

"Whee-Ach" Is Still Sacred Sanctuary for Yakima Indians

Indians Accept Faith of "White Father" But Keep Room of Prayer

By Heister Dean Guie

THE Yakima Indian may worship at the white man's shrine, kneel at the Christian's cross, but he remains true to Me-yay-wah (the man above) and seeks solitude within the confines of Whee-ach (room of prayer and ablu-tion), where his soul is purified and his spirit renewed.

On the Yakima Indian Reservation in south central Washington, 15 minutes from the city of Yakima, there are 3000 Indians regularly fingering rosaries and raising voices in praise to The Christ, all the while watching the rays of the sun that they may hasten to their Whee-ach, alone to purify themselves in the Stone Age!

The culture of the aborigines demands that each man build for himself this strange diminutive house of purification. It is mound-shaped, made of pliant stems, usually willow, arched in the form of an ellipse and the ends planted in the ground. Where the stems cross they are secured by strips of bark and the whole is covered, either by blankets or skins—or, if permanent—with three or four inches of earth, firmly packed.

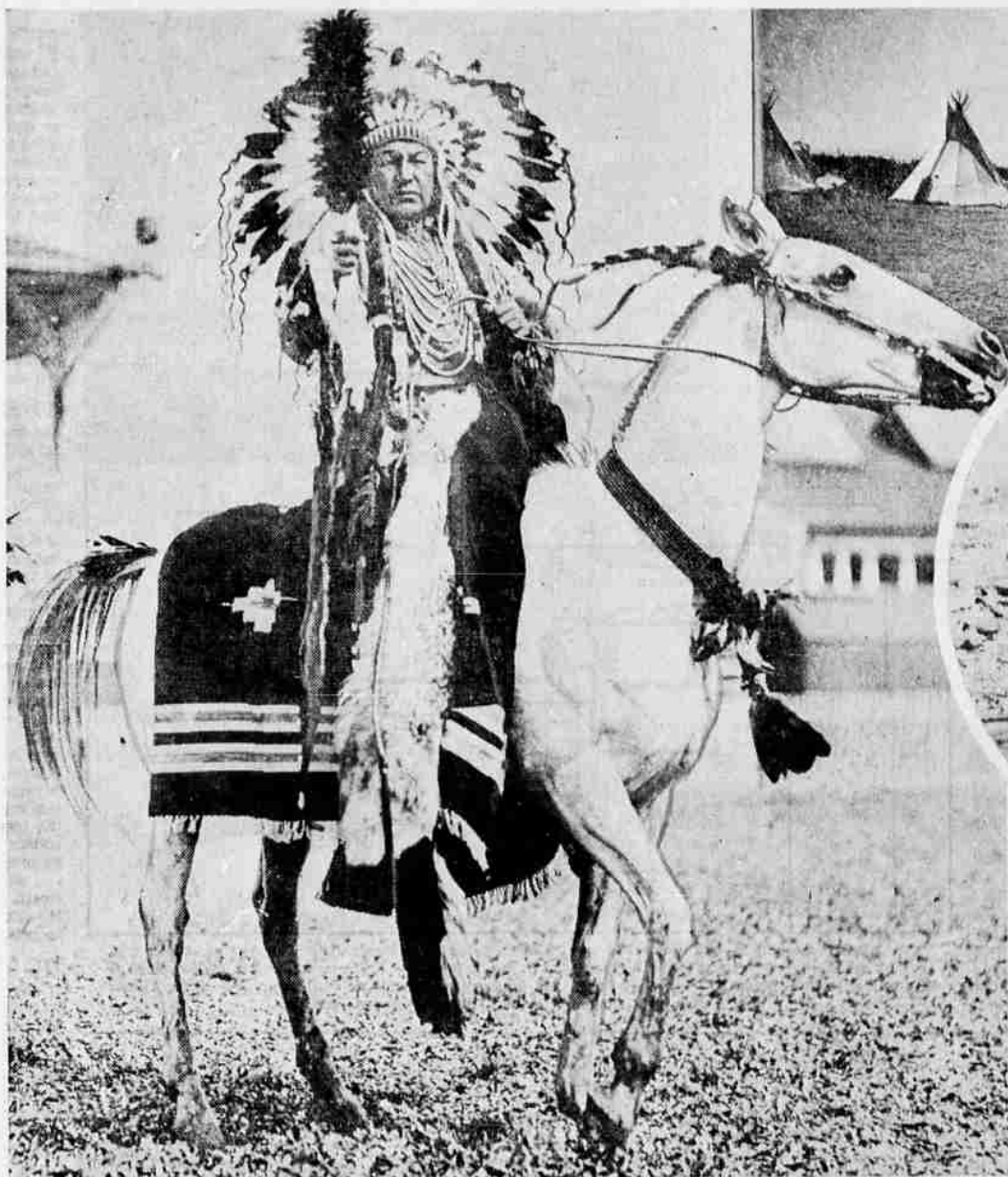
WHILE much of the Yakima's religion deals with his belief in dreams, guardian spirits, in witchcraft, all manner of omens and such ceremonies as the Feast of New Food, parades in memory of the dead and the like, their Whee-ach is the most important of their ancient faith.

