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HENRY RED EAGLE, POPULAR LITERATURE, AND THE NATIVE AMERICAN CONNECTION TO THE MAINE WOODS

BY DALE POTTS

RETURNING TO Maine in 1936 after several decades working in the American entertainment industry, Henry Red Eagle (1885-1972), a Maliseet from Greenville, wrote in an area newspaper of his love of the northern forest: “what I really like is to ease around in an old flannel shirt, or no shirt at all if the place and the occupation permit—and let the rest of the world go by. I like to get off on some unfrequented part of the lake or stream in my canoe or in the woods where the noise of the crowds can’t reach me. I suppose it’s a reversion to the blanket of my ancestors.” As a registered Maine guide, Red Eagle was well acquainted with the woods and waters of northern Maine. Like his father, also a noted Maine guide, Henry possessed an extensive understanding of woods knowledge and Native lore. For him, Moosehead Lake became “the best place in the world to write,” an activity he enjoyed for over forty years. In an era when most writers assumed Native culture was “vanishing,” Red Eagle, in his own short stories, celebrated his Native American ancestry and its association with practical woods knowledge.¹

His early twentieth century fiction and nonfiction represent an important benchmark in the literature of the north woods, incorporating the cultural conservation of Native traditions and the environmental conservation of the landscape. This article draws on Red Eagle’s descriptions of Native woods work and the occasional encounter with adventure and adversity to suggest the reconciliation of two long-standing perspectives on the Maine woods: a recreational wilderness and a working woods.



Henry Red Eagle taking a break along the shores of Moosehead Lake, with Mount Kineo in the background. Red Eagle, a Maliseet from Greenville, turned to Moosehead Lake as a source of inspiration for his writing. The lake represents the dual character of Maine's north woods region, as both a working and a recreational landscape — a feature Red Eagle attempted to reconcile through his writing. Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, *In the Maine Woods* (1941), courtesy Special Collections, Fogler Library, University of Maine.

Out of a mix of tourist activity, lumber and pulp and paper production, and Native lore, Red Eagle created memorable instances of personal relationships to a changing wild. His life was integrally connected with Greenville, Moosehead Lake, Mount Kineo, and the woods and waters of the Allagash region. Born Henry Perley in Greenville, he was the eldest son of Gabriel Frank Perley, a guide from Point Tobique, New Brunswick, and Philemon Tomah of Greenville, both of full Maliseet ancestry. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Maliseet families such as the Perleys left more isolated reservations in Canada and sought jobs in areas where they were in close contact with white society. In Greenville, Henry engaged in a number of occupations including guiding, logging, and clerking in a drugstore.²

Native Performers

Leaving Greenville in the early 1910s, Red Eagle became one of several Maine Natives who worked in American popular culture venues. As anthropologist Harald Prins states, Maine's Native communities had long-standing connections to national performing troupes. Frank Loring of Indian Island, also known as "Chief Big Thunder," worked with P.T. Barnum and other traveling circuses before retiring to Indian Island in 1900. Other early performers included Penobscot Lucy Nicolar, "Princess Wahtawaso," also from Indian Island. According to her biographer Bunny McBride, Nicolar "developed a concert program of Indian songs, legends, and dances, [which she] performed for various audiences" on the Chautauqua and later Vaudeville circuits.³

These and later performers often faced prejudice from white producers and audiences who held certain expectations concerning minorities in popular culture. As Historian George Lipsitz explains, the success of early twentieth-century popular culture depended on familiarity with marginalized communities such as working classes, racial and ethnic minorities, and women.⁴ In this atmosphere, audience familiarity was key to audience appreciation. However, white producers who employed Native Americans in their shows had little incentive to go beyond the most banal of stereotypes, such as the noble savage and the Indian princess.

The issue was complicated by the performers' decision to enter the entertainment field of their own will. The world they joined often demanded adherence to accepted images of their race. McBride notes that Native performers like Penobscot dancer Molly Spotted Elk were be-

holden to audiences who demanded the popularized versions of Indian artistry. Although secure in their own sense of Indian identity and heritage, these performers were willing to enact the adulterated roles familiar to the public. Well into the twentieth century, audiences demanded stereotypical portrayals from their performers. In her lecture and performance series, Lucy Nicolar pointed out “distinguishing aspects of the songs, legends, and dances of the various tribes represented in her program,” but she also had to adjust her presentations “to suit popular taste, aware that Chautauqua’s white audiences were curious about other cultures, but would not tolerate anyone who challenged their ‘civilized’ biases.”⁵

Early in his career, Red Eagle worked for troupes that encouraged these stereotypical portrayals. There is evidence that he worked for the Wild West Shows of Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, 101 Ranch, Texas Ranch, and John Werner. There was little change in the format of these shows over time. As late as the 1910s, advertisements showcased “Indian dances and other weird aboriginal rites and ceremonies.” Of the Miller Brothers’ 101 Ranch Show, McBride writes that the day-to-day living conditions were reasonable, but certain stereotypical aspects of the show had changed little from the days of Buffalo Bill; Spotted Elk was expected to do ceremonies, rituals, and dances that relied on “sheer cliché.” Discontent with these shows was evident in at least one delegation of Native Americans to Washington, D.C. who protested inaccuracies. Chauncey Yellow Robe, a Brule Sioux, asked in 1913, “what benefit has the Indian derived from the Wild West shows?” answering “none but what are degrading, demoralizing, and degenerating.”⁶

Red Eagle’s Writing Career

In the twentieth century, Wild West, medicine, and carnival side shows were replaced by motion pictures. Film represented the culmination of these early popular culture venues, perpetuating old clichés of Native Americans and developing new stereotypes for mass-consumption. During this era, Native American characters were usually portrayed by whites and Asians, with little concern for tribal differences in languages, customs, or beliefs.⁷

In the 1910s, Red Eagle worked for the Biograph Film Studio in New Jersey where D.W. Griffith frequently cast him as a “badman facing either the U.S. Cavalry on the American Plains, or the settlers on the East



Henry Red Eagle, wearing his traditional garb, interviewed by WORL at a Sportsman's Show, Myles Standish Hotel, Boston, circa 1940s. Red Eagle and other Native American performers were often portrayed by the media in stereotypical fashion, and both producers and consumers of popular culture expected Native performers to meet their expectations. Courtesy Moosehead Historical Society, Greenville.

