

Rose Nelson Ecoffey never made Fort Collins her permanent home. We know her because of 2 artifacts which have lived in the museum's collection for 62 years. She is also known by her stage name Princess Blue Waters.



Rose Nelson Ecoffey

Of the 38,000 or so objects in the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, some of the most intriguing are the handmade ones. These tell us so much about the skills, tastes, and aspirations of the individuals who made them. Most of these individuals, these object makers, are not known to us by name, so we are not able to connect what these objects reflect to an individual's larger story.



We are so grateful for the attention to detail that led to Rose Nelson Ecoffey's name being connected to the objects she created. The first is this extensively beaded leather vest, made for a small boy. You see the back of the vest on the left, and the front, with 3 leather ties, on the right.



The other piece is a pair of small boy's deerskin pants, embellished with a very different style of beadwork.



We have documentation, through photographs and records, which connects these artifacts to a fairly legendary figure in our local history, Frank C. Miller, Jr. who operated and starred in a Wild West show for many years in the early 20th century.

Here you see Frank with friends; Rose's vest and pants are being worn by the small boy third in from the left, probably Frank's son, Teddy. A description preserved from a long gone museum exhibit describes the pieces:

“Shirt, Vest, and Pants made for Teddy Miller by one of the early passengers of this coach, Princess Blue Water, who traveled with Buffalo Bill Show many years, also in charge of Sioux Indians at Cheyenne Frontier Days. Beads obtained in Germany on Cody Tour...”

The “coach” this label refers to is the Frank Miller Mud Wagon, on exhibit in our current gallery. It has a story of its own that needs more time to tell.

SHIRT, VEST AND PANTS
MADE FOR TEDDY MILLER
BY ONE OF THE EARLY PASSENGERS
OF THIS COACH, PRINCESS
BLUE WATER, WHO TRAVELED
WITH BUFFALO BILL SHOW MANY
YEARS, ALSO IN CHARGE OF SIOUX
INDIANS AT CHEYENNE FRONTIER
DAYS. BEADS OBTAINED IN
GERMANY ON CODY TOUR.....



Another photograph in the Museum's collection documents Rose's participation in Miller's show. This one shows a delegation of Lakota performers who traveled to Cheyenne, Wyoming and to Fort Collins as performers. Rose, though not identified in this photo is recognizable from others –she is the woman fourth from the right. Records show that from 1925 through 1965, Rose traveled as part of this delegation from Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota to our local vicinity.



Performers from Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota - Fort Collins, July 20, 1950

Several sources show that Rose was well established in the Wild West Show form of show business; she was basically born into it. She was born in 1880 in Pine Ridge, South Dakota to John Y. Nelson and Jennie Lone Wolf, who was a member of the Oglala Lakota.

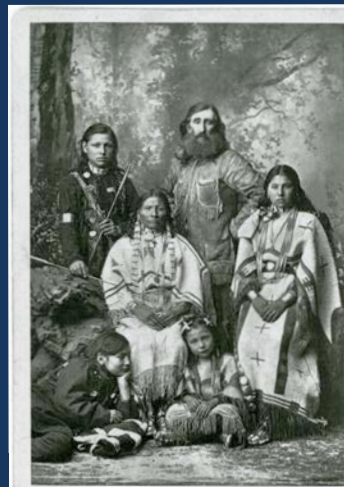
John Y. Nelson, who earlier in the 19th century had worked as an expedition guide and a military scout, worked for many years as a member of the cast of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. He served as interpreter, stagecoach driver, and cowboy in some of the acts. Nelson also played the settler in the "Attack on a Settler's Cabin" – an act in which the settlers are saved by Cody.



parents
John Y. Nelson Jennie Lone Wolf



Nelson brought various members of his family into Cody's show over the years: in 1887 they all traveled with Cody to tour England, where they are said to have been presented to Queen Victoria. Rose, who is the littlest girl in the group photos, and the young woman with long braids in the photo on the right, is said to have been given the stage name Princess Blue Waters by Cody in honor of this trip across the Atlantic Ocean.



JOHN NELSON AND FAMILY,

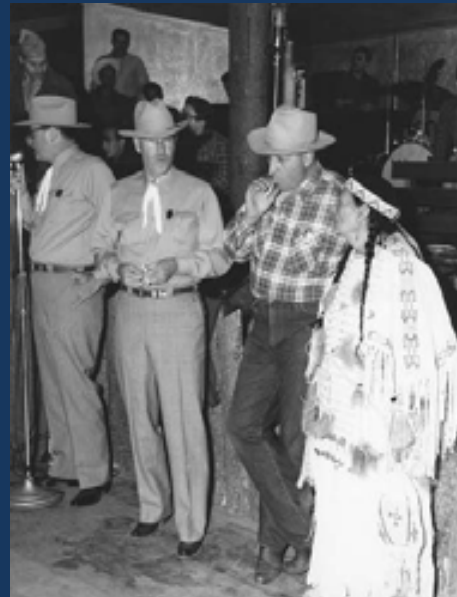


WA-KA-CHA-SHIA (RED ROSE),
The Girl of the Sioux.
ARROW BLUE WATERS



According to an interview with her granddaughter, Rose not only performed with the Pine Ridge Delegation, but served as their leader and advocate, insisting that the Cheyenne Frontier Days Committee pay for their travel, lodging, and food, for example. Rose represented the Lakota with her Princess Blue Waters persona at many ceremonies, including the dedication of Mt. Rushmore and John F. Kennedy's presidential inauguration.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century her role as advocate for and defender of Native American rights grew. Rose served as a tribal lawyer and was appointed to the National Council of Indians. In 1940 she became the first woman to serve as a judge on a Native American Tribal Court.



Despite these accomplishments, Rose is barely present in written accounts. Nonetheless, her participation in Old West performances and her skill as a beadwork artist has left her presence scattered throughout Western institutions: Wyoming State Museum, has 24 beaded items identified as belonging to her, and she is represented in the collections of The Cheyenne Frontier Days Old West Museum, and the Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, in Jefferson County.

Through the enduring presence of her handwork in our museum collection, our hope is that Rose's story will remain and grow as one of ours as well.



Learn more about local history by visiting the Archive at Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, visiting the Poudre River Public Library District, and by checking us out online at the Fort Collins History Connection.