In the vicinity of virtually every Indian dwelling on the reservation may be found this low place of prayer, perhaps right in the back door yard, usually, however, sequestered in a clump of willows or patch of cottonwoods, and always close to water, by an irrigation ditch, a stream or a pond. Scattered through the brush-laced foothill draws and timbered folds of the Cascade Range, into which the western boundary of the Yakimas' domain extends, are the fragile skeletons of Whee-achs, old and new, built for temporary occupancy by silent hunters and chattering women harvesting wild berries and roots.

Occasionally by a sub-alpine meadow half hidden by the ground-sweeping branches of contorted spruce, and facing upon a dripping spring—high beyond the trails and haunts of forest people—a decaying framework of bent and interwoven wands testifies to the former presence of some one who has "made medicine." One, either a man or a woman, versed in the mysteries of magic plant lore, has made supplication there, and then, carefully obeying taboos and rules of immemorial authority, has plucked an herb or flower of rarity, and set about compounding a love charm for an eager swain or maiden in the valley below.

The poor, the rich, the weak and the strong, commoner and chief—all are equal in the Whee-ach. There are no social distinctions, no lines drawn. All have the same privileges.

IN AFFLICTION the Indian goes to the sweat house to ask for sympathy and aid. A Christian red man may subscribe generously to the new creed, but when trouble assails, he repairs to this sacred retreat and appeals to the



WHEE-ACH, pictured in circle, is a place of purification and prayer still retained by Indians on Yakima reservation in the State of Washington. Although they have embraced the Christian faith, their "medicine-men" continue to prepare their spirits for Me-yay-wah (the man above). At left is a Yakima Indian chief, in full regalia, mounted on his horse, and at upper right are seen teepees on the reservation.

Diety of his forefathers. Here the sick seek relief and restored health, hunters pray for good kills, lovers for successful wooing, gamblers for fortune and medicine men and medicine women strive to attain the supernatural.

These houses of prayer vary in size and material. Some are designed for but one person; others accommodate three to six adults. Some are temporary, put up on special occasion, as at a tribal encampment or by travelers on wilderness trails. Others are for permanent use.

Always a small aperture is left for the entrance, and a mat or blanket is on the door. Just within and at one side of the doorway, a shallow hole holds stones that have been heated in a roaring fire a few paces from the lodge. Cold water lightly sprinkled on these searing hot stones quickly produces dense steam. They believe that this is the Great One's way of purifying the mortal, and all garments are removed in the ceremony.

The floor is carpeted with reeds, grass or ferns, and when available, with fir boughs, which are said to possess strong medicine power. The aromatic

greenway, imparting a pleasing fragrance, is valued for occult properties.

Rose bush leaves also are employed in physical and spiritual purification. Crushed in the hands and mopped over the steaming skin, they do double duty, removing bodily impurities and any contamination the suppliant may have recently suffered, as from handling a corpse, or being near a dead person, or on burial ground. Indian undertakers—medicine men who are in the business of preparing the dead for burial and re-interring bodies—rely on the supernatural power of the rose bush leaves in their purifying potency.

UPON the death of an Indian, his Whee-ach is burned, in keeping with the belief that anything cherished by the dead must be burned or buried, to ward off sickness and trouble. Were this to be left standing, the owner's spirit would hover around and disturb people, perhaps make them ill.

Unless it is known that the former occupants are still in the realm of the living, a strange Whee-ach is always taboo. Camping in the mountains, a

party of Indians will erect a new one rather than take over a deserted frame nearby. Nor would they tear down the latter, to clear the site for a new lodge or for some other purpose.

Except to be rid of unwanted spirits this is never destroyed. The sacred character with which it is invested protects it from molestation. Safe too are the cracked and blackened stones which have given off the holy incense. When their "work" in Indian parlance is done, they are carried outside and piled carefully at one side of the little house and must never be trod upon or otherwise desecrated. For them the Indian has a profound respect.

