

THE LEGEND OF THE SAAMIS

Medicine Hat boasts a proud heritage – a city whose name originated from Indian lore. Legend tells of a winter of great famine and hardship for the Blackfoot nation. The Elders of the Council chose a young blood to save his tribe from starvation.

Setting out with his new wife and his favorite wolf dog, he journeyed down the ice-bound South Saskatchewan River. After many arduous days they made their way to the “breathing hole”, an opening in the ice located between what is now Police Point and Strathcona Island in Medicine Hat. This location was known as a sacred place to the Indians; a place where the water spirits came to breath.

The pair made camp and summoned the spirits to appear. A giant serpent rose from the misty waters and demanded the sacrifice of the woman in exchange for a “Saamis” or “holy bonnet” which would endow the owner with special powers and great hunting prowess. The young brave tried to trick the serpent by throwing the body of his dog into the river, but the serpent was not fooled, and finally, the woman was reluctantly thrown into the icy waters.

The Indian was told to spend the night on the island (Strathcona), and “in the morning when the sun lights the cut-banks go to the base of the great cliffs and there you will find your Medicine Hat.” And so, aided by the magic of his Saamis, the young hunter located the much needed game, saved his people, and eventually became a great Medicine Man. The “breathing hole” remains open in winter to this day, and on clear, frosty nights the ghostly wisps of vapour rising from the frigid waters whisper to us of the Legend of the Saamis.