Coast." As an extra, Red Eagle played stock characters that often maintained stereotypes. He lamented that he seldom "lived" to see the end of a picture, stating, "I was always killed [by the third reel] for the good of the plot," after which, the normal procedure was to report to the office for pay and to sign up for another role.⁸ While Red Eagle continued this work into the 1920s, his other career as a writer was of greater lasting significance.

While an active participant in American popular culture, Red Eagle maintained a sense of identity and, above all, a sense of humor. In his obituary, the *Lewiston Journal* wrote, "although he portrayed the standardized white man's conception of Indians, Chief Henry Red Eagle did everything in his private life that he could to refute the traditional impression that Indians were a stolid, noncommittal people."⁹ Red Eagle's Wild West and film careers may have forced him to portray the "stan-

andardized white man's conception," but through the use of the written word, he asserted a Native American perspective in pulp fiction and tourist industry nonfiction. In these markets, he sold an estimated 500 stories and articles during his lifetime.¹⁰ These writings reveal both his frustration with stereotypes and his method of dealing with them, namely through cultural images meant to reassert a Native American presence where popular culture demanded a "vanishing race."

Red Eagle published his North Woods fiction in national pulp magazines, a burgeoning market in the early decades of the twentieth century. His writing, which appeared in *All-Story Weekly*, *Short Stories*, *Argosy*, and *Top-Notch Magazine*, among others, included lumber as well as guiding episodes, and often emphasized the region's Native American presence. *All-Story Weekly* published a number of his fiction pieces, including "The Injun Boss" (1915) and "The Last Arrow-Maker" (1916), wherein Native people drew on traditional knowledge of the forest to assist them with an adversarial nature and their often adversarial encounters with local white residents.

Red Eagle wrote and worked at a time in American society when Native culture was often ignored or denigrated. Despite these obstacles, he embraced the Maliseet way of life in his literature and made conscious efforts to educate audiences about the validity of Native cultures in general. In this respect, his efforts resembled those of Penobscot writer Joseph Nicolar, whose *Life and Traditions of the Red Man* (1893) illustrated the long-standing traditions of the Penobscot people in Maine. Nationally, he joined contemporary individuals such as Luther Standing Bear (Yankton Sioux) and Charles Alexander Eastman (Lakota), who tried to counter negative images of Native Americans found in popular print media.

White representations of indigenous peoples in the early twentieth century offered little more than savage contrasts to white civilization with only a few sincere attempts to describe and understand these cultures. Many characterizations hinged on cultural prejudice. For example, in a story of bird hunting on the Seward Peninsula, Alaska, Frank Dufresne described a village of Inuit peoples assembled by 'moccasin wireless' for the funeral of a young Native girl. Dufresne complained that he suffered the "stench from this bunch of Eskimos, none of whom had ever taken an intentional bath."¹¹ This casual manner of belittling an entire group of Native people was common in popular literature of this period. Moreover, at this time in American history, the majority of white society expected Native American populations to disappear due to

assimilation and disease. Other white writers were more sensitive to Native culture. Charles V. Brereton's 1927 detective story, "In the Mesh of the Law," described the adventures of "Jimmy Crickett, Indian Trapper and Policeman," a California Indian who worked with white law enforcement against poachers, but still spoke in monosyllables and engaged in practices largely contrary to white characters.

Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), a collection of short stories, described an interaction between his character, Nick Adams, and the Ojibwa peoples of northern Michigan. Hemingway utilized his own experiences of vacation summers in Horton's Bay, near Petoskey, as elements in the Nick Adams stories. Less than a mile from the Hemingways' cabin, "Windemere," was the Ojibwa settlement known as Cross Village, a semi-permanent series of shacks where the Indians worked as bark peelers.¹² As scholar Glen Love writes, Hemingway admired the Native Americans' "non-destructive relationship to nature," but found their lumber work distasteful and out of sorts with a "true" Native American experience. And in other stories, such as "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," he took a dim view of Native peoples, believing that past populations had been more "natural" and more connected to the land. In the end, Hemingway represented the Ojibwa as a people disconnected from their traditional landscape.¹³

Hemingway's concepts of wilderness were derived from his complex, lifelong battle with nature involving force and masculine pursuit, but as scholar Frank Scafella writes, some stories, such as "Big Two-Hearted River" and "The Last Good Country," represented a romantic notion of lost wilderness — a nostalgic world the young Nick Adams longed to be part of.¹⁴ Native characters in these stories often act as foils, presenting beliefs which the character, and in some respects the author, rejected. The real wilderness, for Hemingway, was free of people, native or white. Indians — former inhabitants of the Michigan forests — had been culturally detached from this landscape.

While writers such as Hemingway expressed dissatisfaction with Natives working in nature, Red Eagle stressed reconciliation with the white-dominated working woods. While his works never reached the canonical level of Hemingway's, they can be read as an effort to rehabilitate the image of the Native American in a forest environment similar to northern Michigan. This is important, as many contemporary whites in Maine failed to recognize the continued presence of Native peoples in their midst. Red Eagle pursued this theme in his stories, challenging the white presumption of a vanishing race and the idea of a people alienated



Guides Henry Red Eagle and Ross McKenney building a log cabin on the shore of Moosehead Lake. By the 1930s, Moosehead Lake had become an important tourist destination. Guides such as Red Eagle and McKenney were in great demand and were kept busy in an array of tasks. Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, *In the Maine Woods* (1932), courtesy Special Collections, Fogler Library.

from nature and the land — an idea as old as Thoreau's visits to Maine in the company of his Penobscot Indian guides. Red Eagle achieved this by describing forms of labor that sustained both Indian tradition and white industry.

Red Eagle's first writing success came in the pulp magazines of the early twentieth century. As venues for adventure writing, pulp magazines existed between the dime novels of the nineteenth century and the mass-consumption paperbacks of the post-World War II era.¹⁵ Pulp magazines regularly published writers who lived the experiences they wrote about, especially those who lacked university training.¹⁶ Most writers came from urban backgrounds, but some, like Red Eagle, were brought up in rural America. Magazines like *Argosy* accented Red Eagle's Native background, his ancestry, and his home at Moosehead Lake.