THE Whee-ach is supposed to have been started by Speel-yi, Coyote, the Yakima culture hero, concerning whom there seems to be considerable conversation among the Indians. He is the good and bad, often mischievous, one whom the Me-yay-wah has appointed to do his bidding on earth. This was back in the days when the world was young and the animals and terrible monsters walked the earth. The belief is founded in the legend that the Coyote was chosen to prepare the world for the new people who were to follow the animals—the Indians.

Lens Veteran of 50 Years Says Most Famous People Are Vain

MARTIN BEHRMAN has been taking pictures for half a century!

He has seen famous people rise and fall, watched them in the height and glamour of their heyday and in the despair of poverty!

As his camera clicked they have sprung like mirages from tented towns and prosperity smiled upon the kingdom of the Pacific.

What does he think of it all?

That great people are vain!

There was, for instance, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant! Entombed in grandeur though his bones might be, now overlooking the Hudson, Martin Behrman knew him as "a smallish man who liked his cocktail!"

Behrman photographed the bright dyed muslin trimmings that adorned San Francisco to greet the man who said, "I'll fight it out on this line if it takes all summer." The cameraman had just deserted New York for San Francisco and General Grant had deserted war for peace and travel. Together in 1879 they met in the city then famous for its coast ribaldries.

"Sure," said Mr. Behrman, "famous people are vain," and explains that the very consciousness of their public value must make them so; also that only conscious victory brings success. He does not "hold it against them," that they are aware of their importance; but there again is another thing that taking pictures for 50 years has done for him—he is temperate in judgment!

Reminiscences with this man are interesting. There was the time that Fremont Older was "up against it," back in the days before he became the famous editor. They used to loan books back and forth, and after Mr. Older became the recognized authority that he was, their friendship continued.

"A great man—a good man," he says, looking off into space when he talks of the columnist. "Yes, one of the finest." Then he launches into a word picture of Old San Francisco, with the cosmopolitan atmosphere of a world melting pot, what with Spanish Dons, blanketed Indians, Eastern capital-

ists, and miners, all talking together of the brilliant future California was to have.

Slowly as memory walks streets that now are haunted with the great for Mr. Behrman, he recalls Edwin Booth, who replaced his father on the stage in the West. Here he is a little more favored

Taming the "Human Fly" Feat of Southern Belle

ONCE Bill Strother—the world's most famous "human fly"—left an epidemic of gooseflesh across the continent. He crawled up the Woolworth building and all the other skyscrapers he could find, while women fainted and men gasped.

But today Bill is tame! The pretty Mary Weems, Southern belle, did it!

You see, in Los Angeles, another "fly" got in Bill's ointment. He was ill and went to a hospital where he met Nurse Weems, who did to Bill what tall buildings couldn't do—she made him fall! And he fell hard! They were married.

She takes no credit for taming him, and says that her fried chicken, lettuce salad, and strawberry pie did it. She declares, however, that taming lions would be easy compared to what it took to make Bill creep up to breathtaking heights and frightening people.

Bill's the man who took all the chances in Harold Lloyd's picture, "Safety Last," and through that experience and Mrs. Bill's persuasiveness, Bill got interested in being a business man! Mrs. Strother at last was able to sleep at night without having nightmares of her new husband falling hundreds of feet to the pavement and being picked up in pieces!

Now Bill can walk past the tallest building with-

out even looking up! He sells dog food to the nation!

Perfectly tame!



Mr. and Mrs. "Bill" Strother.

than most, for he recalls also when the elder Booth became insane on the New York stage in the old Booth Theater and "spoke lines that he ought not to have spoken."

There was, too, that heavy snow back in 1882, when San Franciscans, astonished, hurried in muffled laughter, to get their shoulders covered with the rare white softness!

Then there came earthquake and fire with its cruelty and devastation, leaving broken hearts, broken families and ruined homes in its wake. He was busy making pictures then! They are in his files now, as mute testimony of grief courageously carried on to victory.

These files might easily serve as a record of the nation for the last 50 years, for he has in them 1500 negatives of historical data, much of it reaching back in the century before—reprints from borrowed pictures of still older photographers.

Going East in memory he will tell of Theodore Roosevelt before he became governor of New York—when as a young man he left to play such an important part in the Spanish-American war as a Rough Rider.

Here again is a photographer's memoirs! Roosevelt to him was a fine upstanding young man, full of courage and deep conviction. Not the delicate youth that many biographers would have the world believe.

The James brothers, too, come in this gallery of memories' pictures, for he remembers seeing their killers, the Ford brothers. He also recalls the famous clown, G. L. Fox, Harrington and Hart and Frank Mayo.

Yes, he is a veritable walking history of the past half century—but try to get an interview! Just try it! He'll be 75 this year and among other things he has learned is to be sparing of his words!