Native Americans, the Earliest Interpreters: What is Known About Their Legends and Stories of Yellowstone National Park and the Complexities of Interpreting Them

Lee H. Whittlesey

The thermal wonders of the Park did not frighten the native peoples of the region. Euro-Americans originated this idea and it must be dispelled before we can understand the true nature of Yellowstone's human past.
—Joseph Weixelman, "The Power to Evoke Wonder" (1992)

What did the Indians say about Yellowstone? They must have told stories about its strange wonders, but what were those stories? Historians have long wondered. Answers have been slow to appear.

Native Americans probably had many more tales, legends, and myths about the Yellowstone country than the few we currently know of, but thanks to Peter Nabokov and Larry Loendorf, we now know more than ever before about some of those early Yellowstone stories. Prior to the emergence of their manuscript "American Indians and Yellowstone National Park: A Documentary Overview," historians trusted only one Indian legend relating to Yellowstone; that is, they knew of only one that appeared to be genuinely Indian rather than "white" (the Ralph Dixey story discussed below). Moreover, before the Nabokov book appeared, only small, unsatisfying tidbits of Yellowstone information were known to us in general about the Sheepeaters, Shoshones, Crows, Bannocks, Blackfeet, Flatheads, Kiowas, Arapahoes, Nez Perce, Assinboines, Northern Cheyennes, Gros Ventres, Sioux, and other tribes who inhabited the upper Yellowstone country and its edges at various times prior to 1870. But now, because of that book, we know more than ever before about how these tribes related to Yellowstone.

There seems to have been an effort by early whites in Yellowstone National Park to make the place "safe" for park visitors, not only by physically removing Indians from the park and circulating the rumor that "Indians feared the geyser regions," but also by attempting to completely segregate the place in culture from its former Indian inhabitants, including their legends and myths. If historians cannot conclusively prove that whites conspired to do this, many of us who have spent years studying Yellowstone's literature certainly cannot escape the overarching feeling that something like that happened. Superintendent P.W. Norris's 1870s statements that "these primitive savages" feared the geyser regions are well known. Even as early as 1895, historian Hiram Chittenden could not find much about what Indians thought about Yellowstone nor about what they told

whites of it. “It is a singular fact in the history of the Yellowstone National Park,” wrote Chittenden, “that no knowledge of that country seems to have been derived from the Indians.…Their deep silence concerning it is therefore no less remarkable than mysterious” (Chittenden 1895: 8, 99).

One wonders whether Chittenden (like so many later writers) simply could not find information about Yellowstone Indians, or whether the Indians would not talk to him because of religion (we know that many tribes considered Yellowstone sacred) or because of other reasons (see the following paragraph), or whether he purposely fostered this thinking for motives of his own. At this late date it is difficult to point fingers at our “white” forebears and accuse them of such conspiracies, but that belief must figure at least a modicum into the fact that until American Indians and Yellowstone was written, we knew less about Indians in Yellowstone than about Indians anywhere else in the American West.

It now turns out that there may be a fascinating reason after all for Chittenden’s comment concerning Indians’ “deep silence” about Yellowstone. I searched for this information for nearly thirty years and only recently found it in a rare book that came to the park via the massive collections of Jack and Susan Davis of Bozeman, Montana. The source is a man named John Hamilcar Hollister who visited Yellowstone in 1883 with the well-known Rufus Hatch party. Hollister published an account of that trip in 1912, and in it he told the now disreputable story of Indians fearing the park’s geyser regions. But following that story, Hollister stated that his attempts to find Indian legends about Yellowstone had been unsuccessful. He, like me many years later, wondered why he could not find such Indian legends of Yellowstone. He then made the following statement that appears in no other known place in Yellowstone literature:

> …there are but few [published] Indian legends which refer to this purposely [!] unknown land. Of these I have found but one [other than for the Indians-fearing-the-geysers story], and that is this—that no white man should ever be told of this inferno, lest he should enter that [Yellowstone] region and form a league with the devils, and by their aid come forth and destroy all Indians. Hence the trappers, who were the first white men to enter these western lands, learned little or nothing [about Yellowstone] from that source [Indians] (Hollister 1912: 145).

