquakies, and particularly the old Mesquakies. Somehow I am aware, Dr. Gilmore, this is the first expert information they have ever been invited to publicly impart, and they have never exchanged with any white man the information you have exchanged with them in these teachers' hearing.

(Some one asks of what material the wickiup matting is made.)

Mr. Harlan: Let us see if we can get that answered.

Jim: I imagine it is made out of bull rushes—cat-tails.

Dr. Gilmore: That is not all. I wish the visitors would

notice how skilfully they are laid together, and they are bound together by a needle—that is through the middle of the end of the cat-tail.

Mr. Harlan: Jim, Dr. Gilmore alludes to the cat-tail leaf made into the matting. Is it the leaf?

Jim: It is the leaf.

Mr. Harlan: Do you make it of the flat part, or the round stalk?

(Jim does not understand the question.)

Mr. Harlan: When we say leaf, we mean the flat part, not the round part.

Dr. Gilmore: It is the blade that they use, not the round stalk.

Mr. Harlan: Do they use the rod or the blade that bends over?

(George interprets, Jim answers, and Young Bear speaks, with George interpreting.): It is the flat part. If any of you look carefully at the wickiup and examine each of those leaves you will find that they are all flat—none of them round. The round part is not used, but the blades are used.

Dr. Gilmore: That is what I wanted the visitors to notice—that the flat part is used so it sheds the rain, and is very skilfully done.

Mr. Harlan: On next Sunday afternoon will you get some cat-tails and start a mat so we can see just how it is made?

Jim: Yes.

Mr. Harlan: Let me make this suggestion. Dr. Gilmore has told us of the woodland and the prairie people. He tells us that the plains people had a separate style of habitation, and the woodland people had their style. I wonder if he will tell us more about these styles of habitation?

Dr. Gilmore: As Mr. Harlan has said, I was born in Nebraska, in the Omaha region, so I know the people of that region better than I know the woods people. The prairie, you see, is the country without so much timber. These people had these materials, and the geographic condition always controls the forms of dwellings. There was some timber along the streams, and the skins of the buffalo were excellent for making the covering of the tent, but these people of the prairie had

not only to cut the poles, but in many instances had to drag them long distances. But when they traveled anywhere, going in quest for meat, on a buffalo hunt, or going after other products, they had to have portable dwellings, and the tepee was the type. Some of the tribes had the custom of using four poles for the frame work, and some tribes used only three poles. Of course, a camp would include much more ground than there is here. The Omahas and other tribes have good camps, and these tepees are set in a circle, according to the size of the party traveling—it might be half a mile in diameter. The circle of each division of the tribe—and in the Omaha tribe there are ten divisions—there are two main divisions of five each—and as the camp is set it is set like the tepee itself. The entrance to the camp is like the entrance to the tepee—which is set according to the way they travel. And so each of these would have its circle. They had a system of placing the tepees. If they did not have a system they could never find anything, but each one knew just where to go for his own tent, because it was always there.

Mr. Harlan: Now, I expect Young Bear and Jim are asleep. But tomorrow evening we will ask them if there is a similar custom with respect to their wickiups.

Dr. Gilmore: Each nation had its own system.

Mr. Harlan: Well, we are all probably within twenty minutes of our sleepy time, and I wonder if we can stir up Jim and have him play that song he played last night.

Jim plays on his flute.

Mr. Harlan: Can that be sung?

George: That is the same one he sang last night.

Mr. Harlan: The one you sang, but didn't play with the flute—sing that.

(Jim sings then tells the story.) George interprets: The words of the song are repeated over and over. Of course in a chorus there are different words, but these words tell the story of a certain young couple.

Once upon a time there was a maid who was of marrying age, and her parents were considering a certain young man, who was already a mighty hunter. This young man seems to have a future before him, and was considered as a likely hus-

band of this girl. So they made an agreement between the parents that this young couple should marry, and they were married, but the girl was in love with another young man, and she did not love this young man she had to marry. She was very unhappy, and so she told her parents that she did not love the one she was living with but she loved another, and she was very unhappy, and she could not have a happy life and she wanted a happy life—to have a lodge of her own, and the rule was that she should serve and try to love the one she was living with, and so they moved them to an island far away, and they could not be seen by any one, and this way they could forget every one and be forced to love the one they lived with. However, she could not forget the young man she loved, no matter how far away they moved her, and so she swam ashore to the main land, and she made this song, and the words are, "I hate him, I hate him! Even from the island I could swim across."

Mr. Harlan: Sing the chorus once more, Jim.

(Jim sings the chorus.)

Mr. Harlan: Now, let us ask Dr. Gilmore if, in his acquaintance of other songs, this particular story has come to his knowledge.

Dr. Gilmore: No, I never heard this one, but similar instances and similar songs I have known of. The first part of the song is the same—I recognize the first part of it in different songs, but the latter part of it is different. It shows the borrowing of music, just as with us.

Mr. Harlan: Will you tell Jim to think up a different one for tomorrow night to play or sing or both?

(George interprets Mr. Harlan's question, and interprets Jim's answer.): He is not sure he can be here for tomorrow night, but he will do as you ask if he can be here.

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