

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Out of the Woods and into the Museum: Charles A. Eastman's 1910 Collecting Expedition across Ojibwe Country

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/10f0h21n>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 32(4)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Martínez, David

**Publication Date**

2008-09-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

## Out of the Woods and into the Museum: Charles A. Eastman's 1910 Collecting Expedition across Ojibwe Country

DAVID MARTÍNEZ

---

---

When *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* appeared in 1916, the Dakota writer and activist Charles Alexander Eastman (also known by his Dakota name, Ohiyesa) told of a rather unusual journey across northern Minnesota and Ontario, Canada. The purpose of the venture, which took place during the summer of 1910, was to “purchase rare curios and ethnological specimens for one of the most important collections in the country.”<sup>1</sup> In typical Eastman fashion, he is elusive with respect to naming the collection, let alone his benefactor. What was really going on here? It may at first appear to be inconsequential to ask for whom Eastman worked or the whereabouts of the items procured; however, viewed from an Ojibwe perspective, the answers become immediately more important. What Eastman “purchased,” as he put it, were pieces of Ojibwe culture and history, which, even in an age of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, may be forever lost to them. Only by recounting this story and filling in the details that Eastman omitted will there be an adequate accounting of what was subsumed into the American museum system, not to mention what stands to be regained if the items are ever returned.

Just as important, we must consider what the story of the 1910 expedition does to Eastman's legacy as a prominent American Indian intellectual. By 1910, Eastman had already become a renowned author, having published three books: *Indian Boyhood* (1902), *Red Hunters and the Animal People* (1904), and *Wigwam Evenings* (1909). Contemporary critics, however, have long criticized Eastman in particular for promoting assimilation as an option for Indian people fed up with the reservation system and for being enamored with the 1887 Dawes Act (albeit, as it was written, not as it was implemented). At the same time, he was a strong advocate for preserving the ethical and spiritual

---

David Martínez is an assistant professor in the Department of American Indian Studies at Arizona State University.

values of American Indians, as exemplified by *The Soul of the Indian* (1911), in which he gave a systematic and eloquent demonstration of “the Indian’s” way of thinking on a variety of philosophical topics, from the ultimate nature of reality to the practical ethics formed through kinship relations, as well as a vision of community founded on an indigenous concept of making peace. Throughout Eastman’s career, he portrayed Indian people as being as wise and knowledgeable as their white counterparts. “The philosophy of the original American was demonstrably on a high plane,” Eastman claimed in a chapter of *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, “The Soul of the White Man.”<sup>2</sup> One could say, perhaps, that Indians were wiser because indigenous communities retained the generations of experience and knowledge that came from being America’s aboriginal inhabitants. Having said this, one cannot get around the fact that Eastman engaged in an activity that is considered reprehensible in an age of decolonization.

What follows is less of an apology and more of a critical appraisal of the events that took place nearly a century ago, during a far different era of American Indian history. As Eastman observed in the classic first volume of his autobiography *Indian Boyhood*, “the Indian no longer exists as a natural and free man. Those remnants which now dwell upon the reservations present only a sort of tableau—a fictitious copy of the past.”<sup>3</sup> Such a sentiment, however, did not come from the whites, who turned Eastman into a celebrity author, but from his late father, Jacob Eastman, who was known as Many Lightnings before his incarceration in a federal prison for participating in the 1862 US–Dakota War. After being released, the elder Eastman acquired a homestead in Flandreau, North Dakota (which is still remembered as Wakpaipaksan or “bend in the river”), and then proceeded to look for his son, who was staying with others from Minnesota’s Lower Sioux Reservation in Manitoba, Canada, who were living as war refugees. While journeying with his father back to Flandreau, Ohiyesa, who would soon be known to the world as Charles Alexander Eastman, began observing his father’s peculiar behavior, such as reading his Bible and praying to Jesus. With respect to the practice of setting aside every seventh day to worship God, Ohiyesa could not hold his exasperation any longer, asking if the whites forget about their God the other six days, to which his father answered:

Our own life, I will admit, is the best in a world of our own, such as we have enjoyed for ages. . . . But there is a race which has learned to weigh and measure everything, time and labor and the results of labor, and has learned to accumulate and preserve both wealth and the records of experience for future generations. You yourself know and use some of the wonderful inventions of the white man, such as guns and gunpowder, knives and hatchets, garments of every description, and there are thousands of other things both beautiful and useful.<sup>4</sup>

The great changes to the Dakota world that Jacob Eastman spoke about with his son were not prophetic, however; they were a *fait accompli*. From the vantage point of the early twentieth century, as Eastman penned the pages of