This is a fascinating assertion that we can prove neither absolutely true nor absolutely false. Hollister does not tell us whence he obtained this supposed legend of Yellowstone, but the fact that he apparently heard it in 1883, very early in the park’s history when hundreds of pre-1872 Indians were still living, gives me great pause. I believe that we must consider this story as possibly true until such time that we get good information debunking it. In light of all that we know about how fervently some Indian tribes believed in the park as a sacred place, the idea of not revealing it to whites makes total sense. Of course we have no idea exactly which tribes Hollister referred to, and, again, we do not know whence he obtained the legend. If true, the Hollister rendering of this Native American story represents a very large and possibly final piece of a long, incomplete puzzle relat-

ing to Yellowstone, i.e., the fact that some tribes may have kept the place a secret and why they did it.

The idea that at least some Indians (we do not yet know which tribes might have had such a policy or how many such tribes there were) might have kept the existence of Yellowstone a secret for religious reasons squares well with both known native proclivities for not telling certain things to white men and with Chittenden's 1895 perception of a deep Indian silence about Yellowstone. It also begins to explain why historians Nabokov and Loendorf, Aubrey Haines, Joseph Weixelman, I, and others have all had a fair amount of difficulty finding good numbers of literature connections between Indians and Yellowstone. Finally, it explains why we have so few known Indian legends about a place that must have generated dozens or hundreds of such legends among ancient natives. Thus, we now must, in my opinion, begin asking our Native American friends whether there is anything in their oral traditions to confirm this, and hope that one or more of them will tell us whether they indeed kept the place secret on purpose. Considering how we white people have spoken "with forked tongue" in the past, I certainly would not blame them if they would not tell us.

One final point with regard to Hollister. A critic has suggested that Hollister's use of the word "devils" here might somehow negate his statement because it might show that the Indian(s) he talked to were "Christianized." Here is why I believe Hollister's statement is not negated by that.

Christianization and the accompanying linguistic translations about it back and forth from Indians to whites and vice versa were (and are) very complicated things. And white men were notoriously poor at understanding Indian religion, whether it had been "Christianized" or not. Note that historian Colin Calloway says many white men tended to dismiss Indian religion as "devil worship" (Calloway 1997: 68). Thus, just because Hollister used the term "devil" does not mean we should jump to conclusions about what he meant or what the Indian(s) he spoke to meant. For all we know, Hollister simply mistranslated what the Indian(s) told him into "white-man vernacular."

Secondly, Indians did not always "buy into" Christianization. In this case, if they did not buy into it, then their comments to Hollister were probably still based upon their intact native religion. Even if their buy-in to Christianity was partly complete, they still might have been using a religion that involved pieces of their original religion and hence their statement on the taboo might still have made it through Hollister to us as a true statement.

Indians' buy-in to Christianity ran the gamut from "not at all" to "partly" to "completely." That is a point Calloway makes over and over again in his chapter on religion entitled "A World of Dreams and Bibles." His chapter discusses the complex interplay between Indian religion and Christian religion in the new world. Calloway mentions instance after instance wherein Indians simply played along with white Friars and Fathers (merely mouthing their words and phrases in order to placate them, or remaining silent, which the Fathers often incorrectly took to mean tacit agreement) before returning to their old ways of religion. In many other cases, Indians simply took pieces of the white man's religion and

incorporated them into an already-established native religion. That often meant that the native religion was essentially left intact with only a few baubles-and-bangles-and-crucifixes thrown into the mix. A few attempts by whites at Christianization undoubtedly worked, wherein Indians were mostly or totally converted, but we cannot assume that this was the general rule, as many white people have assumed.

We now move to other known Indian legends about Yellowstone. For many years, Yellowstone historian emeritus Aubrey Haines believed that only one Indian legend relating to Yellowstone was genuine. It is a tale of the origin of the Snake and Yellowstone rivers, apparently truly handed down in Shoshone and Bannock families and published in Ella Clark's *Indian Legends of the Northern Rockies* (Haines 1982; Clark 1966: 174–177). Other than for this story, there was, until the production of American Indians and Yellowstone, little reliable information or documentation on legends, myths, or other folklore that may have been communicated by Indians about the present Yellowstone National Park. Even after the emergence of the Nabokov and Loendorf's book, the "Coyote" Yellowstone stories that have been bandied about by both Indian and popular "white" writers remain controversial in that historians disagree as to which are genuine and which are made up by whites.

