

This is about a quiet farmer named Bill Moncur who befriended a man named Sitting Eagle. Bill, with his wife Hattie and four children, lived five miles, or 8 kms, north of Boissevain.

Bill had a peculiar habit of looking intently at the ground. He had a sharp eye. When he worked the land he found arrowheads and other hand-crafted tools. Their farm was smack, dab on the historic Mandan Trail, a trade route between the Mandan Nation to the south and the Cree Nation to the north. As the collection of artifacts grew, he became increasingly curious about the people of the plains who had lived and traveled on this land.

In winter he worked for the CPR railway, to earn extra cash. It was a cold day in 1942 and Bill was at the Deloraine station. He noticed an exchange between the conductor and an older Indigenous gentleman. The gentleman, it turned out, wanted to send skunk furs to Hudson's Bay in Winnipeg but the conductor had refused to take the smelly package. Bill sidled up and arranged to take them; securing them between cars so the smell wouldn't inconvenience passengers.

Bill was 31 years old at the time. He'd collected artifacts for many years, but was keen to learn more. So he prepared a tobacco offering and invited the man, Chaske Eagle, better known as Sitting Eagle, to chat in a restaurant next time they met. Bill didn't know then that there would be several visits over the next couple years. Or, that he was embarking on a fascinating ride, with his new Dakota friend as conductor.

Bill learned from Sitting Eagle that the Turtle Mountain land form was, and is, central to several First Nations on the Plains. Long before European settlement, he was told, each Nation would send a representative to mediate conflicts between them, and, during settlement would discuss the effects of colonization on their people. When the Council of Nations met, one stone was placed in a circle for each of seven Nations: the Cree, Saulteaux,

(SAWLtoh) Ojibwa (ohJIBway), Hidatsa (hiDATsah), Dakota, Arikara (ahriKara) and Assiniboine. According to Bill, the current Council had decided, its work was to be placed on hold, because each Nation needed to deal with the disruptions they were experiencing. But, they wanted to preserve the Council Stones, and the story of the Council. Sitting Eagle proposed the Council meet with his friend, Bill.



Bill agreed willingly to the meeting. When there, he observed quietly as the stones were brought into a slight depression, under a great oak. The representatives

smudged, then smoked the sacred pipe. After much discussion, some of which Sitting Eagle translated, the Council asked Bill to protect and to teach about the artifacts left in his care. Bill promised to do his best.

A short time later, the Deloraine station manager alerted Bill to a package left for him. Two rocks, and over a few months, more. Sitting Eagle transported them from his home on Turtle Mountain, and Bill added each to a collection; a collection he at first kept hidden. The stones are roundish and smooth, of varying sizes. Seven in all. Three weeks after he received the final stone, Bill heard, that his confidant, friend and teacher, Sitting Eagle, had passed away.

You can visit the Council Stones, and the artifacts Bill collected, at the Moncur Gallery in Boissevain.

Based on interviews by James Ritchie who was employed by Boissevain-Morton Library in the 90s.

Vantage Points Flashbacks were written by David Neufeld with help from Betty Sawatzky. They were originally aired on CJRB Radio out of Boissevain, Manitoba in the early 2020s.