*From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, the American Indian world was in a state of oppression, its former glory reduced to Wild West shows and Edward S. Curtis images. Colonization was complete. In Eastman's eyes, nonetheless, America needed Indian knowledge and wisdom more than ever. Making himself poignantly clear in the opening chapter of *The Soul of the Indian*, after accounting for the profound relationship that Indian people have with "the Great Mystery," in addition to drawing some parallels between Dakota and Christian beliefs and practices, Eastman states, "It is my personal belief, after thirty-five years' experience of it [that is, modern American society], that there is no such thing as 'Christian civilization.' I believe that Christianity and modern civilization are opposed and irreconcilable, and that the spirit of Christianity and of our ancient [Dakota] religion is essentially the same."<sup>5</sup> During the aforementioned thirty-five years, Eastman never failed to acknowledge the individuals who were not only influential in his life but also who lived up to the principles they espoused. Such praise was not limited to his own revered elders, such as the grandmother and uncle who raised him until he turned fifteen. The list of the esteemed also included the Reverend Alfred L. Riggs, the superintendent of the Santee Indian School, and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Wood, the couple who looked after him during his years of medical training at Boston University. Then there were the men who brought the Young Men's Christian Association to America, such as Richard Morse. Yet, as Eastman explains, "I have said some hard things of American Christianity, but in these I referred to the nation as a whole and to the majority of its people, not to individual Christians. Had I not known some such, I should long ago have gone back to the woods."<sup>6</sup> With regard to these exceptional individuals, did Eastman think this way of the benefactor who sent him across Ojibwe country in 1910? We will probably never know. What we can say is that Eastman did go "back to the woods," to northern Minnesota and Ontario, where he visited the communities of Leech Lake (including Bear Island and Sugar Point), Red Lake, Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, Seine Bay, North Bay, and International Falls. Additional communities may have been visited but are not explicitly mentioned in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. With respect to who hired Eastman for the expedition, the uncovering of his name is a story in itself.

During 2006 and 2007, I was writing a book on Eastman, in which I analyze his work as being that of a Dakota intellectual writing in the early twentieth century, a time in which the concept of "American Indian" was taking shape as both a political and cultural phenomenon, and in which traditional cultures faced the threat of extermination. In the chapter "From Enemies to Pan-Indian Allies," which examines the ways in which Eastman portrays the Ojibwe during the course of his writing career, the episodes recounted in chapter 11 of *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* are scrutinized for the personal growth Eastman exhibited in his increasing sympathy for Ojibwe interests. Historically, the Ojibwe and Dakota were traditional enemies, whose rivalry went back to mythic times. Naturally, Eastman was raised with the assumption that he would one day set on the warpath against this storied enemy, which is gloriously displayed in *Indian Boyhood*. By the time he writes *From the Deep Woods*, Eastman's admiration of the Ojibwes has grown considerably,

particularly those at Leech, Cass, and Red lakes, whom he regards as the only Indians within the United States “who still sustain themselves after the old fashion by hunting, fishing and the gathering of wild rice and berries.”<sup>7</sup> They were not like reservation Indians. Thus, a crucial turning point in Eastman’s life occurs during the summer of 1910.

As I pursued my research, I found an illuminating passage in Raymond Wilson’s excellent biography, *Ohiyesa*, in which Wilson mentions in passing that “during the summer of 1910, Eastman went to northern Minnesota and Ontario, Canada, to collect items from the Ojibways, traditional enemies of the Sioux, for the University of Pennsylvania Museum.” According to Wilson’s footnote, this information was hidden away in the December 1910 edition of the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*.<sup>8</sup> Unable to find more on my own, I contacted Wilson to inquire if he knew more about the 1910 expedition, most importantly, the benefactor’s name. Unfortunately, there was nothing further that Wilson could add to the story.<sup>9</sup> However, he did make the practical suggestion that I contact the University of Pennsylvania’s Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia.

During August 2006, I e-mailed Robert Sharer, the curator in charge at the museum, who informed me from New Mexico that he was not even aware of a connection between Eastman and the museum. Nonetheless, he recommended that I get in touch with Robert W. Preceul, the associate curator of the American section, which I did promptly. After echoing Sharer’s remarks, Preceul said that he would look into the matter as soon as he returned to Philadelphia and enlist the assistance of the museum’s archivist, Alex Pezzati. The fall semester began soon after this exchange. After realizing that two months had passed since last hearing from Preceul, I e-mailed him once more, reminding him of my urgent interest in learning about Eastman’s benefactor. The next day, I finally had my answer: George Gustav Heye. “Of course!” I thought excitedly.

A native New Yorker and a graduate of the Columbia University School of Mines, George Gustav Heye (1874–1957) was a famous collector whose obsession for American Indian artifacts became the basis of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) that now stands in Washington, D.C. Initially, during the early twentieth century, the Heye Museum was established in New York, later becoming the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation in 1916. During the years that Heye built his enormous collection, the anthropological community duly noted the scholarly impact of his work. “The results achieved [by Heye’s expeditions],” George Grant MacCurdy acclaims, “may serve to indicate what may be done in American Archeology in a short time by one man who is possessed not only of the necessary means but also the necessary energy intelligently directed.” At the time, in 1909, Heye’s “splendid collections [were] being installed at the University of Pennsylvania Museum.”<sup>10</sup> The following year, the exhibit in the Pennsylvania museum, consisting of a “remarkably complete representation of the material culture of the tribes of the Great Plains and also of the Eastern and Southeastern tribes,” was recognized as being “one of the most notable and valuable of the great public collections of American ethnology.”<sup>11</sup>