And, too, we now know that there are a great number of other so-called Indian stories that can be totally dismissed as tales made up by whites to explain what Indians "should have thought" about Yellowstone. Again, the most common example of such misinformation is that Indians "feared the geyser regions as inhabited by evil spirits." Virtually all of the stories included in Mary Earle Hardy's *Little Ta-Wish: Indian Legends from Geyserland* (1913) and La Verne Fitzgerald's *Blackfeather: Trapper Jim's Fables of Sheepeater Indians in Yellowstone* (1937) are, in the opinion of this historian, "white baloney," that is, faked Indian tales. At the least, if they are real, there is no documentation to prove it.

With all of that as background, we now begin looking at Indian legends in the Yellowstone country by examining the known Indian names for the place. Nabokov and Loendorf, after years of looking at the ethnological, anthropological, archeological, and historical literature and interviewing dozens of tribal members, have concluded that certain Indian tribes did have names for the upper Yellowstone country. Most of those names referred to the park's hot springs and geysers. The Crow Indians called Yellowstone "land of the burning ground" or "land of vapors" while the Blackfeet called it "many smoke." The Flatheads called it "smoke from the ground." The Kiowas called it "the place of hot water." Only the Bannocks had a name that did not call to mind the park's thermal regions: "buffalo country." Additionally, the Crows specifically called the Yellowstone geysers "Bide-Mahpe," meaning "sacred or powerful water."

As for the stories themselves that might have been told about Yellowstone by the Indians, the Ralph Dixey story is thought to be genuine. It is a tale concerning the origin of the Snake and Yellowstone rivers and long known to have been handed down in the Shoshone tribe (both Ralph Dixey and his Bannock wife stat-

ed that this story was handed down in both of their families). The story begins with "long ago there was no river in this part of the country. No Snake River ran through the land." A man came from the south who was always sticking his nose into everything. He traveled north past the Tetons and went up onto a mountain in what is now called Yellowstone. There he found an old lady with a basket of fish. Hungry, he asked her to boil some fish for him. She offered to make him food but warned him not to bother her basket. He did not listen, stepped on the edge of the basket, and spilled its water and fish. The water spread all over. The man ran fast, ahead of the water, trying to stop it. He piled up rocks to hold the water back, but the water broke his dam and rushed on. That is where the Upper Falls is today. The man ran on ahead of the water and again built a dam of rocks, but it did not hold the water back either. That is where the Lower Falls is today. The water kept on rushing and formed the Yellowstone River. The man then ran to the opposite side of the fish basket and followed its waters downstream, building several dams of rocks, but the water would not be stopped. Those broken dams are the site of American Falls and Shoshone Falls today on the Snake River. The big fish basket that the man tipped over is Yellowstone Lake while the old woman with the fish was Mother Earth. The man himself was Ezeppa or Coyote (Clark 1966: 191–193).

Until recently this Dixey story was arguably the only known, genuine (truly known to have been told by Indians) Native American story about Yellowstone National Park. But there is now new evidence (per Nabokov and Loendorf) not only as to the fact that Indians told stories about Yellowstone but also as to what some of those stories were. In particular we now have several "new" (actually old) stories known to have been told by the Crow tribe.

A Crow narrative from a man named Sharp Horn, who passed it down to his son who passed it to his grandsons, concerns the mythic deeds of a character named "Old Woman's Grandchild" and how at least two of Yellowstone's geysers were supposedly created. This Crow said that in one of the thermal regions of the park, Old Woman's Grandchild fought many beasts and turned them into mountains and hills after he killed them. A large buffalo bull that he killed was turned into a geyser formation that continued to blow out hot air. Near it he placed a mountain lion, also a geyser formation blowing hot air, in order to keep the buffalo bull from coming back to life (Nabokov and Loendorf 1999: 107).