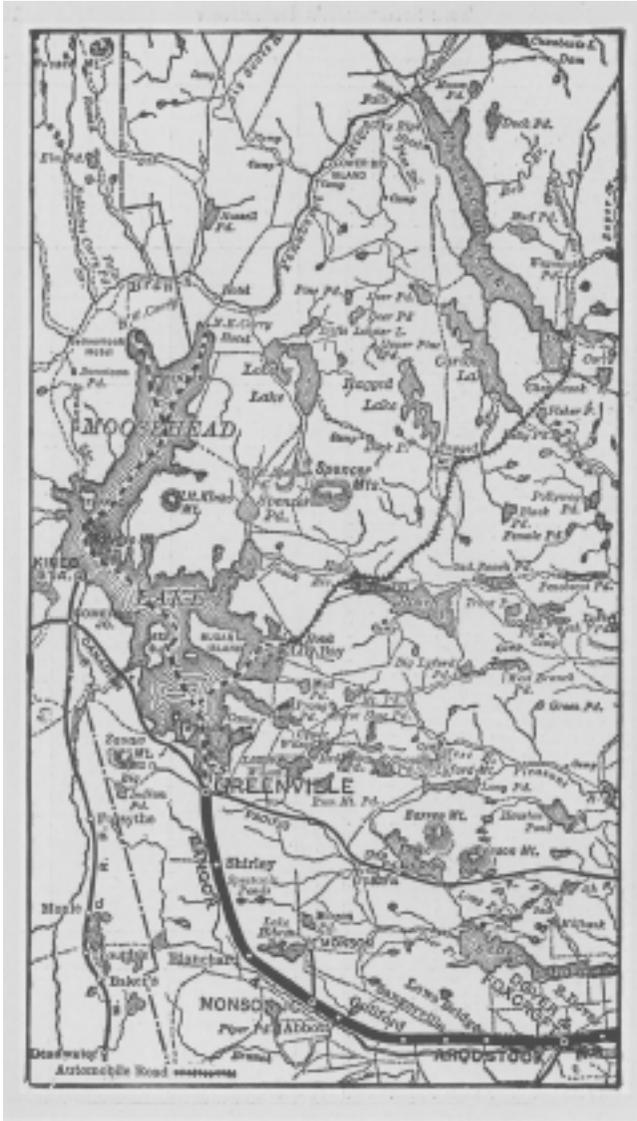
A Native American writing about lumbering and guiding in the north woods had enormous readership appeal in pulp magazines.

Harold Brainerd Hersey, a former pulp editor, illustrated this point in 1937 when he wrote that “the reader has a nostalgia for visiting places that he already half knows, places he had heard about and which he can describe to family and friends who are exactly like himself.”¹⁷ The north woods of Maine and the greater Northeast remained in the public consciousness throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in magazines, film, books, and pulp magazines, largely through the efforts of individuals like Red Eagle.

Red Eagle presented appealing popular themes, like the disappearance of the Native American and the vanishing wilderness, but he also challenged these stereotypes. As Native American literature scholar Donald Fixico notes, it is important to understand the “dynamics of exchange” between Natives and whites, where Native writers appropriated certain themes with the intention of subverting their overall outcome.¹⁸ Examples included placing Native characters in central roles and portraying them in a positive light. A Native American writer who chose to enter the dominant discourse had to accept certain tenets for writing, but Red Eagle also found ways to express counter arguments. He sometimes used the theme of the lone Native American in the twentieth century, separate from white society but continuing to live by traditional means. Where white writers often plotted the death of the Native character, Red Eagle treated the outcome differently.

Red Eagle situated Native Americans within the larger north woods setting through stories involving dangerous log drives, as in “The Injun Boss,” thus reestablishing the Native connection to the forest through the modern lumber industry. Where Ernest Hemingway expressed disappointment at finding Native people engaged in logging, Red Eagle included them as a matter of course. Within the story, he stressed the nobility of woods work, the adversarial and adventurous nature of the wilderness, and the importance of forest products, either as a form of subsistence or as a contribution to the national economy.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the north woods landscape was typically described as the scene of work, and timber operations particularly continued to influence perceptions of the north woods. More profitable industries, such as pulp and paper production, superseded lumber production, but these also accentuated the industrial aspects of the northern forest. Although far removed from the tourist image of the north woods, pulpwood cutters, under companies like Great Northern Paper, produced over a billion feet of pulpwood each year.¹⁹



Map of the Moosehead Lake region. This central Maine landscape has provided diverse resources — economic, recreational, cultural, and aesthetic — throughout Maine’s history, and continues to do so. The Moosehead backcountry symbolizes the convergence of Maine’s working and recreational landscapes. Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, *In the Maine Woods*, (1931), courtesy Special Collections, Fogler Library.

Red Eagle's story begins with the drowning of a lumberman, Benny Britt. The destruction of his bateau in a mass of logs and hissing foam is blamed on a white foreman named Martin who taunted his boat crew to run the falls. The lumber operator, Dan McDade, selected Mitch Lolar, one of the Native Americans in the crew, to replace the foreman, a promotion that angered Martin. Lolar "gained the respect and admiration of the crew by his easy manner of directing," Red Eagle wrote; he "took upon himself the hardest tasks rather than impose them on another." When he gave an order, the crew obeyed. Martin, the former camp foreman, was the exception. His animosity toward Lolar increased when Martin's former girlfriend, Marie Latour, and Lolar became a couple.

McDade told Lolar to deliver three million board feet of timber into the boom at Umsasqua, a little village at the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, sixteen miles away. While McDade attended to business elsewhere, a log jam backed up the water, and for an undisclosed reason, Lolar was nowhere to be found. The situation intensified when the camp clerk accused Lolar of stealing \$400 from the wangan. When McDade returned, he refused to believe Lolar had stolen the money.

Seeking his foreman, McDade went to the home of Lolar's mother, a Native woman who worked at the traditional craft of making ash pack baskets. McDade thought he saw Lolar leave by canoe upriver toward the Canadian border. With no time to pursue, McDade dealt with the jam that had grown increasingly dangerous: it had formed at a point where a rocky ledge extended at right angles to the stream, becoming a "seemingly inextricable mass of logs that rose menacingly forty feet in height; forever like a set of giant jackstraws." McDade had gambled all his money on this one drive, and it appeared he could not fulfill the order.

