



EPISODE 1 2004 - RED CLOUD PIPE, LIVERMORE, CALIFORNIA.

Wes Cowan: Our next story will offer a unique insight into the life of the legendary Native American chief, Red Cloud. It's the 1870's. On the Northern Plains, the U.S. army is forcing Red Cloud and his Oglala Lakota, or Sioux people, onto a government reservation. Here, they will become dependant on U.S. officials known as Indians Agents, many of whom have reputations for corruption and inefficiency. The chance of Red Cloud and one of these agents becoming friends seems unlikely. Or is it?

We've heard of a story about a Native American pipe that, if true, suggests a remarkable relationship. The pipe is the proud possession of Pat Smith and her daughter, Susan. It once belonged to Pat's great-grandfather ... an Indian Agent named James Irwin, who family legend says was given the pipe as a gift.

Susan: The peace pipe was given from Red Cloud to our ancestor Dr. Irwin.

Wes: But would Red Cloud really give a pipe to an Indian agent? I'm Wes Cowan. I've come to Pat's home in Livermore, California to check the story out.

Wes: Hey there it is!

Pat: Yeah.

Wes: Can I pick it up?

Pat: Sure, go ahead.

Wes: Oh terrific, beautiful. Now what is it that you want me to find out?

Pat: I want to know was it actually given by Red Cloud to Dr. Irwin – and if so what sort of a relationship Dr. Irwin and Red Cloud had?

Wes: You know I've gotta tell you, I find this story about the pipe a little hard to believe.

Susan: I agree. I think it's a very unusual story and that is why I would be excited to know that it was a true story.

Wes: If you don't mind I'm going to take the pipe and I'm ready to get to work. The first thing I want to do is take a closer look at the pipe. As an appraiser I've seen dozens of these pipes. And from the wood of the stem and the shape of the bowl, this looks to me like a genuine Plains Indian pipe from the late 1800's. I also know Red Cloud was one of the greatest adversaries the U.S. military ever faced. In 1868, he won a remarkable victory against the U.S. government, forcing them into the Fort Laramie Treaty. This required the army to abandon its forts along the settler route known as the Bozeman Trail. And it guaranteed the Lakota possession of what's now the Western half of present-day South Dakota, including the Black Hills, and much of Montana and Wyoming. Less than a decade later, the government reneged on that deal. They encroached on the Lakota's land, and eventually confined them to reservations. But Red Cloud continued to fight for the rights of his people. He became a statesman - regularly traveling to the East Coast to cultivate relationships with reformers and fight his case with government officials. So to get a second opinion on the pipe and discover more about it, I've come to the Cultural Resources Center of the Museum of the American Indian near Washington D.C. - where I'm meeting Native American pipe expert and associate curator, Emil Her Many Horses. First, Emil explains that Native American pipes are much more than "peace pipes".

Emil Her Many Horses: The pipe is used in all kind of aspects of Native American life, through individual prayer, individual ceremonies. It's conceivable that this was used at the end of a treaty and that, to cement that deal, the leaders may have smoked that with them and that hence, "peace pipe".

Wes: Next, Emil reveals that many Native Americans regard pipes as sacred.

Emil: The Tobacco was put in here... When you're done praying you would smoke that pipe and then that smoke, that visible form rises to the Great Spirit, or what we call the "Great Mystery".

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Wes: The whole act of a person having a pipe is one that is not taken lightly, because it's such a religious symbol. It seems unlikely that Red Cloud would have given away his personal pipe. But I still want to confirm my suspicion that the pipe is period Lakota. The first clue lies with the bowl. It's made of Catlinite, a rare red stone with an unusual story attached.

Emil: So from our stories, from our traditional stories, the red stone is the blood of native peoples who died in a flood.

Wes: What's interesting is that Catlinite is found in only one place- Minnesota, the ancestral home of Red Cloud's tribe, the Oglala Lakota. And what about the date? Comparing our pipe to the museum's collection of late 19th century Lakota pipes reveals something remarkable. They're identical!

Wes: So we have a traditional Lakota pipe that comes from the right time period.

Emil: Correct.

Wes: So our pipe is period Lakota. But could it have belonged to Red Cloud? The answer may lie here at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. Red Cloud was the most photographed Native American of the nineteenth century. Photo historian Frank Goodyear is an expert on his images.

Frank Goodyear: Red Cloud was one of the most celebrated warriors but later as a tribal diplomat. He came to east more than a dozen different occasions, met 5 different presidents, and there was a real demand for images of him. Plus, I think that Red Cloud enjoyed being photographed. This was an occasion for him to mark a friendship between himself and somebody that he had met in the past.

Wes: Have you ever found one of Red Cloud with an Indian agent named James Irwin?

Frank: There are no photographs that I know of, of Red Cloud and Irwin together.

Wes: How about Red Cloud holding a pipe?

Frank: Yes, we've actually got a number of instances where Red Cloud is holding a pipe. This is an early photograph from 1877 taken during the 4th trip that he made to Washington D.C.

Wes: Round stem, tack decorated. Clearly not our pipe . . . It's not our pipe... That pipe is a very gracile pipe though, very different than this one, so that's not it. This is looking like a dead end... until Frank shows me one last picture.

Frank: A photograph in the portrait gallery's collection of Red Cloud and Professor O.C. Marsh.

Wes: According to Frank, Marsh met Red Cloud in 1874. He was so appalled by the conditions on the reservation, that he fought Red Cloud's case all the way to the White House. This photograph re-enacts a meeting between the two men. In it, Red Cloud seems to be thanking Marsh with a gift. It's a pipe!

Wes: So that there's a precedent here that's shown photographically the fact that we know that Red Cloud gave pipes as tokens of friendship or esteem or respect to white people is very important.