Heye's collection only continued to grow, justifying the museum's expansion less than a decade later, when it moved to its new building in 1916. Standing in-between the Hispanic Society of America and the American Geographical Society on the corner of Broadway and 155th Street, the Museum of the American Indian opened its doors in 1922, followed four years later by an annex at Eastern Boulevard and Jarvis Street in the Bronx, "where stored material [was] more readily available for study by scientists."<sup>12</sup> From the beginning, the museum sought a noble objective. As George A. Pepper, one of Heye's closest associates, proclaimed in a 1916 article: "The institution . . . embodies the hopes and plans of years of active work and will contain not merely collections of primitive art and utilitarian productions but everything that will be of value to the student who is endeavoring to add something to the general knowledge of the American Indian." Thus, it is with the scholar in mind that the museum developed a "study collection" that could be "utilized to advantage" by students and collectors, such that they "could obtain the needed information through personal study of the objects."<sup>13</sup> At the time of his death, according to the *New York Times* obituary, Heye had amassed approximately three million items from across the Western Hemisphere.<sup>14</sup>

In light of such passion, one would expect Heye to have maintained a deep respect and understanding of the indigenous nations from whom he gathered his treasures. As it turns out, obsession does not necessarily equal respect. In his article "Slim-Shin's Monument," Kevin Wallace describes Heye as more of an obsessive-compulsive than an enlightened collector: "[Heye] didn't give a hang about Indians individually, and he never seemed to have heard about their problems in present-day society. . . . George didn't buy Indian stuff in order to study the life of a people, because it never crossed his mind that that's what they were. He bought all those objects solely in order to own them—for what purposes, he never said."<sup>15</sup> Slim-Shin is a name that Heye, according to one story, received from some visiting Gros Ventre Indians, who were anxious to reacquire a sacred bundle that was in his possession. The story—perhaps the better word is *legend*—behind this encounter is a fascinating example of the apotheosis that typically occurs on the death of the rich and powerful. Heye, after all, was born and died in New York, bequeathing to his native city a major museum collection, equal to Frick and Guggenheim. The legend in question was told in the above-quoted *New York Times* obituary, under the subtitle "Respect for Customs":

[Years before the Depression of the 1930s, Heye] had acquired the Sacred Bundle of the Water Busters clan of the Gros Ventre Indians of North Dakota. The bundle consisted of the skulls of two men who were regarded as the incarnation of sacred Thunder Birds that protected the Gros Ventre and Shoshone Indians.

In 1938, through the Federal Office of Indian Affairs, an exchange was arranged. Foolish Bear and Drags Wolf, leaders of the clan, were eager to end the drought [from which their tribe had been suffering] by recovering the bundle. They went to the museum, offered a Buffalo Medicine Horn in exchange, smoked a peace pipe with Mr. Heye

and conferred on him the name of Slim Shin, previously borne by a faithful custodian of the bundle.<sup>16</sup>

On the one hand, Foolish Bear and Drags Wolf may be commended for the deft way in which they used an indigenous form of diplomacy—making a trade and sealing the agreement with a ritual smoking of the pipe—in getting an item of paramount importance to the tribe returned to them. On the other hand, Heye's materialism shows through loud and clear, as he obviously could not return the sacred bundle based purely on his alleged respect for indigenous cultures. Something of equal, that is, monetary, value had to replace the item that had been surrendered to the two clan leaders. One naturally wonders how Heye obtained the sacred bundle in the first place. It is difficult to believe that the Gros Ventre would relinquish such a vital possession easily.

At this juncture, we need to return to Eastman's own expedition story. In 1910, Heye's growing inventory, and the various expeditions through which they came, was already a major source of artifacts for scholars and collectors. However, the Museum of the American Indian was still a dream. It was during the premuseum years, and because the collection became nearly unmanageable, that Heye began storing the overflow in the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Of the Heye collection, *The Museum Journal*, the University of Pennsylvania Museum's own publication, had this to say in 1910:

The George G. Heye collection illustrating the culture of the American Indians has been materially enlarged since its first opening in February last. Among other things a fine carved wooden bowl from the Sauk and Fox Indians, a sun robe, and a collection of pipes from the Northwest Coast have attracted special attention. At the present time Mr. Heye is maintaining three expeditions in the field, one among the Plains Indians, another among the Ojibways and still another in Ecuador. No reports have yet been received from the last. The first has had very remarkable success, obtaining rare specimens, such as sacred medicine bundles and objects used in ceremonies. From Dr. Eastman, who is in charge of the work among the Ojibways, there have been received two very fine birch bark canoes and a collection of very remarkable specimens, which will be enumerated and described in a later issue.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of the lofty reason for being in Ojibwe country in the first place, Eastman never emphasizes the work he is doing on behalf of Heye in his account in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. The Heye collection may be one of the "most important" in the United States; nonetheless, Eastman maintains a humble attitude as he recalls his meetings with prominent Ojibwe leaders. When visiting Bear Island, apparently while a Midewewin ceremony was in progress, Eastman fondly tells the story of his meeting with Majigabo, who was well known for having fended off federal troops under the command of



Captain Wilkinson in 1898 during what was regarded as the last military battle between federal troops and an opposing Indian force. Twelve years after the battle, Eastman records Majigabo as stating: "They can take everything else, but they must let me and these island people alone." To which, Eastman willingly admitted, "I could not but sympathize with his attitude."<sup>18</sup>