In melodramatic fashion, the camp door opened and Mitch Lolar walked in. Still uncertain of what transpired, McDade postponed any interrogation in order to work the jam. Without explanation, Lolar made his way to the jam with another lumberman, Jim Markham. McDade made the decision to dynamite the log jam. This climax was a staple of north woods adventure stories: "standing precariously on a log and swinging a heavy sledge with well-timed precision, was Mitch Lolar; while nonchalantly turning the drill for him was Jim Markham. Towering over their heads in a menacing mountain of destruction was three hundred and fifty thousand feet of logs, any one of which, if loosened, would crush out their lives as though they were flies."²⁰ Fearing the worst, the crowd watched "the pygmy-like figures beneath that wall of death." Lolar set the charge to blow out the logs at the lower end of the

ledge. "For a second the great mass shook, gave a little, stopped, then its very core bulged outward. There was a lusty roar from a hundred throats — 'She hauls!' — and the great mass plunged in a whirling maelstrom of upended logs through the sluice."²¹

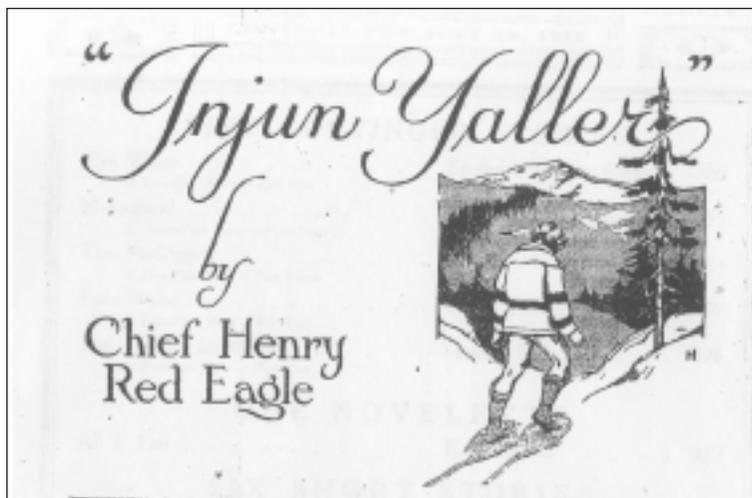
Red Eagle created a situation where Lolar must act to ensure the profitability of the drive, but also risk his own life. As the logs raced down the river, McDade confronted Lolar and Marie Latour. Marie explained that the former drive foreman, Martin, tied Lolar to a tree and with the help of Lolar's half brother, Joe Roc, set a plan in motion to cripple the log drive and to blame it on the Indian. To accent Martin's ill nature and for further explication, Red Eagle assigned him a part in a smuggling ring with Joe Roc, the man McDade had seen paddling up-river from the home of Lolar's mother.

Marie Latour suspected Martin's hand in Lolar's disappearance and followed him into the woods. By story's end, Red Eagle had redeemed Mitch Lolar in the eyes of McDade and the crew, and his actions at the jam showed his resolute character in the face of danger. Lolar knew that the drive must go through so that the men would be paid and McDade would survive. Marie and Lolar were married at story's end.

"The Injun Boss" reestablished a Native American connection to the landscape while including Native workers within the predominantly white lumber industry. Woods work was noble, not destructive. Although Red Eagle's critique of white society remained muted, his placement of Native characters in major positions within the story was rare in American popular literature at the turn of the century. As literary historian Jon Tuska writes, after the 1925 publication of Zane Grey's *The Vanishing American*, "all Curtis publications, including *Saturday Evening Post*, adopted an editorial policy that prohibited authors of western stories and serials from characterizing Native Americans [positively] in their fiction," leaving Native peoples in the roles of renegades and minor characters.²²

"The Last Arrow Maker"

In his fiction, Red Eagle focused on the labor involved in lumber operations and hinted at other uses of the forest, such as Lolar's mother making ash baskets. In another piece, "The Last Arrow-Maker," published in *All-Story Weekly* in 1916, he combined a romantic view of wilderness with a utilitarian Native connection to the landscape. Written



Title Page for Red Eagle's, "Injun Yaller." Red Eagle's writing career included pulp fiction, as illustrated above, and non-fiction. In a lifetime of writing, Red Eagle labored to reconcile the dual character of the north woods as both a working and a recreational landscape — and to place the Native American within this conflicted natural world. *All-Story Weekly*, 60 (July 22, 1916), p. 563, courtesy of the author and Juana Perley.

for a national readership, his description of the Moosehead Lake region combined nature appreciation with a Native American presence, important for an era still entertaining the concept of the vanishing race. For Red Eagle, the woods was a scene of practical activity, whether for sustenance or for lumber production.

This did not mean that dominant cultural notions about forest and Indian went without comment. The plot of "The Last Arrow-Maker" hinged on and subtly critiqued popular ideas regarding Native peoples, namely, the manner in which white society romanticized Native culture while indulging beliefs in its imminent passing.²³ Ironically, white writers often appropriated elements of Native culture as a means of finding authentic experience in the wilderness that they also assumed was rapidly disappearing.²⁴

"The Last Arrow-Maker" represents a critique of dominant ideas about the Native presence in the north woods. The white characters in the story found solace in the vacant forest landscape where no "work" could be seen. Importantly, it was the white protagonists who described the region as a "forest primeval," where the "vast unbroken forest, deep,

infinite, mysterious” stretched out beyond the camp fire. With this romanticized backdrop, Red Eagle introduced the party’s guide, a traditional woodsman with a practical perspective on the forest. The leader of the party, a captain of industry, asked Stokes if he would like to trade places, to which the guide replied, “Haint much fun trompin’ twenty five or thurty mile a lookin’ after traps, or paddlin’ a canoe agin a stiff current day in an’ day out for nigh forty year ‘thout nothing to show for it ‘cept a tarnal good appetite, while you fellers sits in a mahogany-paneled office, wear a high-top beaver [hat] an has every lux’ry ye want.”²⁵ Guides like Stokes defined the forest as a place of both work and — for their clients, at least — recreation. Work involved guiding, trapping, and lumbering, and Stokes would not mind trading for a time, but the Maine north woods was “home,” and it would draw him back.

Red Eagle, like Stokes, viewed the forest as a place of traditional work and local subsistence practices. Further in the story, he illustrated for the reader the longstanding Native American presence in the Moosehead Lake region, evidenced by pilgrimages to Mt. Kineo in search of rhyolite for arrowheads. As the title, “The Last Arrow-Maker,” suggested, white civilization’s influences drastically altered the landscape, as well as traditional practices, through logging, settlement, and in this instance, an endless stream of vacationers.

In the story, an elderly Maliseet named Nicola, the arrow maker of the title, abhorred white civilization, living in conflict with camping parties and those who ran trap lines on his ancestral hunting grounds. White encroachments in his homelands twisted Nicola’s world view, disrupting the balanced relationship he held with nature. Nicola’s animosity was exacerbated by his granddaughter’s death, following her abandonment by her seemingly white husband, Leon Rodman.

