



Mashkokiipinens

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# Louis Prince

A Mediator of the Higher Powers

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Original Article by Dave Hunt

Introduction by Craig Charbonneau Fontaine

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## Introduction

The following *Winnipeg Tribune* article appeared in print July 28, 1954. The article was written by a staff reporter, Dave Hunt. Unfortunately I could not find any information about the author, but, as you will read, his account of Louis Prince's profound gift as a healer and clairvoyant seems fair and objective. This kind of objective reporting, in a time rife with derision and scorn directed at First Nations culture by white society, has to be commended. Although some of the language used in the article, such as "gods" and "witch doctor," does reflect the time period, the article provides evidence as to the power inherent in First Nations ceremonies.

According to information provided by the Prince family, Louis Prince's spirit name was Mash ko kii pi nens or Mashkokiipinens meaning Baby Buffalo. The article incorrectly records it as Meshakeepeeness and does not include translation. Louis Prince was married to Amelia Marie Beauchamp (née) who is not identified in the article.

The original title given to the article was "Powers Defy White Man: Witch Doctor's Rites 'Raise' Lost Bodies," and I have elected to replace it with the one on the cover. When first reading the original title given by the editors at the *Tribune*, one notices the arrogance it conveys. Is the "white man" so powerful in life that the power imbued in the spirit world is able to "defy" him? In my opinion, this line of thinking still exists today and is clearly evident in the way government and industry see the Earth as a resource for exploitation.

Louis Prince's abilities were known throughout Manitoba and his services were requested on a number of occasions by the RCMP. In 1954, 1958, and 1971 he was asked to locate individuals who were reported missing in Wanless, Mountain Road district, and Carberry, Manitoba. During my research, it was not revealed if any of the information Mr. Prince provided in these cases was correct. Yet, this isn't entirely surprising since the media does not often follow up on past stories. The events do show a positive reputation and respect accorded to Louis Prince by the authorities and also Mr. Prince's willingness to apply his gift to assisting those who needed help.

In the account of Louis Prince's powers one notices several things that are

universal in practitioners of First Nations ceremonies. First, is the ability to demonstrate one's power and have it validated by those who seek its benefits. Another critical component is the application of Indigenous languages in manifesting the spirit of one's tools or gifts in ceremony. Language is key to unlocking the relationship one has with energy or spirit residing in prayer or ceremony. Intimately connected through the language are songs, chants, or invocations, which are recited in exact detail to ensure each practitioner is fulfilling their entrusted responsibility.

The story demonstrates the special relationship gifted individuals had with the higher powers. Sadly, it also tells how these higher powers were consulted whenever a personal tragedy impacted individuals and families. The loss of five-year-old Clifton Hall of Dakota Tipi, Manitoba, who unfortunately lost his life in July 1954, is the basis of the story. More importantly, this loss shows the human element involved when loved ones seek help, via higher powers, through gifted individuals like Louis Prince.

Miigwech,

Craig Charbonneau Fontaine  
*MFNERC Language and Culture Researcher*

## Sandy Bay Article Powers Defy White Man

By Dave Hunt (*Tribune* Staff Writer)

From a whitewashed log and mud hut on the Sandy Bay reservation near Marius, a one eyed "witch doctor" is following the ancient practices of his Indian forefathers with apparently astounding success.

On Sunday, 59-year-old Louis Prince brought the silent struggle between Indian culture and the white "civilization" into bold relief once again by predicting with uncanny accuracy where the body of a young Indian lad drowned in the Assiniboine river near Portage la Prairie could be found.

Visited Tuesday by a *Tribune* photographer and reporter checking on the story, the medicine man for the Saulteaux tribe on the shores of Lake Manitoba, through an interpreter, explained his methods in curing sick people and in finding those who are lost.

An extensive investigation in Portage through the drowned lad's father and others connected with his Sioux Indian Village group left us with the impression given an RCMP constable at Portage: "The facts are there, you can't deny them. He has a reputation for that sort of thing." And what are the facts? Two locations of drowned bodies where corroboration of the details is certain, and a third in Swan River reported by Mr. Prince himself.