The manner through which Eastman obtained artifacts from his Ojibwe hosts is illuminated in an episode that took place at Sugar Point. Boggimogishig, who was once an eminent war leader, known for fighting bravely and often successfully against the Dakota, is reminiscing with Eastman about the "old days." "Boggimogishig's 'good fortune'" against the Dakota, Eastman points out, "was attributed largely to the influence of the sacred war club, which had been handed down through several generations of dauntless leaders."<sup>19</sup> The club (see fig. 3) is approximately sixty-five centimeters long and made out of a dark wood. The design consists of a long, slightly arched handle with a darkly colored ball at the forward end and an animal face carved into the base of the grip. The animal face looks like a bear's. The grip is marked with the same dark coloring as the ball, and inserted at the bear head's neck are strands of dark green (they may have been dyed black at one time) and red yarn knotted together with tips made of cylindrical metal caps about two centimeters long. The handwritten index card that goes with the club, now in the NMAI's Cultural Resources Center (CRC), simply reads, "War club. Collected by Chas Eastman from Pillager band of Chippewa. Bear Island. Leech Lake. Minnesota."<sup>20</sup> How Eastman acquires the war club is just as fascinating as the story of the Gros Ventre clan leaders who traded with Heye for their sacred bundle. As Eastman tells it, "I made use of the old-time Indian etiquette, as well as of all the wit and humor at my command, to win a welcome, and finally obtained from the old man the history and traditions of his people, so far as he knew them, and even the famous war club itself!"<sup>21</sup> By virtue of taking the war club, which previous generations of Ojibwe war leaders took into battle against the Dakota, from Boggimogishig, it is tempting to claim that Eastman has "counted coup," hence the exclamation mark punctuating his account.<sup>22</sup>

However, such an interpretation would be cleverness on my part. Nowhere does Eastman gloat about his acquisitions from the Ojibwe. On the contrary, he is eminently respectful. Unlike Heye, there is not so much as a hint that Eastman desired for himself any of the items he collected. Eastman never mentions any "gifts" that he felt obliged to hold and cherish, withholding them from his benefactor. This is reflected in his method for acquiring items, which is in addition to the etiquette mentioned above:

My method was one of indirection. I would visit for several days in a camp where I knew, or had reason to believe, that some of the coveted articles were to be found. After I had talked much with the leading men, feasted them, and made them presents, a slight hint would often result in the chief or medicine man "presenting" me with some object of historic or ceremonial interest, which etiquette would not permit to be "sold," and which a white man would probably not have been allowed to see at all.<sup>23</sup>



What Eastman values most are the memories of having met such individuals, who typically regaled him with traditional stories. Though the Ojibwe were the Dakotas' "fiercest enemy," the journey through the northern woodlands set off nostalgia for his boyhood days in Manitoba that was almost irresistible. "Every day," Eastman stated, "it became harder and harder for me to leave the woods." Recapturing his woodland life, in the end, became more important to Eastman than the collecting expedition, which soon becomes forgotten in his recollections of traditional Ojibwe life. Except for the war club, Eastman does not offer his reader additional accounts of obtaining objects. There is merely a vague reference to having "secured several things [at Red Lake] that I had come in search of . . . among them some very old stories," such as the story of Battle Creek, where Dakota and Ojibwe warriors once fought.<sup>24</sup>

When I learned that Heye was behind Eastman's expedition, Preceul advised me to contact the NMAI in Washington, D.C., which led me to the CRC in Suitland, Maryland, where Patricia Nietfeld serves as the collection manager. After describing my project to Nietfeld, she said that she would get back to me. Two hours later I received an e-mail, complete with a PDF file containing a list of all the items from the Eastman expedition that were still stored at the CRC. I could not believe my eyes. There it all was in plain sight. For years, whenever I taught Eastman's *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, there would be the inevitable question from one of my Ojibwe students: "What happened to our stuff?" I finally had an answer. I also possessed an inventory (complete with images) that scholars with the appropriate research interests and members of the Ojibwe community may access at the CRC. What they will find is as follows:

1. Birch-bark record (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
2. Gambling bowl, set of dice and counting sticks (Leech Lake, Bear Island) (see fig. 1)
3. Mink medicine bag (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
4. Turtle medicine bag (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
5. [Beaded] saddle (Leech Lake, Bear Island) (see fig. 2)
6. War club (Leech Lake, Bear Island) (see fig. 3)
7. Pipe and stem (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
8. Can rattle (Leech Lake, Bear Island) (see fig. 4)
9. Woven bag (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
10. [Wooden] medicine bowl (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
11. Tom-tom (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
12. Drum and stick (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
13. [Two sets] birch-bark canoe and two paddles (Leech Lake, Bear Island)
14. Birch-bark basket (Cass Lake)
15. Sweet-grass basket (Cass Lake) (see fig. 5)
16. Snake-skin medicine belt (unknown)
17. Bone game (unknown) (see fig. 6)
18. [Two plaited] mats (unknown)
19. [Two] otter-skin medicine bags (unknown)



**FIGURE 1.** Gambling bowl, set of dice, and counting sticks. Collected by Charles Eastman from Pillager Band of Chippewa, Bear Island, Leech Lake, Minnesota. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.