Another mythic tale, told by the Crow and associated with the park, concerns Yellowstone Lake and what happened to the dinosaurs. A thunderbird grabbed a Crow Indian by his hair and took him to "Overlook Mountain," on the southeast side of Yellowstone Lake, and placed him in a nest there. The thunderbird told the Crow that he wanted him to help him fight the giant water beast that lived in Yellowstone Lake and which ate the thunderbird's young. The Crow built a large fire and heated many rocks and boiled much water. When the beast came out of the lake and climbed up the mountainside, the Indian pitched hot rocks and hot water into its mouth. Steam came out of the monster's mouth and it tumbled down the mountainside and into the lake. Supposedly this was the last "dinosaur," and steam vents around Yellowstone Lake may be remnants of this

event, a myth from Crow history (Nabokov and Loendorf 1999: 107–109).

Of course, as Paul Schullery pointed out to me when we discussed this subject, the very idea of dinosaurs and Indian tales generates numerous immediate questions. Is this tale perhaps younger than other such Indian tales? Is it only as aged as the old nineteenth-century white guys who first discovered dinosaur fossils? Or did Indians themselves find dinosaur fossils and generate stories about them long before the nineteenth-century white guys found the "terrible lizards"? Did Indians perhaps have contact with the nineteenth-century white-guy dinosaur hunters and merely generate the story after talking to them? Or is this story just pure "Native American baloney," a faked Indian tale? There are no easy answers to these questions.

From Hunts-to-Die, a Crow Indian born about 1838, we have it that his tribe believed there were spirits in Yellowstone geyser areas who were benevolent and helpful rather than malevolent and dangerous. This tends to correct what is perhaps the worst piece of supposed Indian information about Yellowstone—-the long-surviving but incorrect notion that Indians feared the geyser regions. Even though this piece of white baloney has been thoroughly discredited by Weixelman, Haines, and Nabokov and Loendorf, we can look for it to continue to appear in the shallow, unresearched, and thoughtless writings of popular journalists for years to come. It belongs in the same class of malarkey as the notion that "Yellowstone Park was once called Colter's Hell" (Nabokov and Loendorf 1999: 83; Mattes 1949).

The incorrect notion that Indians feared the geyser regions seems to have originated in Euroamerican literature from a note that William Clark added to his notes after 1809 when he returned to St. Louis. It is not known whence Clark obtained this information, but here is the relevant quote (complete with misspellings and incorrect syntax and punctuation):

> At the head of this [Yellowstone] river the nativs give an account that there is frequently herd a loud noise, like Thunder, which makes the earth Tremble, they State that they seldom go there because their children Cannot sleep—-and Conceive it possessed of spirits, who were averse that men Should be near them (Haines, 1974: 4).

Unexpectedly, the Kiowa tribe is now known to have oral traditions associated with the upper Yellowstone country. The Kiowas, who eventually settled in western Oklahoma, were earlier located in the present Crow country near the headwaters of the Yellowstone River. Lewis and Clark found them below there in 1805 "in seventy tents," somewhat near the Yellowstone Valley. One of their descendants, N. Scott Momaday, has written that around the time of the Revolutionary War the Kiowas migrated from a place near the "headwaters of the Yellowstone River." In this earlier history they were friends and trading partners with the Crows, but nevertheless it was an unexpected surprise for Nabokov and Loendorf to find that the Kiowas had traditions associated with present Yellowstone National Park (Nabokov and Loendorf 1999: 93–96).

Nabokov and Loendorf found what so far may be the most important piece of

Indian "interpretation" associated with present Yellowstone National Park. It is the legend told by the Kiowas about their origins in the present park. It concerns a man whose name no Kiowa remembers but who "was one of the greatest Kiowas who ever lived." The Kiowa informant called him "Kahn Hayn" for the purposes of the story. He said that when Doh Ki, the Kiowa equivalent of the Great Spirit, put people on earth he had no homeland for Kiowas, so he promised them a homeland if they could make the difficult sojourn through a barren and desolate volcanic land where clouds of steam shot from holes and fissures in the ground. Doh Ki called all of the Kiowas around one particularly disturbing steaming pool, a deep caldron of boiling water that surged and smashed against jagged rock walls and made fearsome sounds as if a great beast were just below the surface. Most of the Kiowas ran away, but a few remained, including Kahn Hayn. Doh Ki then pointed to the fearsome pool and said that the land there would belong to the tribe of any man who would dive down into it. While some of the Kiowas did not want this hot land, Kahn Hayn knew that Doh Ki was a benevolent spirit whose rewards were always good and lasting, so he decided to take Doh Ki's test. He dove into the boiling pool and was immediately panic-stricken. He burned and ached and thrashed and lost consciousness. Suddenly he felt himself being lifted from the water by the hands of many Kiowas who were yelling excited, victory cries. As he looked about he saw that Doh Ki had vanished and that the landscape was no longer barren and desolate. Instead it was covered with rich forests, lush meadows, cascading streams, and large animals. This spot in the present Yellowstone National Park was now the most beautiful and abundant of all places on the earth, and it became the homeland of the Kiowas.