As for the curing of the sick you just have to take Mr. Prince's word for it. An Indian youth at the Marius Mission told us that "when you're sick you're supposed to go to Louis Prince."

Another lad living near the Prince dwelling assured us he was a "very good" doctor.

Any desire of Christian missionaries to rid Indians of heathen practices and beliefs receives a telling blow every time the medicine man comes through with a prediction or otherwise demonstrates the power given to him through the thunder gods.

## “He Does Nothing”

A Roman Catholic priest at the Marius Mission said he had not heard of Prince’s latest exploit. The priest has been working among the Saulteaux at Sandy Bay for 40 years. He knows of the witch doctor, but says “he does nothing.”

Rev. H. Crump, a Presbyterian missionary among the Sioux at Portage offered no explanation of Mr. Prince’s apparent powers. “White people are superstitious too, and these people have not been too thoroughly Christianized,” he said.

Christians do not believe Indian witch doctor practices can exist beside religion without injury to one or the other. Yet on the wall of Louis Prince’s inner room is a crucifix and the Saulteaux in the vicinity are at least nominally Catholic.

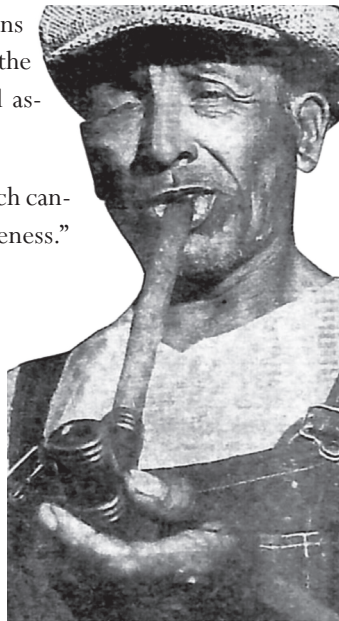
Louis Prince is a married man, with four married daughters and a son. He was born “with powers of acting through the gods” in him. Before him, his father born south of Portage at Long Plains was medicine man for the tribe.

“For years Louis has been finding lost humans and horses and cows that have wandered into the brush,” he told us through his interpreter and assistant Mike Fish.

From the gods he received his Indian name which cannot be translated but sounds like “Meshakeepeeness.”

## Skin Rattle

Eight years ago, when he assumed the position of leader of the annual sun dance held 100 yards across a field in front of his house, he received instruments of his calling, a skin rattle filled with shells, a whistle that is said to emit high sighing sounds during incantations and a Pipe, “from the gods.”



These objects he uses in all conversations with the gods. We met Prince as he strode across the field out of the bush beyond which he had been working putting up hay. He was returning to make his supper. “He’s batching it, his wife is away,” it was explained.

It was not the most impressive entry ever made by a medicine man. Long winter underwear clung to the sweat on his body, his overalls showed the absence of a woman’s hand around the house.

## From Father

He seemed to understand our greeting perfectly and was amenable to our purpose. Once inside the two room shack and with his tall straw hat removed, Louis preferred to work through an interpreter.

His power he explained was passed down through father to son. He cannot cure the sick unless they have faith in him. He uses no medicines, “although there are other doctors who do.”

With Mike Fish assisting, the Saulteaux medicine man demonstrated how he affects cures.

## Invocation

The two men knelt beside a young Indian boy whom they had stretched out on the floor on a blanket. Mike relayed greatly to us what was being done while Gordon Roberts went through contortions to catch the right angle in the small room for his photograph.

The witch doctor muttered an invocation to the gods in his Saulteaux language.

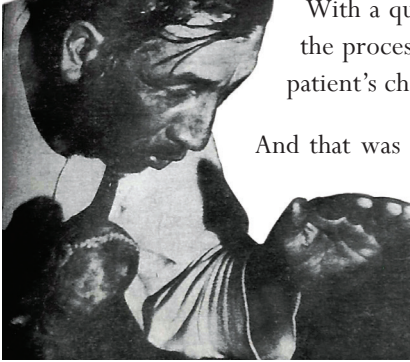
“Now he’s receiving the Pipe I’ve filled with tobacco,” Mike explained as the Pipe was passed back and forth. “The tobacco is a gift from the parents of the sick person.”