In a melodramatic twist, Red Eagle included that husband as a member of the camping party. Rodman, whose past remains somewhat clouded in the early pages of the story, was once again slated to marry — this time to the daughter of a prominent businessman. Father and daughter were also members of the camping party. Rodman, now calling himself Hildreth, repeatedly denigrated Native peoples, their understanding of the wilderness, and their traditional practices. He asks, for instance, what the Native American contributed to the essential resources of the nation, denying the authenticity and productivity of their work in the woods. He derides attempts to educate them; since “they immediately go back to the blanket, what benefit did they derive?” Dave, another guide, defends Native peoples and white woods workers: “gener-

ally speakin', but locally, I can vouch pussonally for some Injuns as is men, for hyar we measure a man 'cordin' to his achievements an' square'-ness rather'n his preachin's or th' lent' o' his fingernails." In the villain Hildreth, Red Eagle created a man who turned his back on his wife and, as it turns out, on his own Native American ancestry.

Through the introduction of another character, the elderly Nicola's grandson, Red Eagle confirmed the Native American connection to the landscape. The grandson, a link between white civilization and Native culture, appeared out of the forest to save the businessman's daughter from drowning during a windstorm on Moosehead Lake. He also smoothed over relations between the party and his grandfather, but ultimately not with the fiancé of the heroine, who maintained his antipathy to the end of the story. The grandson is by far the stronger of the two characters, a graduate of Dartmouth College but also a critic of the dominant American society: "civilization can do much for a man of my kind — it can do too much."²⁶ Civilization brought about the death of his sister and his grandfather's burning hatred for whites. Her death indirectly led to the death of their father, who tried to raise money to pursue Leon but died in a logging accident. Their mother also died from grief.

The grandfather's grief and the grandson's anger were caused, in part, by white society. As the younger Nicola states to the camping party, the forests of northern Maine constituted "the Indian's last stand — far from civilization's ghoulish hands" — and as such he felt it "would... have been better never to have left its protecting wilds, to live untrammled as his ancestors lived." Red Eagle elicited sympathy for the younger Nicola's plight by contrasting his position to that of the villain. Only slowly does the group understand that Hildreth is not what he appears. Meanwhile, the businessman's daughter pondered her growing interest in Native peoples in general and Nicola's grandson in particular. Leona sympathized with Native culture; knowing their party had moved into the ancestral lands of the Maliseet, she asks if they could move to some other camp. Recognizing the Native point of view, she asks: "I think I should feel much as the Indians do myself. Suppose they were to camp on our lawn?"²⁷

The seriousness of the situation becomes apparent when the party realizes the elder Nicola has taken their canoes, leaving them alone in a wilderness where "except for an occasional trapper's camp, there was no other sign of civilization nearer than Suncook, sixty-five miles away." To emphasize the distance, Red Eagle made the forest "practically virgin,

abounding with deep, boggy swamps and no trails.”²⁸ The party now depended on the woods skills of the younger Nicola and the guides in their party.

Possessing a traditional knowledge of the forest, the grandson finds no reason for concern. As he says: “years before I was born this was an old Indian camp and burial ground... they were happy until the game grew scarce and the lumberman’s ax sounded nearer and nearer. My grandfather fought the movement to go northward because it would take them farther from Mt. Kineo, the source of their material for arrowheads.”²⁹ Dellwood, the businessman, asks Nicola, whom he considers an intelligent and resourceful man, to return to civilization, but Nicola dismissed his arguments, not only for himself, but for Native people in general. Hinting at the Indian wars of the previous century, he states that, “instead of propagating, his people had been wiped from the face of the earth, and all because of civilization.” For his own circumstance, “with his hopes beating high, confidently breasting the tide of his ambition, he was beaten back at one fell stroke of civilization’s scourge.”³⁰

The death of young Nicola’s sister remains the focal point of both his and the old man’s grief, but other instances of conflict in white society are surmised. In describing Nicola’s college education at Dartmouth, Red Eagle, like other Native writers in the early twentieth century, outlined the cultural dislocation experienced by Native students on university campuses. In the novel *Sundown* (1934), John Joseph Mathews, an Oklahoma writer of mixed Osage and white ancestry, portrayed university life for a young Osage man who found the attitudes of whites at college merely an extension of their “strange attitudes” toward the Osage on the reservation. These responses reinforced the conflict of living within two worlds and alienated from both.³¹

As Red Eagle’s story unfolds, Hildreth’s true identity is revealed. A Maliseet by birth, he turned away from Native culture and embraced a deceitful life. Years before, when the elder Nicola remained behind in the Moosehead region, a younger generation of Maliseets moved north to Madawaska. The only other family that remained was that of Motar Sakkis. Sakkis had one male child who, in time, went by many aliases, including Leon Rodman, also known as Hildreth, the man who married and deserted the younger Nicola’s sister, Oneta. Toward the end of the story, Hildreth’s behavior creates suspicion among the party. Leona spies him stealing silver gray fox skins from old Nicola’s traps.³² In a scene of poetic justice, Sakkis-Rodman-Hildreth is killed by a naturally-occurring deadfall. In a parallel scene, the elder Nicola fires an arrow into the

air; it comes back to earth to kill him. In his hand is a locket with the picture of his granddaughter and the man who betrayed her.

Rodman severed his connection to his ancestors and the land. The younger Nicola maintained traditional subsistence practices and honored his ancestral links to the forests, but he also realized that nature could no longer sustain his people in the face of white encroachment. Thus his relation to the woods was both traditional and modern. The white heroine and Native hero unite, symbolizing the continuing viability of Native culture in the white-dominated woods world.

Red Eagle romanticized traditional work in the woods through Leona Dellwood's interest in young Nicola's life in a landscape she believed to be an alien and threatening place. She envisioned him crossing "treacherous, ice-crusting lakes and rivers and the melting snows of spring that graduated into balmy summer, and [flitting] from lake to lake in his birchen craft as he sought new trapping grounds." Although Leona romanticized Nicola's life, Red Eagle made it clear that the conflict between white and Native culture was not easily resolved. Nicola's Dartmouth education, as Leona saw it, was a temporary stay before he returned to the Moosehead wilderness. She found "he had renounced his earlier association to return to his native heath; to live as his ancestors lived untrammelled." He was "unable to assimilate the Anglo propaganda because of antithesis and inherent pride, so he went back to Nature."³³

Returning to an ancestral landscape was important for many Native writers in this period. John Joseph Mathews also wrote of this return in his novel *Sundown*.³⁴ But Red Eagle's story of rejecting white society and reconnecting with a homeland is more subtle. Through the Dellwood family, he showed how sympathy and understanding among whites could help alleviate past wrongs. Red Eagle provided white support for Native working traditions. By story's end, young Nicola's partial acceptance of white society balanced out the anger of his grandfather and the duplicity of the villain. He rescues the heroine and ultimately survives, while anger, grief, and antipathy led to the demise of his grandfather and the villain.