The Kiowas today have a name for the place where these mythic events supposedly occurred. It is at the Dragon's Mouth Spring near Mud Volcano in the park, and the Kiowas call it "Tung Sa'u Dah" which means "the place of hot water" (Nabokov and Loendorf 1999: 97–100).

Historians have long argued about whether Ella Clark's tales of Yellowstone in her book *Indian Legends of the Northern Rockies* (1966) are genuine tales passed down by Native Americans or whether Clark made them up herself, either partially or fully, by being careless in how she translated the stories, by failing to tell us enough about who her Indian sources were, or both. Haines and I take the side that we should not always trust Clark, an English teacher with little or no training in history or anthropology. We believe that she was primarily interested in the stories themselves and not in whether they were truly Indian rather than made up by whites, in whether they had been genuinely passed down orally through Indian history, or in how carefully she translated them.

On the other hand, Nabokov and Loendorf take a more charitable view of Clark's book. As anthropologists, they see in her stories a thread of consistency to other parts of Native American folklore (especially, they say, that of the Blackfeet and Flathead) and they tout that connection as evidence that Clark's stories may be genuine Indian tales (Nabokov and Loendorf 1999: 129–132).

But of course one can argue that anyone who has spent a small amount of time reading Indian legends and myths can easily make up new ones in the same vein as the genuine ones that they have just read. I could certainly do it easily, and, in my opinion, this would be the very type of thing an English teacher or journalist might be tempted to do in "doctoring" Indian stories that did not otherwise quite "work" for them. Because Clark talked to a lot of Indians and produced three books on Indian legends in the Northwest, I have no doubt that some if not many of her stories are indeed genuine. But she did such a poor job of telling us where they came from that I remain suspicious of some of them.

As it turns out, however, probably the best known of Clark's Yellowstone legends may well be a genuine Flathead tale. It is the one that she calls "Coyote's prophesy concerning Yellowstone Park," and according to her, it goes like this:

> In generations to come this place around here will be a treasure of the people. They will be proud of it and of all the curious things in it—-flint rocks, hot springs, and cold springs. People will be proud of this spot. Springs will bubble out, and steam will shoot out. Hot springs and cold springs will be side by side. Hot water will fly into the air, in this place and that place. No one knows how long this will continue. And voices will be heard here, in different languages, in the generations to come (Clark 1966: 103).

As one might expect, less-discerning writers, especially journalists, have glommed onto this story like flies to a carcass. They have not been able to resist it, in the apparent belief that surely the story contains some kind of ancient Indian wisdom about Yellowstone that accords with the later "good" judgments of whites about the place, and which must thus somehow give dramatic credence to those judgments. I remain suspicious of the story, because it sounds fake and because Clark did such a poor job of documenting it. It is exactly the type of contrived-sounding piece that white writers would make up as a faked Indian legend. It is written too slickly and has too much perfectly balanced drama in it to ring true as a real Indian legend (which generally are neither slick nor perfectly balanced). The prediction about the pride of future generations sounds European. The business about future voices in different languages seems beyond the reach of the normal Indian legend.

But, again, the story may well be genuine. Clark claims (1966: 79) that most of her Flathead stories came from Pierre Pichette or Bon Whealdon. Pichette was a completely trustworthy source, because he was a blind Indian who spent at least fifty years of his life becoming an authority on the traditions and culture of his people. Clark would have us believe either that Pichette told this story to her from one handed down to him by elders in the summer of 1953 (the year before he died), or else that Bon Whealdon told it to her. Whealdon came to Montana's Flathead reservation in 1907, and he too spent many years gathering information on the Flathead culture. Unfortunately, Clark not only does not tell us exactly from where she got the story or when, but her citation (1966: 366, 376) lists only an article by herself, "How Coyote Became a Sachem," as the source. Worse, the story does not appear in a pamphlet by Pichette found and cited by Nabokov and

Loendorf. Thus, while I am suspicious of this Yellowstone legend, if it truly came from Pichette or Whealdon, it must be a genuine Flathead story rather than a piece of white baloney.

