

shadow: "My two boys met me at the wharf yesterday evening and accompanied me to my house. Some time before our arrival, my sister-in-law looked out of the window and saw the elder boy pass by. It was really his shadow that she saw, not the boy himself, for we must have been nearly a mile away at the time."

Many Ojibwa living on Parry Island in the 1920s, still believed that all objects had life, and life was synonymous with power. Just as man's power comes from his intelligence, his soul – so does the power of the animal, the tree, and the stone.

"Long ago the manidos or supernatural powers gathered somewhere and summoned a few Indians through dreams, giving them power to fly through the air to the meeting-place," Mr. Pegahmagabow explained. "The Indians (their souls) travelled thither, and the manidos taught them about the supernatural world and the powers they had received from the Great Spirit. Then, they sent the Indians home again."

The Parry Island Ojibwa found authority for their belief in a world of supernatural beings around them, beings who are part of the natural order of the universe no less than man himself, whom they resemble in the possession of intelligence and emotions. Like man, they too, are male or female and in some cases have families of their own. Some are friendly to the Native Peoples, others are hostile.

According to the Museum report of 1929: "There are manidos everywhere, or there were until the white man came, for today, the Indians say, most of them have moved away."

"Occasionally, the Parry Islanders speak of a Maji Manido, Bad Spirit, referring either to some lesser being malevolent to man, most commonly the great serpent or water spirit. Apparently, the chief enemy to man are the water-serpents, which can travel underground and steal away a man's soul. If lightning strikes a tree near a native person's wigwam (home) it is the thunder-manido driving away some water-spirit that is stealing through the ground to attack the man or his family. The leader of all water-serpents is Nzagima."

One had to be very careful of protecting the soul, Jenness points out.

"Until quite recently, and perhaps even now in certain families, adolescent boys and girls were compelled to fast for a period in order to obtain a vision and blessing from some manido," he noted. "Parents gave their children special warning against a visitation from the great serpent, which might appear to them in the form of a man and offer its aid and blessing. A boy or girl who dreamed they received a visit from a snake should reject its blessing and inform their father, who would bid their return and seek a second visitation, since the evil serpent never repeats its overtures once they have been rejected. If then, a snake appears in another dream the boy or girl may safely accept its blessing. But if he incautiously accepts a blessing from the evil serpent he will deeply rue it afterwards, for sooner or later he or his family will have to feed it with their souls and die."

John Manatuwaba, a seventy-year-old Ojibwa in 1929, recalled a family who fed their soul to the serpent: "A Parry Island couple had three children, two boys who died very young and a child that died at birth. Two years ago the serpent swallowed the man's soul. The woman then confessed that in her girlhood she had accepted a blessing from the evil serpent."

"I recall the tales about the water-serpent," stated a First Nations resident of Parry Island today. "It was told to us to keep the kids from going out in deep water. This kept the children safe."

"I have heard that the water-serpent lives in Three Mile Lake and travels underground to Hay Bay. It was told to us that when a south wind blows and the water becomes murky the serpent is moving in the water."

According to another First Nations resident, a group of young children encountered the water-serpent in the 1950s on Parry Island. The creature was snake-like and had legs. It could travel through the forest as well as the water.

One Native Elder on the Island, when asked about the water-serpent,

reinforced the belief that the creature is actually a spirit.

There are other spirits that inhabit the district, such as the little people called the Memegwesi, she said. They are friendly manidos, or rather a band or family of manidos. They may play pranks on the people, but never harm them. In the early part of the last century a Parry Island native on his way to Depot Harbour saw a Memegwesi going down a creek. It had the outline of a man, but only its face was visible, the body being concealed beneath a huge growth of whiskers.

John Manatuwaba, the 70-year-old Ojibwa native in 1929, recalled this encounter with the Memegwesi: "At the north end of Parry Sound, in what white men call Split Rock channel, there is a crag known to the Indians as Memegwesi's crag. Some natives once set night lines there, but their trout were always stolen."

At last one of the men sat up all night to watch for the thief. At dawn he saw a stone boat approaching manned by two Memegwesi, one a woman, the other was bearded like a monkey. The watcher awakened his companions and they pursued the stone boat, which turned and made for the crag. Just as the thieves reached it the woman turned around and called to the Indians 'Now you know who stole your trout. Whenever you want calmer weather give us some tobacco, for this is our home'. The boat and its occupants then entered the crag and disappeared," Manatuwaba related. "The Indians still offer tobacco to these Memegwesi whenever they pass their home."

Jenness also discovered there are two kinds of invisible Indians, both closely akin to manidos: "One kind has no name, the other is called bagudzinishinabe or 'Little Wild Indian'. To see an individual of either kind confers the blessing of attaining old age."

The bagudzinishinabe are dwarfs that do no harm, Jenness discovered, but play innumerable pranks on human beings. Though small, no larger in fact than a little child, they are immensely strong. Sometimes they shake the poles of a wigwam, or throw pebbles on its roof; or they steal a knife from a man's side and hide it in his lodge. Often a person will eat and eat and still feel unsatisfied. He wonders how he can eat so much and still be hungry, but the dwarfs, unseen, are stealing the food from his dish.

Occasionally you hear the reports of their guns, but cannot see either the dwarfs or their tracks. Yet, Francis Pegahmagabow stated that he once saw their tracks, "like those of a tiny baby", on a muddy road on Parry Island.

A few years ago a Native person camping on the island awoke in the morning to discover tiny child-like tracks alongside her tent.

In 1976, a Rosseau area resident who was studying with Native elders, encountered the little people.

"This one day I was in a beechnut forest south of Algonquin Park and I had stopped to eat some nuts," he said. "Afterwards I sat down in a glade near a babbling brook. I dozed off."

"Suddenly I woke up and caught a glimpse of a creature about ten feet away. At that moment it ducked behind a tree. Both of us were surprised to see each other. Then another creature appeared in the distance followed by another one to my right. I had never seen such a creature in my life. They were short, approximately two feet tall. Short mousy brown hair covered their entire body. They stood upright on their hind legs. Their front legs were shorter. I recall their long rabbit-like ears that hung straight down their back. I had the feeling their ears could rise up like a rabbit in an alert position. The creature's eyes were set in the front of their face. The eyes were quite expressive. The nose was flat. They had no tail."

"They communicated telepathically, by way of images, leaving you with a solid impression."

"Then they led me over to the creek. They communicated that this was a special place for them. It was here that they would adjust the stones in the stream to create certain tones that would help them raise their consciousness. They told me that the lower the tone, the greater the level of consciousness."

"They communicated to me that they like tobacco and to bring some the next time," he/she recalls. "Their favourite food was red squirrel."

These mysterious stories help to introduce the possibilities of seeing our world in a new way, to awaken us to the magic and enchantment lurking in all four directions, to engage our souls.

There is a tradition to ponder. When you meet a person on the road never address them until you have passed them, for then your soul and their soul will continue on their separate ways and only your bodies and shadows remain to converse. If there should be disagreement between you it will pass away quickly, for your souls will be unaffected.

Terry Boyle is the host of CTV's Creepy Canada. He conducts summer historical haunted walking tours in Parry Sound and Bala and is the author of Haunted Ontario Revisited and Haunted Mississauga, plus 11 other books of history and folklore.