**FIGURE 2.** Saddle. Collected by Charles Eastman from Pillager Band of Chippewa, Bear Island, Leech Lake, Minnesota. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.



**FIGURE 3.** War club. Collected by Charles Eastman from Pillager Band of Chippewa, Bear Island, Leech Lake, Minnesota. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.



**FIGURE 4.** Can rattle. Collected by Charles Eastman from Pillager Band of Chippewa, Bear Island, Leech Lake, Minnesota. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.



**FIGURE 5.** Sweetgrass basket. Chippewa, Cass Lake, Minnesota. Collected by Charles A. Eastman. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.



**FIGURE 6.** Bone game. Chippewa. Minnesota. Collected by Charles A. Eastman. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.

20. [Woodchuck] skin medicine bag (unknown)
21. [Two] mink-skin medicine bags (unknown)
22. [Cloth] shoulder sash and bag (unknown) (see fig. 7)
23. Pair buckskin leggings (unknown)
24. Woven bag (unknown)
25. Yarn sash (unknown)
26. Pair garters (unknown)
27. Yarn mat (unknown)
28. Loon-skin water bag (Seine River) (see fig. 8)
29. Pelican-skin water bag (Seine River)
30. Birch-bark recording, gambling, and hunting medicine (Red Gut Bay)
31. Conjurers' hoof ring rattle (Lake of the Woods, near Manitoba)
32. Inner cedar bark, coiled (Seine River)
33. Marsh-cedar roots (Seine River)
34. Strips of marsh-cedar roots used in making canoes (Red Gut River)
35. Powder horn (North Bay) (see fig. 9)
36. Conjurers' drum and stick (Rainy Lake, North Bay) (see fig. 10)
37. Feast ladle for fish feast (Lake of the Woods, near Manitoba) (see fig. 11)
38. Medicine man's rattle (Rainy Lake)
39. Deer-bone gambling instrument (Rainy River)
40. Bone flesher (Seine River)
41. Fawn-skin bag for wild rice (Turtle River)
42. Moose-calf bag (Lake of the Woods, Cedar Island)
43. Needle used in making fish nets (Lake of the Woods, Big Island)
44. Mesh gauge for nets (Lake of the Woods, Big Island)
45. Iron spear head (Lake of the Woods, Rainy River)
46. Moose-skin headdress (Lake of the Woods, near Manitoba)
47. Moose-skin neck ornament with a bird attached (Turtle River)
48. Skunk-skin and deer-tail war bonnet (Seine River)
49. War headdress (Red Lake)
50. Bear-paw and hawk-wing headdress (Lake of the Woods, near Kenora)
51. Medicine man's spirit helper, used in treating disease—consists of birch-bark case, miniature club, and stone (Kettle Falls)
52. Gambling board and birch-bark with two sticks and eleven counters (Lake of the Woods, near Manitoba)<sup>25</sup>

So what about Eastman's legacy? It may seem easy to dismiss Eastman as a pawn of cultural imperialism, as perpetrated by a burgeoning American antiquities community. It may be equally tempting to portray him as a naïf who bought into the vanishing race mythology, thereby convincing himself that handing over artifacts, including stories, to white anthropologists was a way of preserving the noble memory, if you will, of peoples like the Ojibwe. Both images are stereotypes. The situation that Eastman saw himself in was far from clear-cut, and therefore more difficult to evaluate. As Eastman saw



**FIGURE 7.** *Shoulder sack and bag. Chippewa, Minnesota. Collected by Charles A. Eastman (NB: exchanged to Stolper Galleries, 15 January 1965). Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.*



**FIGURE 8.** *Loon-skin water bag. Ojibway, Seine River, Canada. Collected by Charles A. Eastman. Photo courtesy of National Museum of the American Indian.*



**FIGURE 9.** *Powder horn. Ojibway, North Bay, Canada. Collected by Charles A. Eastman. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.*



**FIGURE 10.** *Conjures [sic] drum and stick. Ojibway, North Bay, Rainy Lake, Canada. Collected by Charles A. Eastman. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.*



**FIGURE 11.** *Feast ladle for fish feat. Ojibway, Lake of the Woods, Canada. Collected by Charles A. Eastman. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian.*

things: "Very few genuine antiques are now to be found among Indians living on reservations, and the wilder and more scattered tribes who still treasure them cannot easily be induced to give them up."<sup>26</sup> Eastman clearly remembered what Dakota life was like up in the woods of Manitoba, which he vividly invokes in *Indian Boyhood*. Although he and his family may have been far from their southern Minnesota homeland, it was still a life free from the confines of the reservation, in which people still fluently spoke the Dakota language and maintained a level of traditional life that contemporary Dakota can presently only dream about. What Eastman saw on the reservations, in particular, during his service at Pine Ridge and Crow Creek, could only have disheartened him, sinking his spirit into the kind of melancholy that infects defeated and oppressed nations.