Red Eagle's generation followed the first modern group of Native writers, including Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) of the Lakota people. Such writers felt the tension between Native and white cultures. After pursuing the "new trail" of white civilization, Eastman returned to confirm the culture of the Lakota and critique white society.³⁵ Red Eagle's fiction followed this formula, holding white society accountable for tres-

passes against Native peoples, but largely in an oblique manner. The Native Hildreth followed the “new path” like Eastman, but he embraced all that was negative in white society and became twisted by it. It remained for young Nicola to assert a cultural connection to Maliseet heritage and a physical connection to the Moosehead region.

Red Eagle wrote north woods fiction by stressing the authenticity of Native connections to the woods. That authenticity meant using the woods more than romanticizing it. If the Indians of the north woods engaged in lumber operations in Michigan or Maine, their appreciation for the forest was no less reverential — shaped, as it was, by centuries of intimate use. This adaptability proved itself in the ability to incorporate a larger economic presence, the lumber industry, into traditional lifeways. For Red Eagle, the Native connection to the landscape could be unlearned, as represented in the character of Hildreth, but as the younger Nicola shows, it could be sustained by incorporating the best of Native and white society.

Red Eagle’s Tourist Literature

Red Eagle returned to Moosehead Lake semi-permanently in the 1930s, just as pulp fiction markets were beginning to decline. Responding to shifting literary markets, he turned to non-fiction tourist literature. A significant aspect of this writing was his accent on Native work in, and aesthetic appreciation of, the forest environment. He wrote tourist literature with an eye for marketing the region, but he used this venue to comment on the aesthetic state of Maine’s north woods, again connecting wilderness to the region’s Native American presence. This body of work, extending over decades, is important for understanding the presentation of the north woods by a writer of Native American ancestry.

Red Eagle published nonfiction in major outdoor periodicals like *Field and Stream*, *Sports Afield*, and *Outdoor Life*. As literary historian James Ford writes, the material in these magazines included personalized information on “hunting and fishing triumphs, backed by judicious support for conservation, and regular departments devoted to guns, rods, dogs, and all the elaborate paraphernalia of camping, boating, and outdoor ‘roughing it’ with the most modern gadgets.”³⁶

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed a tremendous growth in the outdoor recreation industry. Much of this was attributable to increased automobile use by the middle and upper classes intent on

escaping the cares of industrial America. Urbanites took to the automobile and quickly made the connection between increased travel opportunities and the ability to reach secluded and scenic wilderness areas. Reliable automobiles, better roads, and more vacation time led to increased interest in long-distance travel, in turn creating new markets for nature-writing. In 1906, a writer for Maine's *Pine Tree Magazine* proclaimed, in reference to the northern part of the state, that the automobile "has now proven its adaptability to the needs of the huntsman and the fisherman," eliminating the drudgery of canoe portage.³⁷ Despite this writer's pronouncements, huntsmen, fishermen, and general tourists continued to enjoy canoeing the waters of northern Maine.

One reason for the expansion of tourist travel in the northern forest was the changing nature of vacationing. By the early decades of the twentieth century, "die-hard wilderness fans" in search of an "untouched" New England landscape were forced to travel further north; increasing numbers, for instance, were taking the St. John canoe trip. According to historian Joseph Conforti, between 1900 and 1929, the "real" New England moved north away from the urban, industrial southern part of the region and endured in Northern Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The Allagash River, Red Eagle wrote, "pounds through millions of acres of wild timberland that is almost 'a forest primeval,' through white-capped rapids and along high banks, with intriguing streams and deep shaded pools every few miles, while about you reigns a deep solitude."³⁸ Despite the presence of the lumber industry, northern Maine became synonymous with this urban idea of "true" wilderness.

In the 1930s Red Eagle emphasized the connection between the tourist and lumber industries by contrasting the growing aesthetic appreciation of nature with the increasingly destructive power of work in the woods. He wrote in the tourist magazine *In the Maine Woods*, an annual publication of the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, that "modern progression has made inroads into the land of his [the traditional woodsman's] youthful days of guiding, hunting, and trapping." He resented the "irresistible march of civilization into a heretofore wild country." These cautionary observations continued with greater specificity and ire: "But the dams are his bugaboo! Huge ten gate dams that hold a thirty foot head of water, inundating the surrounding country for miles back, to leave the skeletons of water killed trees; wiping out his old camping grounds and ice cold springs; making lakes of the lowlands and, above all, flooding out the falls and rapids that tested his skill as a canoeman."³⁹

In the Maine Woods began in 1898 as a sportsmen's magazine aimed



Indian Encampment at Moosehead Lake. Moosehead Lake was a destination for many Maine tribes long before the area was first explored and exploited by whites. Native people continued using the area for seasonal encampments after the arrival of the timber and recreation industries. Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, *In the Maine Woods* (1932), courtesy Special Collections, Fogler Library.

at upper and emerging middle classes. By 1937 it was published and distributed to over 25,000 people and remained a significant means of presenting Maine to the nation until after World War II. Through the 1920s, the magazine's articles, including the canoe guides, were written by out-of-state scientists, physicians, and other metropolitan society elites recounting their experiences as tourists in the region. Their writings conveyed a north woods of health and rejuvenation. Sportspeople, fleeing the stresses of the city, "looked upon fields and forests as inspirational resources for their urban life," and the Maine north woods ably fit this description.⁴⁰ Their concept of aesthetics hinged on a fleeting stay in the woods, and it often ignored local inhabitants and denigrated the assistance of individuals such as guides.