Wes: Could Doctor James Irwin have taken Red Cloud's side like this? Here in the National Archives in D.C., I'm hoping to find out. Let's see records of the Bureau of Indian affairs. This looks like the first box. These records reveal that in 1877, Irwin was appointed to Camp Robinson in Northwest Nebraska. Here he was put in charge of the Oglala Lakota. So Irwin must have met Red Cloud! I wonder how they got along?

Wes: Here's a letter from Irwin to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, written July 26, 1877. "I came to this agency determined to steal my heart against all sympathy for my old enemies..." This makes sense ... according to Pat and Susan, Irwin lost a son in an Indian attack. And here's another letter from Irwin.

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W: "I'm discouraged with the whole Sioux outfit and believe they will never be cured of their importance, and arrogance, and willful stubbornness until they are made to face the power of the government." Based on these reports, it's hard to imagine Irwin doing anything to earn Red Cloud's gratitude... let alone a gift. Then I discover some surprising correspondence. Just three months after Irwin is appointed as their Indian Agent, he's ordered to move a number of Lakota bands to a new reservation, two hundred miles east on the Missouri River. To ensure the order is carried out, the government cuts off all food rations. Faced with starvation, 8000 Lakota men, women, and children have no choice but to begin their journey. As winter sets in, and the cold begins to kill his people, Red Cloud decides they will walk no further. Irwin meets Red Cloud in a council meeting. What happens next is recorded in this letter from Irwin to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Wes: "But when I was calling to their counsel and heard their simple tales of wrongs and their earnest appeal to the government not to move them to the Missouri River, I was forced to the conclusion that since they have yielded and promised to be peaceable, it is not only policy but justice to yield a little to their wishes." Irwin seems to be siding with Red Cloud. Letters and telegrams start flying.

Wes: "Don't allow them to have a pound of food anywhere except at their proper agency, and consider them hostile unless they submit to authority."- Commanding General of the U.S. Army, William T. Sherman

Wes: "No Indian Agent has the right to change the destination of the Red Cloud Party". - Lt. General of the U.S. Army, Philip H. Sheridan

Wes: "There's more trouble with the Agent than with the Indians themselves". - Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Ezra Hayt

Wes: The impasse lasts several months before the government finally backs down. Red Cloud is allowed to move his people to a location of their choosing. From what I now know, Irwin's contribution to Red Cloud's victory seems more than enough to warrant the gift of a pipe. So Pat & Sue's story could be true after all. But this is just one version of history, told through official sources. To get a Native American perspective, I'm traveling to the place where Red Cloud's journey finally ended. In South Dakota, at the Pine Ridge Reservation. It's a beautiful but isolated place where for the last 130 years the Oglala Lakota have struggled to survive. That history isn't written down. Instead, tribal elders maintain an oral tradition. These caretakers of the past rarely grant television interviews, but I've managed to meet one of them. Calvin Jumping Bull. First I ask Calvin about Indian Agents.

Calvin Jumping Bull: Some are very good and some are not too good and some are just completely bad because they always wanted to have their way, they're a dictator type of a person.

Wes: Did you ever hear of an Indian agent named James Irwin?

Calvin: Yes, Irwin was well respected. He even used his own money to help people. It's too bad that the government don't agree with him or didn't try to help him to do his job. He was kind of dissatisfied with whatever the government was doing.

Wes: When you look at our pipe, what do you think the likelihood is that Red Cloud could have given that to an Indian agent? Calvin's answer to that question provides the last piece of evidence I need. It's time to return to California to tell Pat and Susan what I know. Starting with the fact that their pipe is period Lakota.

Susan: I'm excited. I'm relieved that it's the actual pipe. There's always a little bit of fear in there that this is not what you think it is your whole life.

Wes: Was it once Red Cloud's? I tell them about meeting Calvin, and his response to my questions.

Calvin: I think that Red Cloud would present a pipe as a gift. When somebody accomplished something important it is a very special gift. This man Irwin was honored because of maybe his generosity.

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Wes: And there's one more piece of evidence supporting Calvin's conclusion.

Wes: We found a letter that Red Cloud himself wrote to President Rutherford B Hayes. And I'd like to give that letter to you. He said to Hayes, "We want old man Doctor Irwin, as long as he lives, as our Indian agent and that he's the only Indian agent that we've ever had who we really trusted."

Pat: That's nice to know.

Wes: It's very clear that they were close and they enjoyed a special relationship. Were they, you know, best of buddies? Probably not. Irwin probably still saw Red Cloud and the Oglala as "his" Indians.

Pat: Well thank you very much – this is exciting.

Susan: And I'm very proud to say that's my relative. He stood up for what he believed and even to the, you know, highest government of saying no, this is where we stand and we're staying. I think that's wonderful.

Wes: James Irwin ultimately left government service as an Indian agent and returned home to Wyoming. Until the day he died in 1894, he remained a constant critic of the U.S. government's policy towards American Indians. Red Cloud lived to the ripe old age of 87, eventually dying in 1909.

Wes: Over the course of his lifetime, Red Cloud and his people experienced traumatic change - from an independent existence on the northern plains, to mere survival on poorly run government reservations. Red Cloud is buried here at Pine Ridge.

Wes: From Red Cloud's grave you can see the Paha Sapa, or the Black Hills – a land traditionally sacred to the Lakota peoples. In 1981 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Black Hills had been taken illegally from the Lakota and awarded them hundreds of millions of dollars.

Wes: To this day the Lakota have refused to accept government compensation. They insist that all they want is to have their land back. As for the pipe, Pat and Susan's family are planning to donate it to an appropriate museum.

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