In his 1978 article, "Charles Alexander Eastman, the 'Winner': From Deep Woods to Civilization," David Reed Miller cites the same *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* article that Wilson used, in addition to a brief piece from a 1911 issue of *The Red Man*, "A Canoe Trip among the Northern Ojibways," to substantiate his claim that "by 1910, at fifty-one years of age, Eastman remained in many ways a frustrated and disillusioned man, still not having found his 'place' in life."<sup>27</sup> After being forced out of his post in 1893 as the government physician at Pine Ridge, due to his criticism of the local Indian agent in the wake of the Wounded Knee massacre, Eastman drifted from one project or job to another, which was likely a consequence of the trauma he experienced on the reservation. Miller then quotes from *The Red Man* piece, in which Eastman admits that "early in the summer of 1910 the 'call of the wild' in me became very insistent, and I decided to seek once more in this region (northern Minnesota) the half obliterated and forgotten trails of my forefathers. I began to see the vision of real camp fires, the kind I knew in my boyhood days."<sup>28</sup> Miller then states that during this trip, "Eastman found the new sense of identity and spiritual renewal as an 'Indian' that he was seeking." Miller subsequently notes the more philosophical or reflective turn that Eastman's expedition narrative takes in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*.<sup>29</sup> In the end, Miller neither criticizes the moral ambiguity of Eastman's expedition nor does he go into much depth in explaining the venture. Instead, the trip through Ojibwe country is a symptom of Eastman's two-world torpor, which was the result of the thirty-some-odd years that the author of *Indian Boyhood* spent in modern Anglo-American society. From Miller's point of view, Eastman exists in a kind of cultural limbo—lamenting his lost Indian youth, while constantly in search of an American identity.

Ruth J. Heflin, in a more skeptical turn, cites Miller's article in her book "*I Remain Alive*": *The Sioux Literary Renaissance*. In the chapter "Charles Eastman's Warpath," Heflin takes a more biased perspective on Eastman's 1910 expedition, at least when compared to Miller's near indifference. Curiously, she claims that the work Eastman did for Heye was "one job to which, not even his biographer, Raymond Wilson, refers," which is clearly incorrect. In any case, Heflin goes on to state that when Eastman accepted Heye's commission this was not "the first time he would be shortsighted—a human failing, after all—in what was best for Native Americans." This is consistent with Heflin's



analysis of Eastman's work as being colonized or, to use a word that Eastman used about himself, "Puritanized." As such, Heflin assumes that Eastman is completely beholden to white interests, consequently paying little regard to even the Indians he meets face-to-face. On this point, David Murray is quoted: "Eastman seems here to play the exploitative white with no awareness of the irony of his position." Heflin then imagines that Eastman, who was once trained by his uncle to go on the warpath against white Americans, "would have noted the significance of removing sacred artifacts from their owners." However, the "Puritanized" Eastman only recounts his own "cunning, a kind of cunning he might have used on enemies on the warpath." With such a comment, Heflin runs the risk of turning her portrayal of Eastman into caricature. An attempt on Heflin's part, however feeble it may be, to redeem Eastman's reputation is made when she places the 1910 expedition in the context of the Dakota and Ojibwe rivalry, Eastman's Christianity, and the presumed inevitability of Anglo-American domination over Indian country, which supposedly implies that "[Eastman] probably had no second thoughts about acquiring artifacts—even sacred ones—for private museum ownership. The artifacts and legends he collected were for a higher purpose—preservation; they were relics, tokens of the free past that was, and, just possibly, spoils of war for a worthy warrior."<sup>30</sup> Expanding on Miller's diagnosis of Eastman as feeling inadequate, Heflin uncritically latches onto the warrior motif that characterizes her discourse on Eastman's collecting expedition. What we should be careful of doing is overstating the extent to which Eastman collected sacred artifacts. Of the fifty-two items listed above, only a handful was genuinely sacred, such that pictures of them were not even taken at the CRC. Specifically, there was a turtle medicine bag from the Pillager Band, Leech Lake, Bear Island; a snake-skin medicine belt of unknown provenience; an otter-skin medicine bag, also of unknown provenience; a yarn sash of unknown provenience; and a war headdress from Red Lake.<sup>31</sup> Everything else largely consisted of utilitarian objects, which were of interest to those studying Ojibwe material culture; however, these items were not especially sacred in content or meaning. What is unknown, as of this writing, is the extent to which individual items in the Eastman collection have been used in curated exhibits. What is certain is that the items that Eastman collected in the summer of 1910 have never been exhibited together as the Eastman collection at any museum or gallery. Furthermore, none of the items have been repatriated to their respective Ojibwe community. One item, a shoulder sash and bag, bearing a culturally characteristic floral pattern, but of unknown provenience, was "exchanged" to Stolper Galleries on 15 January 1965. Two birch-bark canoes, the ones supposedly mentioned in the University of Pennsylvania's museum journal, have since left for other collections. Both canoes, complete with two paddles, were acquired from the Pillager Band at Bear Island. One set was sold to the Kanawa International Museum of Canoes, Kayaks, and Rowing Craft in September 1976. The other was sent to Carl Hartman and R. Harrington on 26 January 1981, exact destination unknown.