The urban traveler in the early twentieth century still relied on these guiding services. *In the Maine Woods* argued that the Maine guide "is the living fiber of the great north country. He is a tradesman and an artisan whose apprenticeship has been a lifetime in the great outdoors.... To these hardy men is entrusted the pleasure and the task of showing

northern Maine to the nation.” Many Maine guides were indigenous, following a long tradition of Native guiding. The federal census for the town of Greenville, “gateway” to the north woods, on Moosehead Lake, lists several, primarily Maliseet. This fact was not emphasized in tourist publications, however, even when local writers began highlighting local expertise to draw connections between recreational aesthetic appreciation and traditional work within the forest. Instead early tourist-writers appropriated Native cultural elements and reconstructed them as authentic “Yankee” local color.⁴¹

By the 1930s traditional forms of work in the woods were becoming familiar themes in the romance of the northern forest. Arthur MacDougall (1896-1982), of Enfield, Maine, wrote over fifty fiction stories revolving around a Maine guide named Dud Dean. MacDougall and his contemporary, Connecticut-born Edmund Ware Smith, underscored the region’s pioneer Euro-American past. MacDougall, for instance, highlighted the saga of the first white settlers of the Upper Kennebec, who found “a dark, ancient forest of white pine, spruce, and hemlock.”⁴²

MacDougall, Smith, and Red Eagle wrote at a time when the northern forest was becoming a field of recreation rather than a field of work, but all three stressed traditional practical activity in the woods, showing how Euro-Americans or Native Americans utilized trees, fish, and game. As recreation became more prominent in the region, their depiction of work took on a mythical quality. This literature also reflected a rising interest in regional identity throughout the United States and Canada. In the 1930s, magazines, books, radio, and federal and state governments emphasized each region’s distinctiveness, ignoring the mechanization of woods labor to portray a timeless rural culture.⁴³

Red Eagle’s articles for *In the Maine Woods* conformed to this growing interest in traditional regional culture, but they violated the literary construct of a working woods by stressing the ecological changes wrought by industry and tourism. Here again, he veiled this criticism by placing these ecological changes in the context of his own Native American experience. His perspective, therefore, combined the nobility of woods work with appreciation of the integrity of the forested landscape. As he emphasized, Maine’s Native peoples, through traditional work, developed a close relationship to the land over many generations.

Red Eagle’s own relationship to north woods industry — logging and tourism — did not fundamentally compromise his Native connection to the landscape. In his fiction and non-fiction, he critiqued the economic system from a traditionalist point of view while working

within the lumber and tourist industries. Understanding the forest as a place where people lived and worked in the context of tradition helps to explain some of Red Eagle's perspective. As historian Shepard Krech writes, "many non Indians expect indigenous people to walk softly in their moccasins as conservationists and even [in Muir's sense] preservationists."⁴⁴ In a forest of utility, however, this point becomes increasingly complicated.

Although Red Eagle wrote primarily for tourists, in many of his writings he explained the value of wilderness for Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Penobscot peoples. Other writers might provide the barest of essential information; their articles explained canoe routes and provided helpful advice on portages, rapids, and good fishing holes. Red Eagle was one of the few *In the Maine Woods* writers who could make a dry, informational article interesting.⁴⁵ His 1932 article, "Moosehead Lake: A Long-Famous Vacation Spot," was personal as well as informative:

As a boy, I would sit for hours in the wigwam of my old grandmother, Malie Tomah, who was conceded to be the oldest inhabitant of the section, as, in the lilting music of our native tongue, she related how our forefathers and their contemporary tribes, journeyed along the waterways and trails of the woods, for days and weeks, in order to reach the big se'bem; on the shores of which rested the famed mountain, whose geologic formation of felsitic rhyolite made the best arrowheads, spearheads and tomahawks.⁴⁶

Being personal, such descriptions validated the Native American connection to the land. His grandmother, as Red Eagle noted in a letter, was a respected individual. "Her passing into the Happy Hunting Grounds marks the trail for the few scattered remnants of her many descendants," he wrote, "just as in life she helped to mark the trail with the old Indian Pioneers who traversed the wood and waters of the north into the unknown land, just over the horizon."⁴⁷ Her stories reiterated this traditional connection to Moosehead Lake and surrounding forests.

Red Eagle fought a long-standing prejudice against Native peoples and their pursuit of traditional work in the woods. David Richards writes in his book on Maine's Poland Spring House that resort owners demanded specific roles for Penobscot, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy families who sold crafts, such as baskets, on the grounds. As elements of local color and exotic culture, they were to shed their "savage" characteristics, yet not appear too modern. Similar prejudices existed further

west. Arthur S. Knight, in his *Guide to the Adirondack Mountains*, told prospective travelers about the “Indian Village” at Lake George, where they could see “an unforgettable picture of Indian life in action.” This he described as “colorful-primitive-authentic, there’s nothing like it in the East. Bring your little Indians to meet our Indians.” These cultural tropes portrayed Native peoples as “other.” They stereotyped Indian work, set Indians apart from white settlement, and disconnected them from the land.⁴⁸ Red Eagle mirrored the growing public consciousness of Native Americans during the 1930s, but he also embedded his Native characters in the north woods landscape through their work as guides, rivermen, and loggers, even while he criticized the impact of industry and tourism on the land.

Ecological Changes

Although not the first to point it out, Red Eagle lamented the long-standing ecological damage wrought by Maine’s lumber companies. As forestry scholar Dean B. Bennett points out, in 1879, naturalist and writer Lucius Hubbard lamented the effect of lumber company dams on trees in the region. Three decades later Red Eagle wrote that the bleached wood lining the shores of the northern lakes marked “the toll of the lumbermen’s greed, whose dams and resultant flowage inundated the trees’ roots and killed them.” And although Red Eagle worked for the tourist industry, he was not above expressing his thoughts regarding its impact. There was an irony in wilderness vacation trips taken with growing attention to comfort. As he wrote in the 1930s, rail cars and automobiles brought tourists to “Moosehead [Lake] . . . [where] a waiting speed boat or airplane will whisk you to any one of the palatial hotels, sporting camps and private cottages around the lake.”⁴⁹

Judging from his public writings, he was not necessarily an anti-modernist foe of technology. In some works, he praised the accomplishments of dam builders or the time-saving measures provided by trucks, buses, and float planes. But as a guide, he watched the ecological impact of industry with a measure of despair. In 1937 he wrote that the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad “has been a potential factor in the gradual development of this vast territory, which is a veritable sportsman’s paradise,” ironically juxtaposing development and the idea of wilderness. At the very least, Red Eagle conveyed conflicting images of a forest of play and work. This underlying conflict indicates the tension in his recogni-

tion of his own Native ancestry and his adherence to the themes of the tourist industry publication. Through the 1950s, a decade that witnessed the increasing presence of the paper companies in building more roads, more dams, and bigger camps, Red Eagle continued to express this tension. In 1957, he wrote of a new road through the wilderness to a paper company site, “incongruous and but an indication of encroaching civilization as more and more the lumber companies are extending their roads into the deep woods to reach untouched stands of spruce, pine, fir and other sources of pulp to open up country hitherto reached by canoe and spotted trails.” Despite this, he ended on a positive note: “however, you can enjoy almost complete solitude at this wonderful spot.”⁵⁰

