

Pai Shamkain (a.k.a., Charley Shaplish, Dr. Whirlwind) (ca. 1825-ca. 1910)

By Lee Moorhouse Collection

This photograph shows Cayuse Indian doctor Pai Shamkain, also known as Charley Shaplish and, most commonly among Euro Americans, Dr. Whirlwind. The photograph was taken by Major Lee Moorhouse, an eastern Oregon businessman and civic leader who served a short stint as Pendleton's mayor in the mid-1880s and later worked as an Indian agent on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. He was also an avid semi-professional photographer, taking more than 9,000 photos from 1897 until his death in 1926. With his stern visage and apparent willingness to pose in a variety of costumes, Dr. Whirlwind was one of Moorhouse's favorite subjects. Born around 1825, Whirlwind carried dispatches for Colonels George Wright and Edward Steptoe during the wars of 1855-1856, and served as a U.S. Army scout during the campaign against the Bannocks in the late 1870s. In the photograph above he is shown here around the turn of the century wearing otter fur hair wraps, an elaborate necklace likely made from dentalium shells, and a necklace made of bear claws interspersed with beads. Dr. Whirlwind performed medicine dances while holding live rattlesnakes. Dangerous practices like this were not uncommon on the Plateau, where Indian doctors sometimes performed ceremonial gashing (the cutting of loose flesh from one's own body) and other forms of self-mutilation to demonstrate power to others. Whirlwind was fatally bitten by a rattlesnake during his final dancing display some time in the late 1900s or 1910s. Shamans (also called Indian doctors and medicine men or women) played an important role in Indian societies, in some ways similar to the role of doctors in European and Euro American cultures. These men and women helped cure ailments by applying their extensive knowledge of medicines, rituals, and ceremonial practices. In addition to being healers, shamans were also spiritual leaders. Native peoples in the Northwest called upon the guidance of shamans often, because they believed that shamanic powers could be used either to heal or to harm. By providing knowledge and experience essential to physical, psychological, and social health, community members valued men and women such as Dr. Whirlwind.

Further Reading: Steven L. Grafe. "Lee Moorhouse: Photographer of the Inland Empire." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 98, 1997: 426-477.

Robert Boyd. *People of The Dalles: The Indians of Wascopam Mission*. Lincoln, Neb., 1996.

Deward E. Walker, Jr. "The Moorhouse Collection: A Window on Umatilla History." In *The First Oregonians: An Illustrated Collection of Essays on Traditional Lifeways, Federal-Indian Relations, and the State's Native People Today*, in Carolyn M. Buan and Richard Lewis, eds. Portland, Oreg., 1991.

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