Another of Clark's stories, "Defiance at Yellowstone Falls" (1966: 361–362), is a fascinating mystery. It is the supposed Crow legend of thirteen Crow braves and five Crow women taking a raft over Lower Falls to their deaths in a suicide story that Clark says originated because the Crows wanted to escape the U.S. Army. She attributes it to Charles M. Skinner's *Myths and Legends of Our Lands* (1896), and indeed a look at that book reveals that Clark merely rewrote Skinner's "A Yellowstone Tragedy" (Skinner 1903: 204–206).

We do not know whence Skinner got the story, but he may have gotten it from Charles Sunderlee. Sunderlee's version appeared many years earlier in a purported news story in a Helena, Montana, newspaper *(Helena Daily Herald,* May 18, 1870) under the headline "A Thrilling Event on the Yellowstone" (Kearns 1940). There, Sunderlee listed the five members of his party and claims that they witnessed the event above Lower Falls on April 2, 1870. Suspiciously, none of the five men he mentioned appeared in the 1870 Montana census. Haines dismissed the Sunderlee story as fiction inspired by Clark's Crow Indian legend (Haines 1974: 40–41; 1977: 339n49).

At first I thought that Sunderlee's newspaper story might have inspired a fake (white) Indian legend that Skinner and Clark passed on. After all, there is no hint of U.S. Army soldiers chasing Crows in the upper Yellowstone country in 1870, as Skinner and Clark say, and in fact Sunderlee says nothing about soldiers being present. And, too, Sunderlee's story is 26 years older than the first known appearance of the legend (some of its details seem at least partially convincing as a news story). But later I found that it was not that simple.

Two present-day Crow experts know nothing about this supposed legend. When I ran the story past Burton Pretty-on-Top, the current chairperson for the Crow Tribal Cultural Committee at Hardin, Montana, he told me that it sounded like "hogwash" to him. "Crow people do not kill themselves," he said to me. He also stated that he knew of no Crow historians nor "tribal elders" that had ever passed this story on in oral history as a Crow legend, at least to him. While he was not familiar with Clark's book, he stated that he had read numerous comparable works by white authors, and he stated that all too often he would have to "put these books down without finishing them" because they were filled with so much bad information. I also spoke to Tim McCleary, head of General Studies at Little Bighorn College, Hardin, Montana, and a Crow expert. He too was suspicious of the Clark "legend," but cautioned me about how easy it was to be wrong about such things, regardless of which side one is on. He had read the Clark version of the legend but had never heard it in any other form (meaning from Crow elders or otherwise in Crow oral history). He agreed with Pretty-on-Top's assessment of Crows generally not committing suicide, and expanded on that, saying that those beliefs were based in Crow religion. McCleary says that the Crow belief was and is that if one commits suicide, one's spirit will remain on earth rather than ascending to some promised land, so they do not generally com-

mit suicide. McCleary was also suspicious of the idea of Crow Indians being on rafts or boats, because “they tend to avoid boats and water and getting onto water” (Pretty-on-Top 2000; McCleary 2000)

But even with all of this evidence for the proposition that Clark’s “Defiance” legend is false, Haines points out that Clark got a number of her Indian stories from military man Lt. James A. Bradley. A look at Bradley’s long Crow discussions makes it clear that Bradley did get a lot of stories, legends, and general information during the period 1871–1877 from Little Face and numerous other Crows (Haines 2000; Bradley 1917: 197–250). If Clark truly got the story from Bradley (and one of his stories bears some resemblance to it) rather than pirating it strictly from Skinner, then perhaps the Crows do (or did) have such a suicide legend even though certain Crow experts have never heard it. All in all, I do not know what to think about this convoluted mess.

