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THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS
OF THE EDUCATION OF THE CROW INDIANS
1885-1955

by

William James Henderson

B. A. Montana State University, 1952

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1956

Approved by:

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Date

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DEDICATION

To

VIOLET R. ALEXANDER

Whose Patience and Understanding

Have been an Inspiration

To Many

"May the Great Spirit permit her Moccasins

To make Tracks in many Snows"

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer makes grateful acknowledgment to all the many persons and institutions which gave so generously and unsparingly of advice and material in the preparation of this volume. Special thanks are due to Dr. James E. Short, Professor of Education in the School of Education of Montana State University, who read the original manuscript and was able to suggest many improvements; and to Mr. H. R. Salyer, Superintendent of Schools at Hardin, Montana; and to Miss Violet R. Alexander and Mrs. Anne Davis, veteran teachers in the Crow Agency Public Schools who contributed so willingly from their first-hand experiences on the reservation.

PREFACE

For a great many years there has existed a genuine need of a short, concise history which would serve to acquaint the public with the story of the educational development of the Crow people. This volume, then, is addressed to those persons who in their work will be thrown into close contact with the Crow Indians. This unseen audience might include the following: public and Mission school teachers, missionaries, welfare workers, doctors, nurses, sanitarians, Government employees, and other interested persons. In the belief that a quick orientation to the character of the Crow Indian is a distinct advantage in getting off to a fair start with him, this little volume is offered to bridge the past and the present.

A great many volumes, have of course, been written on the subject of the Crow Indians, but most of them were either written long ago, or they are largely fictional in nature, or they are addressed to the specialist, hence have little or no general appeal.

The writer feels that he is reasonably well prepared by experience and background to attempt a work of this kind. For the past three years he has been principal of the Crow Agency School; he has taught Crow children and come into daily contact with numbers of their parents. All this has afforded an excellent opportunity to observe Crow behavior patterns and to test and verify the observations made by Lewis and LaForge years ago.

In the belief that a study of this nature had real merit the writer began his research on this subject three years ago. This consisted of reading just about everything that had been written on the Crow Indians, consulting old newspaper files, referring to old records and reports, placing numerous telephone calls, arranging personal interviews, and sifting through a wealth of other material.

The result is a volume which is largely historical in character, and distinctly narrative in style. It is not designed to entertain the reader, but to inform him. In the following chapters the writer has attempted to bring to the reader a clear, graphic picture of the geography of the region embracing the Crow Reservation, taking into account the resources and industries, the means of transportation and communication, the climatic conditions, and the possibilities for further economic development.

An unusually large amount of background material was included.

✓ This was done to acquaint the reader with relations between Indians and whites in the historic past, and to enable him to view the Indian in his true perspective. Social, cultural, and religious practices loom large in the life of the Crow Indian, and although he may not be properly described as "chained to the past," he has not yet succeeded in breaking away from some of the old tribal taboos and superstitions.

No person who has racial prejudices should undertake work among the Indians. Primitive people are sensitive and able to determine quickly whether a newcomer is in their midst for his own or their

benefit. Teachers and other professional persons are not apt to be profoundly successful in their work unless they possess a genuine sympathy and appreciation of Indian culture and psychology. The person who makes sneering and disparaging remarks about Indians, belittles their accomplishments, and exhibits contempt for their folkways, is sure to make himself persona non grata ere long.

Teachers, especially, have to be circumspect at all times in their associations with Indian children. A casual remark made in an unguarded moment, the tone of voice used in addressing them, and the approach to disciplinary problems, are all factors which, to be sure, the Indians will weight in evaluating a teacher. Above all things the Indians demand justice and fair play. An integrated classroom is no place for the distribution of favoritism, patronage, and discrimination of any sort.

The splendid work of the early and present-day missionaries in uplifting the Indians from a state of barbarism and paganism to their present well advanced state is told in the chapters headed "Religious Background" and "The Mission Schools."

The progress of formal education is treated in the last four chapters of the volume. Research on the phase of education encompassed by the span of the Crow Agency Boarding School was difficult, owing to the fact that the records were destroyed by a conflagration which swept the building years ago.

In this study no attempt was made to burden the reader with

statistics, nor to compare the academic achievement of Indian with non-Indian pupils. The writer has been content to record the educational progress of one of the most fascinating Indian tribes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE	iv
I. GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING	1
II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	18
III. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS	47
IV. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND	63
V. THE MISSION SCHOOLS	81
VI. GOVERNMENT BOARDING SCHOOLS	89
VII. THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS	96
VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY	109
APPENDIX	113

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Map of the Crow Indian Reservation, Montana	8
2. Photograph of the architects' model of the proposed Yellowtail Dam and Power Plant, Montana	12

CHAPTER I

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

"Here was a people whom after their works thou shalt see wept over for their lost dominions: and in this place is the last information respecting lords collected in the dust."