The war club that Eastman got from Boggimogishig may be omitted from the foregoing list of sacred items for the reason that by 1910 the

Dakota and Ojibwe were no longer enemies. Certainly, by this time, they were no longer going to war against each other. Eastman underscores this point in the account he gives of his expedition, in which he says that he “was kindly welcomed by the principal chief [at Bear Island], Majigabo, who even permitted [Eastman] to witness the old rites upon their ‘sacred ground,’” referring to the Midewewin.<sup>32</sup> Peace between the Dakota and Ojibwe is given even more emphasis in *The Soul of the Indian*, which, although it was published years before *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* in 1911, was nevertheless written soon after Eastman’s expedition. In light of this, the way *The Soul of the Indian* ends is meaningful. Eastman tells the story of a Dakota war party led by a “well-known Sioux war-prophet,” who not only predicts that they will encounter an Ojibwe war party but also that the enemy will be led by the Dakota leader’s spirit-twin. Because of this, the Dakota war chief asks his warriors not to engage the enemy in battle, to which they grudgingly agree. The story culminates with the two sides smoking the pipe and singing sacred songs, including identical songs sung by the two war-party leaders.<sup>33</sup> This story is a fitting reminder to the reader that pre-reservation life is over as a viable option for American Indians, though it may be long remembered in the oral tradition, not to mention repeatedly romanticized by many a writer and artist.

The Indian wars in general were now a thing of the past. For any people who have lived through a time of war, its conclusion always heralds a new era. Although battles would continue in the political and judicial arenas against the US federal government, the time of the war club is no more. Indigenous nations across the continent now lived in the American era, a time in which sovereignty and tradition were under constant revision, but the violent confrontation between indigenous combatants was now a thing of legend and history books. There were now more important battles to be won against the Indian Bureau and the dominant American society. Above all, there was the spiritual battle to preserve the living memory of indigenous cultures and languages. With respect to the maintenance and teaching of traditional knowledge, many Indians, like Eastman, felt compelled to experiment with new ideas and practices, lest Indian peoples and their Indian ways be completely overrun by the juggernaut of progress sweeping the land. As we watch Eastman gather items from across Ojibwe country, there are some things we should bear in mind before we judge him.

Eastman was not the only Indian participating—willingly—in anthropological projects. Not only were several of his peers anthropologists, such as Arthur C. Parker (Seneca), Francis LaFlesche (Omaha), James Murie (Delaware), and J. N. B. Hewitt (Mohawk), but also we must not be blind to the fact that, “Indian etiquette” aside, the Ojibwes who handed over their utilitarian and sacred artifacts to Eastman did so under their own volition. There was no evidence of a threat, be it in the form of federal troops coming in, the withholding of annuities, or the seizing of land, should any of the Ojibwes not accommodate the Heye-sponsored expedition. We may never know the reasoning behind the Ojibwes’ respective decisions, but if Eastman spoke honestly in his account, then we can rest assured that, unlike Heye’s acquisition of the Gros Ventres’ sacred bundle, the items Eastman acquired were



handed over in the spirit of "gifting." After all, why would someone as defiant and unafraid of American coercion as Majigabo cooperate with Eastman?

What we need not speculate about is the cultural turmoil that Heye's Museum of the American Indian caused generations of indigenous peoples. Even if we can assume that none of the items in question were forcibly removed from their rightful communities—and I say this only for the sake of argument—we cannot deny that the museum did not take any consideration of what the indigenous communities may have wanted from such an institution. There has been much written about the historic relationship between America's museums and the indigenous peoples on whom they rely for their existence, including the legal and ethical issues surrounding the collecting and exhibiting of traditional paraphernalia and regalia, much more than I can possibly synthesize in my conclusion. Nonetheless, short of segueing into a whole new essay, allow me to conclude with a few parting words about Eastman. Although I may cringe at seeing him take joy in his trip across Ojibwe country, I still admire him for doing what one man could to try and change things in a time of great duress. Although he may have been obligated to a wealthy and powerful benefactor such as Heye, Eastman did not hesitate at indigenizing the collecting process. He approached Indian leaders and showed them due respect, smoked the pipe with them, stayed in their camps and villages, ate with them, "and made them presents."<sup>34</sup> Consequently, Eastman is less of a scientist and more of a traveler, perhaps even a pilgrim. As he goes from one place to another, farther north and away from so-called civilization, Eastman's spirit is rejuvenated. At one point, his journey is even comparable to the one that the Japanese haiku master Matsuo Bashō made with his travel companion Sora, recounted in the prose and poetry of *The Narrow Road to Oku*:

I was eager to realize for a few perfect days the old, wild life as I knew it in my boyhood, and I set out with an Ojibway guide in his birch canoe, taking with me little that belonged to the white man, except his guns, fishing tackle, knives, and tobacco. The guide carried some Indian-made maple sugar and a sack of wild rice, a packet of black tea and a kettle, and we had a blanket apiece. Only think of pitching your tent upon a new island every day in the year!<sup>35</sup>

