

15. Charlyn and Gary Votour/As the Crow Flies TC-01-15. I visited As the Crow Flies in Barre, a craft and gift shop specializing in Indian and New Age art and artifacts, at the suggestion of Guy Dayhoff (see TC-01-14 above), who spoke highly of the couple and of their inventory. Co-owners Charlyn and Gary Votour were both in the shop that afternoon, although subsequently Charlyn left for a meeting, and I spent the bulk of my visit talking solely with Gary and later, taking photographs.

When I arrived, the couple were seated at a small table. Gary was working to transform the skull of a small animal he'd found -- road kill -- into an artifact for sale or display there. I found it interesting that, having had many conversations during fieldwork this year in Massachusetts with Indians about the 'encroachment' of New Age culture onto Indian culture, and on appropriations of Native culture by members of the New Age community, here was a shop which bridged the traditions. At As the Crow Flies, Native American and New Age materials commingle, and their possible connections are foregrounded and to some degree consciously manipulated by the Votours.

I believe that the Votours are quite possibly part of a long tradition of naysaying, that is, of rejecting mainstream culture and exploring alternatives to it. In their case, the alternative is Indian culture. For many individuals who find or consciously position themselves philosophically or ideologically outside the 'mainstream' of culture in this country (or what is presented as 'mainstream' by government, business, and the media), Native American culture and spirituality form an available resource that can be taken up and used to make spiritual meaning in an increasingly materialistic world. As such, the Votours appear to be working conscientiously to locate this cultural connection and identify meaningful expressions for it in their own lives and work. Their shop is the visible manifestation of their search.

Gary believes that his father was half Cree, and his grandfather full blooded Cree. There is an eagle pipe in the shop which Gary's father made, and which he believes expresses the father's Cree heritage. Pointing to the pipe, Gary told me that "This shop has helped my father reconnect with his identity." Gary was not consciously raised as a Native American but has always been interested and aware. Charlynn told me that although both she and her husband were born and raised in towns or suburbs in the Boston area, they have been sought out and expressed themselves through the medium of Indian culture for most of their lives.

Whatever can be said of these trends within mainstream culture in the United States, appropriations of Native American culture and spirituality by non-Natives can be strongly problematic for Native Americans who are themselves struggling to identify, recover, and perpetuate elements of their own culture and to pass it along to their children. Indian culture has been decimated by generations of Euroamerican hegemony here and elsewhere in the United States, although the problems seem particularly acute in the Northeast, the site of first contact between the two cultures.

When asked, Gary Votour describes his religious identity as 'Buddhist Indian.' His shop carries Native American items as well as Buddhist prayer beads, and there is a small altar in the shop which is broadly similar to altars I've seen in Buddhist homes, temples, and commercial establishments throughout the Northeast. There is a Buddhist meditation center in Barre, and Gary hopes that visitors there will provide a ready client base for As the Crow Flies.

Mr. Votour is a cartographer by profession, though early in life he became interested in leather work and has periodically worked with leather over a number of years. Now, however, he is most interested in medicine shields, which he makes at the shop, and for which he harvests the

wood himself. His current project at the time of my visit was to make a seven-sided medicine shield for the Cherokee village now under development at Winchendon (on the site of the previous intertribal village I visited last year when doing fieldwork in Worcester County, and which has since been destroyed as a result of internal conflict among the members).

According to Gary as well as to others I spoke with, Indian communities of New England were scattered during processes of European land seizures and colonization, but local people, especially Native Americans, feel that the geographical place itself is nevertheless alive even today with meaning derived from the region's ancient past. It is a powerful place. For example, Blue Sky told me about an ancient copper pit and stone circle on a farm site in the hills above Charlemont (see his section of this report above); and Paul Pollard and Kayla Duda emphasized the historical and sacred nature of land in Turners Falls and especially, in Gill. These examples could be multiplied, and are cited in various places throughout this report.