Putting his hands over the boy’s body Mr. Prince began to speak again. Then he did it again this time rattling his stick.



## The Climax

“Now comes the climax,” Mike said. “He’s curing him.” Prince lifted and lowered hands, meanwhile blowing softly on his whistle held in his lips.



With a quick bend from the waist, he completed the process by pointing the whistle straight at the patient’s chest.

And that was it. The mood was jocular in the group. Other members of the tribe had gathered at the inner door and were laughing as they passed low-voiced remarks among themselves.

“The boy’s all cured, shouldn’t be sick for another two years,” he said going out the door and patting the eight-year-old patient’s curly dark head.

Everybody laughed.

## Old Socks

We left the Indian camp still smiling over the hocus-pocus, remembering the anomalies of the place. The stunted trees outside were hat-racks for all manner of strange objects: old pots, bits of cloth tied to branches, a pail with rope and scissors in it, two very holey socks, part of a cotton sweater, a tin doll carriage and an old wine jug.

In the yard had been the front portion of a Model T radiator, and an old car seat propped up on a pail and box that looked in its sagging condition like a psychiatrist’s chair.

We had been forced to pass up a check in Portage with Sioux villagers there because the families had been working in the fields.

## New Outlook

Our attitude changed after we travelled 60 miles back and spoke to those connected with Louis Prince’s latest exploit.

Last Wednesday, a five-year-old Sioux lad, Clifton Hall, went down to the swollen Assiniboine River to bring a pail of water back to the house. He missed a step on the bank which has been edging away towards the houses ever since 1891 when the Sioux fled the United States. Some settled near Portage.



Clifton Hall

All his two young playmates could do was run for help. In the words of Bruce Pashe, a Sioux who had looked for the body from Wednesday until it was found Sunday, this is what happened.

## Expected

“The police dragged but could not find the body, I wanted to get Louis Prince who had helped before in similar cases but didn’t get much support.”

Finally on Saturday he managed to get a ride to Sandy Bay.

“Louis Prince met us at the door. He was dressed up and ready to go.”

“I’ve been expecting strangers from far off,” he said.

In the car he told us we were looking in the wrong place for the body. “It is down farther, beyond where the white men are building a bridge or something across the river.”

## RCMP Net

“Although Louis could not know, this was a net built by the RCMP in hopes on intercepting the boy’s body as it passed downstream.”

At the home of the Hall’s, the medicine man first went alone to the river where the body had fallen into the water, then held a séance, attended by five other Sioux and a white farmer friend.

Prince’s actions were much the same as those used for curing sick people. He spread powder on a plate of hot coals provided by Henry Hall, father of the drowned lad, calling on the gods for help.

## Plate of Ashes

Those in the room said the whistle lying on the floor whistled throughout the ceremony. Voices were heard coming from the plate of ashes. The presence of the white farmer who also took part in the preliminary Pipe-smoking ceremony, had no effect.

“The father had better not go in the boat with the searchers. The body will be found six bends down the river caught in tree boughs,” Mr. Prince said.

Sunday morning the accuracy of the prediction was proved. The Hall boy’s body was found.

## 1948 Case

These statements of Bruce Pashe were borne out by middle-aged Henry Hall who has been left, through the drowning, with only one child in a community where children are numerous.

One other instance of a Prince prediction was cited by the Sioux Tuesday. This was the drowning of nine-year-old Barry Graham at Westbourne in 1948. A Portage resident, Thomas (Bud) Kitson avers that Prince discovered the body with uncanny quickness under “weird circumstances.”

In 1950 Louis Prince said he aided in the location of a 13-year-old girl who had met a watery death near Swan River.

In the first two cases at least, there seems to be no way Prince could have known where searchers should look prior to giving his advice—save through some psychic foresight.

Those are the sober facts. And with each such occurrence the legend about Louis Prince grows stronger and wider.