These problems with both Clark’s “Defiance at Yellowstone Falls” and her “Coyote’s prophesy concerning Yellowstone Park” point up the difficulty of determining whether or not some reputed Indian legends are truly Indian. They also point up how easy it is for any of us to get confused when white baloney, known or suspected, enters the picture. For those of us who do not always trust the vagaries of oral tradition (was the story passed down correctly by one person and was it remembered/retrieved correctly by another, especially over many generations?), having to worry about white baloney adds one more complex and troubling wrinkle to the equation.

And these problems also point up the reasons why all researchers, including those who talk to Indians simply to write down their stories, must be meticulous in documenting their sources. We must be certain that we ask the tribal person conveying the story to us (1) from whom he heard the story and (2) whether others in his tribe have also heard it. These two questions are important because they give us clues as to both the antiquity of the story and how widespread it is (or was) within the tribe. For example, I am a lot more willing to believe Joe Medicine Crow’s story if he tells me that he heard it from his 100-year-old grandmother than if he tells me he isn’t quite certain from whom he heard it but only that he remembers hearing it. And, too, I am a lot more willing to believe that the story is truly established within the tribe if I also hear from several other tribal members that they heard it from their forebears.

Finally, we should end by making one thing perfectly clear even if some of this is murky. While Indians appear not to have feared the Yellowstone geyser regions, we know that many tribes revered them. Revere and fear are two different things, reverence referring to beliefs in something sacred. There is much evidence put forth by Weixelman, Haines, and Nabokov and Loendorf that a number of tribes considered the Yellowstone country sacred and used it as a vision-questing, prayer-making, and gift-bequeathing place, and there is much other material in their writings that disproves the theory that Indians feared Yellowstone.

These few known Indian stories then, and probably dozens or even hundreds of others that are now lost to us or perhaps still in the oral traditions, were among

the first known attempts to interpret the strange Wonderland country at the head of the Yellowstone River.

[Ed. note: This paper represents the first chapter, with title and text somewhat modified, from the author's upcoming book *Yellowstone's Horse-and-Buggy Tour Guides: Interpreting the Grand Old Park, 1872–1920,* which is as yet unpublished.]

References

Allen, C., and A. Pinkham. 2001. Personal communication to author from Allen and Pinkham, Nez Perce elders, 27–28 August, at Nez Perce symposium in Yellowstone.

Bradley, Lt. J. 1917. Bradley Manuscript F. *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana* 8, 197–250.

Calloway, C.G. 1997. *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America.* Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Chittenden, H. 1895. *The Yellowstone National Park.* Cincinnati, Oh.: Robert Clarke Company.

Clark, E. 1966. *Indian Legends of the Northern Rockies.* Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press.

Fitzgerald, L.V. 1937. *Blackfeather: Trapper Jim's Fables of Sheepeater Indians in Yellowstone.* Caldwell, Id.: Caxton Printers.

Haines, A.L. 1974. *Yellowstone National Park: Its Exploration and Establishment.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

———. 1977 [1996]. *The Yellowstone Story.* Boulder, Colo.: University of Colorado Press.

———. 1982. Letter to author, 9 July. (In author's files.)

———. 2000. Letter to author, 14 March. (In Yellowstone National Park history files.)

Hardy, M.E. 1913. *Little Ta-Wish: Indian Legends from Geyserland.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Hollister, J.H. 1912. *Memories of Eighty Years: Autosketches, Random Notes, and Reminiscences.* Chicago: N.p.

Kearns, W.E. 1940. Historical items on Yellowstone from earliest Helena Heralds. *Yellowstone Nature Notes* 17:3/4 (March-April).

Mattes, M. 1949. Behind the legend of Colter's Hell. *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 36 (September), 251–282.

McCleary, T. 2000. Personal communication to author, February.

Nabokov, P., and L. Loendorf. 1999. American Indians and Yellowstone National Park: a documentary overview as "Restoring a Presence." Unpublished draft manuscript. Yellowstone National Park, Wyo.: Yellowstone National Park Research Library.

Pretty-on-Top, B. 2000. Personal communication to author, February.

Skinner, C.M. 1896. *Myths and Legends of Our Lands.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott.

Weixelman, J. 1992. The power to evoke wonder: Native Americans and the geysers of Yellowstone National Park. Master's thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman.

Lee H. Whittlesey, Yellowstone Center for Resources, P.O. Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming 82190; Lee_Whittlesey@nps.gov