The Dudas and Mr. Pollard are part of an effort to preserve the Gill site from planned development. According to Paul Pollard, Native Americans think of Gill as 'Great Island' because it is a point of land, very significant in Native American history and tradition, that is completely surrounded by water (the significant water boundaries are the Fall River on the west and the Connecticut River to the east and south, with their tributaries forming the thin, though wet northerly boundary).

But Native Americans throughout the state of Massachusetts must struggle to secure dedicated and undisturbed sites for gatherings, rituals, and celebrations, and in some cases they have been successful to a degree (for example, the Greater Lowell Indian Cultural Association, or GLICA, has established the right to hold gatherings and powwows at a small site in a park near Lowell, and the Chaubunagungamaugg band of Nipmuk Indians under Chief Wise Owl have a three-acre reservation at Grafton near the tribal offices in Dudley. (See Chief Wise Owl section below for additional discussion.)

Meanwhile, there are efforts underway to establish locales for meetings and cultural activities, such as that at Fort Devens (see Mike Roberts section above for discussion). Of these, the most prominent of those established or yet to be established sites located outside the Boston area (where the state Indian affairs council meets) are in my view Ken Nadreau's efforts to establish a Metis social and cultural center in West Springfield, the gatherings, now suspended though under consideration for revival, held at the Duda farm in Gill, the Chaubunagungamaugg tribal office at Dudley and their reservation at Grafton, the GLICA site at Dracut near Lowell, the Native American cultural center in Worcester, and potentially, the intertribal or Cherokee site under development at Winchendon. Significantly, Gary and Charlynn Votour see themselves as part of this tradition of site development for the Native American community. According to Gary Votour, they consider their shop part commercial establishment, part exhibit space, and part classroom. "We want this to be more than a shop," Gary told me. "We want this to be a cultural center."

It is unclear as of this writing whether the shop will be accepted by members of the Native American community of central Massachusetts, though there is a precedent for acceptance, such as Art and Laurie York's Mohawk Trading Post in Shelburne. (See sections on Art York above and Laurie York below). The New Age/American Buddhist emphases in the Votours' shop may prove to be an obstacle to Indian acceptance of their place in Barre.

Regarding the New Age and Indian communities, however, Gary Votour argues that "there is overlap between the two groups." Pointing to a pine needle basket made by a non-Indian who

learned the craft from a Native American, he notes that "It doesn't matter whose fingers do it," provided that the process and the piece itself are moved by the underlying spirit of the work, which is Indian. I would note here that Marie Mann is a finger weaver who has won wide acceptance in the Native American community here, although she is not of proven Indian blood; and that Ms. Mann herself pointed out that the work of a non-Native finger weaver from Worcester is exemplary work that falls within the Native American tradition. And Therese Scheutze describes her work process in much the same way: as a process of discovery, guided by attentive ancestors or by the spirit of the work itself.

This is a thorny issue. Given the historical circumstances which have affected the Indian culture of southern New England, Native Americans can't ignore craft revival activity undertaken by the non-Indians in their midst. In fact, these can be important corollaries and even stimuli to work by Native Americans themselves. (The work of Dave Holland in Petersham, as discussed in my report on Worcester County fieldwork last year, is a compelling example of this sort of sympathetic relationship.)

Putting the subject of the Votours' shop aside for the moment, I'd say here that in my view, craft activity (and related activities) helps to establish linkages between the two groups, Native and non-Native, that can provide energy and definition for non-specific issues such as identity formation within the Native American community, as well as more pointed inspiration and direction for social movements such as that exemplified by the Metis. According to a recent historian of Metis people in North America,

It has been a long road for the *Metis* people.
Their New Nation remains rooted in their history,
a history of continuity and adaptation in a constantly changing social and political environment.
While their mixed Indian and European background continues to define them as a people, it is still in their hearts, not in their genealogies or in state boundaries, that the New Nation continues to live and develop.[1]

Part of the spiritual foundation of the Native American peoples, at least in this region of the country, has been laid by the sympathetic intermingling of these two human groups whom history and circumstances have thrown together. In any case there often appears to be only a thin line, on the surface at least, separating the two groups, and the thinness of this line is reflected in occasional divisions and arguments as well as in occasional compatibilities and cooperation.