

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT (442-5744)

This is Ron Pierre for Community Comment.

Over the past several weeks I have been doing a family history based project, documenting my farm in Northern Montana and the generations of my family that have owned the land. The project has been more than a detective story, it has been a lesson into the character of those individuals who make up my heritage. In addition, I have gained insight into what my family has left to me. I have been left a core value system centered on hard work and self reliance. These factors characterized the pioneer Montana farmers and ranchers who survived in a MOST hostile environment. One decision central to the sustainment of the generations was the marriage of my great-great grandfather into the Piegan Nation of the Blackfeet Tribal Confederation. My great-great grandmother's name was "See-i-appy".... (Ellen). My great-great grandfather married into the Blackfeet tribe to secure his ranch and homestead.

I started out researching verifiable births and deaths. I then expanded the project into books and family records. In these books and other documents, I found primary source accounts of frontier exploits. From hostile Indian attacks to severe winter weather, my family survived it all. At one point my great-great grandfather, Edward Lewis, was shot in the hip. For the rest of his life until 1914, he walked with a limp. The cane he used is now a possession of my nephew Luke. Lewis was born in 1837 and at age 18 hired out on a Missouri River long boat, and made the trip up the Missouri River to Ft. Benton, Montana. He was one of the first settlers in Montana Territory. In the late 1860's he ordered a child's rocker for his new daughter Isabel and had that rocker shipped up river from St. Louis. He picked the rocker up at the river port, and took it to his ranch home by horse-drawn wagon. Today, that rocker has a prominent spot in my grand daughter's bedroom.

I have also learned that my great-great grandmother- Ellen "See-i-appy" was the daughter of "Mee-i-appy" - Heavy Shield, a Piegan war chief and renowned horse thief. Heavy Shield was married to Owls Child. The two were killed in 1878 by a Gros Ventre war party.

I must admit that my fascination with this ancestry project is additive. I have traced, documented, researched both of our families, and my wife and I have learned a great deal about our relatives.

In addition to the Indian connection, my family is traceable to French Canadians, Scots, Irish, and English relations. My wife's family on the other hand is all Italian. When we get a couple of generations back with her lineage, we run into departure ports in Italy and villages of origin, but we have not yet been able to get to the European family records. Looking back across the generations gives me a deep appreciation for the generations who gave everything to began new lives with only the courage of their dreams for a better future.

I can't help but wonder if generations that will follow us will understand, like our parents and grandparents, that success comes through one's own character and self motivation, and not from a government hand out.

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