The irony of a well-worn “wilderness” became more glaring with the appearance of automobiles, float planes, buses, trucks, and telephones in the deep woods. The “most modern type of railway and bus service” connected metropolitan travelers to “the very threshold of every important sporting site.” In the 1950s “speed and safety, comfort and economy” became the rule in wilderness vacations. At the end of the Allagash canoe route at St. Francis, he wrote, a comfortable ride home awaited the traveler in the form of a plush Pullman car.” Red Eagle did not dismiss the region’s comparative wildness. Accelerated tourist activity, amply represented by *In the Maine Woods*, contrasted with the magazine’s statement that the region was the most roadless area in the United States east of the Mississippi River.⁵¹

But this well-worn nature suffered, in many respects, from recreational development. Overzealous fishermen and hunters placed tremendous pressures on local fish and game populations. “Most fishermen today,” he wrote, “would rather sit in the canoe and find a spot easier of access.” These were the “same fishermen who yelp like a loon because these spots are fished out.” The problem of fish and game depletion was debated widely, and Red Eagle’s concerns mirrored an emerging public consciousness on this issue. Despite his own conservationist ideas, Red Eagle emphasized his traditional Indian hunting, trapping, and fishing skills, and like many Americans at mid-century, he discriminated between game animals — the object of conservation consciousness — and nuisance animals, which could be dispatched through any effective means. He published a non-fiction piece for *Yankee Magazine* in 1939 about a fight with a bear in a steel trap, and he hunted and killed bear cubs, a common practice in the early twentieth century. As historian Thomas R. Dunlap writes, advocates for the humane treatment of wildlife made only limited progress in the interwar



Red Eagle and Bear. After decades of rampant exploitation, Maine's wildlife became an issue of concern in the late nineteenth century. A conservationist himself, Red Eagle, like many Maine Native Americans, viewed wildlife from a utilitarian perspective born of centuries of subsistence use. Still, he shared in the growing concern for the area's wildlife populations and its overall ecological well being. Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, *In the Maine Woods* (1931), courtesy Special Collections, Fogler Library.

period. By World War II the anti-steel trap campaign was successful in only five states and twenty municipalities.⁵² As a Native American, Red Eagle viewed wildlife from a utilitarian perspective foreign to white observers unfamiliar with centuries of Native forest use. The fact that he encouraged recreational development and at the same time criticized its ecological implications reflected a deeper personal tension embedded in his decision to live in both worlds.

A Career in Retrospect

By the 1950s, Red Eagle, like many other hunters, had grown more reflective on the subject of wildlife. He related a conversation with an old white trapper who told him that early trappers nearly exterminated

Maine's beaver. When the Fish and Game Commission launched a campaign to save them, beaver populations rebounded to the point where their dams flooded roads and threatened farmlands.⁵³ The trapper was torn between saving this species of wildlife and cashing in on its commercial value.⁵⁴ Although Red Eagle's article provided no clear answers from his traditional hunting perspective, it drove home the dilemma of economic necessity and wildlife conservation. Industry and local culture were woven into a complex web of nature appreciation and resource utilization. Despite writing for a tourist industry publication, Red Eagle still sided with local people, even though they contributed to the loss of game.

Red Eagle guided vacationers into the Allagash wilderness off and on from age fourteen until at least his mid-sixties. Guiding and camp work were staples of his career, and they allowed him an ongoing connection to the wilderness in his later years. Even in the age of auto-camping, the Maine woods camp and its guides were middle-class necessities providing the opportunity to recreate in comfort — with cabins provided. But by the 1950s, the era of the guide was in decline, owing to changing vacation patterns. Extensive road systems, float planes, trucks, and telephones made a camping vacation for the entire family easier and a guide unnecessary. In the postwar era, as “all-season lumber roads opened up the wilderness, a new approach to north woods recreation emerged.” Recreationists could drive to a camp in the woods, and no longer needed a guide to take them upriver by canoe. Even in the deepest part of the forest, furthest away from settlement, timber company phone lines remained open at small way stations, although as Red Eagle pointed out, the traveling businessmen calling their offices might have to plug in the switch and keep ringing until somebody answered.⁵⁵ By the 1960s families toured national parks and forests in “self-sufficient recreational vehicles” or hiked and canoed on their own. Red Eagle emphasized the ease of travel and overnight stays in the woods, writing that sleeping on the bare ground has been “relegated into the limbo of a decadent era along with the birch bark canoe and the muzzle-loading gun.”⁵⁶

National magazines like *Sports Afield* accented the changing nature of American recreation, relegating the guiding tradition to the last frontier of the nation, Alaska. “Guides are Big Business,” one Alaskan author wrote in 1950; “guiding today is more than owning a canoe and a skillet. The modern outfitter — to give him his proper name — has to be a combination woodsman, student of psychology, and big business execu-

tive.”⁵⁷ With these changes, guiding as a traditional occupation declined in states like Maine. Red Eagle, like many other outdoor enthusiasts, instead began working for the burgeoning children’s camp industry.

Following Red Eagle’s retirement in 1966 from New Hampshire’s Camp Morgan, the camp director commented on the Maliseet Native’s long career in the north woods: “conservation and the preservation of Nature was a way of life for him. It came about naturally, for his father was a well-known figure among other Maine guides ... [Red Eagle] believed that one lived close to God in the world of Nature and he passed that reverence along to younger generations.”⁵⁸ Henry Red Eagle chose to engage the burgeoning white audience for pulp fiction and tourist literature, but his writings were more than just melodrama or a simple record of canoeing and camping practices. They were part of a complex dialogue between Native American culture, white fascination with the primitive, and the industrial use of the forest.

Red Eagle worked within the stylistic and thematic parameters of this literature, while offering critiques — sometimes humorous, sometimes indignant — of the impact of modernity on the Maine north woods. By referencing his own Native American consciousness, he could insert this critical commentary in his pro-tourist and pro-industry writing and still pay tribute to the themes that defined this literature: native uses of the forest and the never-ending expansion of Maine woods tourism. His writings spanned a thirty-year period of enormous change in the Maine woods and in public ideas about the Maine woods. His ideas reflected these changes, but they also expressed the unique perspectives of a man committed to two worlds and living within the wilderness environment he described so effectively and so personally.

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