The writing that this experience inspired led to more than just compelling travel narratives, such as the chapter in *From the Deep Woods*. It also led Eastman to rethink the idea of ethnography. The upshot of his reflections was *The Soul of the Indian*, in which we read, perhaps with reference to the likes of Lewis Henry Morgan, author of *Ancient Society*, and Clark Wissler, curator at the American Museum of Natural History, not to mention, in retrospect, the work of Frances Densmore: "My little book does not pretend to be a scientific treatise. It is as true as I can make it to my childhood teaching and ancestral ideals, but from the human, not the ethnological standpoint. I have not cared to pile up more dry bones, but to clothe them with flesh and blood. So much as has been written by strangers of our ancient faith and worship treats it chiefly as matter of curiosity. I should like to emphasize its universal quality,

its personal appeal!"<sup>36</sup> Nearly sixty years before Vine Deloria Jr. published his infamous yet necessary critique of anthropology in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Eastman was already setting the stage for the intellectual overhaul that Indian writers and activists would perform on the way in which indigenous cultures and artifacts are treated.<sup>37</sup>

### Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank Patricia Nietfeld, collection manager at the CRC for her invaluable assistance in locating the items of the Eastman collection. Also, thanks must go to Lou Stancari, who is in charge of the image archives at the CRC, and who generously assisted me in acquiring images of the items in the Eastman collection. Lastly, a heartfelt thank you to Amy Ojibway, who has been my enthusiastic research assistant throughout this entire project, and who won a University Research Opportunity Program grant from the University of Minnesota that enabled her to travel to the CRC and exam the Eastman collection firsthand.

### NOTES

The information in the figure captions is taken straight from the index cards that the NMAI transferred with the collection items from New York to the CRC in Suitland, MD. The ones for Minnesota were handwritten in pencil, and the ones for Canada were typed.

1. Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1977), 166.
2. *Ibid.*, 188.
3. Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *Indian Boyhood* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), v.
4. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 8.
5. Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *The Soul of the Indian: An Interpretation* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1980), 24.
6. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 151–52.
7. *Ibid.*, 168.
8. Raymond Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 150 (my emphasis), 165.
9. Wilson did, however, inform me that he was working on a sequel to his original biography, in which he would cover the latter years of Eastman's life, during which he published his last book (in 1918) and separated from his wife Elaine (in 1921).
10. George Grant MacCurdy, "Anthropology at the Winnipeg Meeting of the British Association," *American Anthropologist*, new series, 11, no. 3 (July–September 1909): 468.
11. Albert G. Keller, John P. Harrington, O. G. Libbey, E. E. Woodworth, Gilbert L. Wilson, C. A. Peterson, Shridhar V. Ketkar, and James Mooney, "Anthropologic Miscellanea," *American Anthropologist* 12, no. 1 (January–March 1910): 136–37.
12. "George Heye Dies; Museum Founder," *The New York Times*, 21 January 1957, 25.

13. George H. Pepper, "The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation," *Geographical Review* 2, no. 6 (December 1916): 401, 405.
14. "George Heye Dies; Museum Founder."
15. Op cited in Clara Sue Kidwell, "Every Last Dishcloth: The Prodigious Collecting of George Gustav Heye," in *Collecting Native America 1870–1960*, ed. Shepard Krech III and Barbara A. Hail (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 233. See also, Kevin Wallace, "Slim-Shin's Monument," *New Yorker*, 19 November 1960, 118.
16. "George Heye Dies; Museum Founder."
17. *The Museum Journal* 1, no. 1 (1910): 11–12. This particular citation came to me courtesy of Patricia Nietfeld.
18. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 170–71.
19. *Ibid.*, 171.
20. Frances Densmore documents in her book on Ojibwe material culture in the subsection "Clubs and Spoons," which is in the section "Articles Made of Wood," that "in maple and birch trees the grain of the wood turns outward as the trunk of the tree divides into the roots, and a man expert in woodwork utilized this curve of the grain. A 'bird's-eye' formation often occurred at this point, and he used this for the bowl of the spoon or the head of the club. It made a strong bowl, not likely to split, and it made a very heavy head for the club." See Densmore, *Chippewa Customs* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1979), 170.
21. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 171–72.
22. From the French *coup*, a blow, the basis of the war honors system. Coups were points awarded for striking an enemy and for acts of bravery and daring. For a fuller definition, see Sam D. Gill and Irene F. Sullivan, eds., *Dictionary of Native American Mythology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 53.
23. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 166–67.
24. *Ibid.*, 178, 172.
25. The information on all of these items was provided to me courtesy of Patricia Nietfeld, who e-mailed me a nine-page PDF file on 31 January 2007. With regard to how the items are listed, I have used Eastman's original descriptions, including within parentheses the provenience when known.
26. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 166.
27. David Reed Miller, "Charles Alexander Eastman, the 'Winner': From Deep Woods to Civilization," in *American Indian Intellectuals of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Margot Liberty (Norman, OK: Red River Books, 2002), 72.
28. Op cited in *ibid.*, 72. See also, Charles A. Eastman, "A Canoe Trip among the Northern Ojibways," *The Red Man* 4 (1911): 236–44.
29. Miller, "Charles Alexander Eastman, the 'Winner,'" 72–73.
30. Ruth J. Heflin, *"I Remain Alive": The Sioux Literary Renaissance* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 47–48.
31. Lou Stancari, photo archivist, CRC, NMAI, provided the list of unphotographed items.
32. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 170.
33. Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian*, 167–70.
34. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 166.
35. *Ibid.*, 175.

36. Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian*, xii.

37. For a more expansive treatment of Eastman as an intellectual and the legacy that he created, see David Martínez, *Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009).