The Arabian Nights

The Crow Indian Reservation, located in the southeastern part of Montana, occupies the greater part of Big Horn County and a small portion of adjacent Yellowstone County. Extending from the Wyoming boundary on the south to Hardin on the north, and from the Pryor Mountains on the west to the Rosebud Mountains on the east, the Crow Reservation is roughly rectangular in shape, measuring some eighty-five miles from east to west and some fifty miles from north to south. With the consent of the Federal Government which holds the title of the allotments in trust for the allottees, many persons have sold or otherwise disposed of their allotments, and at the present time the Crow Indians own approximately one and a half million acres of land. The classification of this land into various categories is shown in the table which appears on the following page. The information embodied in this table and in the two paragraphs that follow it was extracted from a paper prepared by Mr. Joe Medicine Crow, Tribal Land Clerk, and is based upon official Government documents. As of December 31, 1953, the records show the following:

Individual Allotments	1,581,069.53 acres
Consisting of: Grazing Lands	1,444,761.49 acres
Dry Farm Land	95,466.87 acres
Irrigated land	40,525.40 acres
Miscellaneous	335.77 acres ¹

Land owned by the Crow Tribe, both surveyed and unsurveyed, totaled 262,400 acres.

In 1944 there were 2,467 enrolled members of the Crow Tribe, and a new enrollment made in April, 1954, placed 3,416 on the tribal rolls. One of the most noticeable population trends among the Crows in recent years is that the fullblooded segment of the population is on the increase. With the coming of the first trappers in the early days, many Indian women married white men, and as a result of these interracial marriages, the fullblood strain of the Crow Tribe was reduced to about twenty-five per cent of the population by the time of World War I. As the mixed-bloods married non-Indians and interracial marriages decreased in recent years, the result has been a rapid increase in the number of full-bloods.

Traveling across the broad expanses of the Crow Reservation, which occupies an area greater than the State of Rhode Island and only a trifle smaller than the State of Connecticut, one is struck with the

¹Joe Medicine Crow, Tribal Land Clerk, "The Crow Indian," a brief outline of history and general information, p. 2. (Mimeographed. 2 pp.)

great variety of scenery, of flora and fauna. Here is a land that definitely belongs to the future, awaiting a time when an abundance of water and cheap electric power will open the door to new and greater opportunities, develop latent resources, and make possible a better way of life.

Situated as it is on the edge of the Great Plains, and Crow Reservation comprises part of the northern watershed of the Big Horn Mountains. These mountains sweep upwards like a great wall from the floor of the plains and on a clear day are visible from a distance of sixty or seventy miles. The mountains of the Big Horn Range rise to towering heights, and their slopes are covered with dense stands of timber. Only successive ridges of hogback hills, so named because of their rounded shape, lie between the valleys and the mountains. The Great Plains region consists almost entirely of rolling prairie, which rises gradually to meet the foothills of the mountains. In this prairie region there are occasional isolated buttes, and bluffs occur along the streams. Some of these elevations have been carved and sculptured by the prevailing winds in a most fantastic manner, and are interesting objects of study. While this region may not be remarkable for the beauty and grandeur of its scenery, and is scarcely the type of landscape to inspire poetic rapture, yet there is little justification for tourists to view it with a shudder and hurry on.

The Great Plains region is fairly level, and varies in elevation from half a mile to a mile above sea level.² Much of the dry

²The World Book Encyclopedia (1933 ed.), XVIII, 2940.

plains is covered with short, tough bunchgrass which affords excellent pasture for livestock, except along the streams and rivers. There thickets of chokecherry, buffaloberry, and wild plum trees abound, and the cottonwoods attain a tremendous size.

The climate here is dry and, considering the latitude, milder than one might suppose. Like other interior regions, the Crow Reservation experiences a wide range of temperature. In winter it is not unusual for the mercury to drop as low as forty or fifty degrees below zero, while in summer it sometimes rises to one hundred degrees and over. The chinook winds in winter bring to the region a much milder climate than it would otherwise have. Due to the proximity of the Big Horn Mountains which are regarded as weather-makers, the Crow Reservation is subject to high winds, particularly in spring and fall. The rainfall is light, averaging from twelve to twenty inches a year.³ While dry-land farming is attempted with some success, particularly if summer-fallowing is employed, irrigation is advantageous, if not absolutely necessary. Most of the dry-land farming is done on a grand scale by huge corporations which make a handsome profit even if the yield is only a few bushels an acre, whereas the same return would put a small farmer out of business, come one bad year or two.

The Crow Reservation is watered by three streams of considerable size. The most important of these is the Big Horn River, which forms the chief southern tributary of the Yellowstone. The Big Horn

³Ibid., XI, 5206.

River arises in west-central Wyoming, and flows northward parallel to the scenic Big Horn Mountains on the east. The Big Horn, including its headstream, the Wind River, has a length of about 450 miles. Its basin drains an area of approximately 20,000 square miles, and is part of the Missouri River Reclamation Project.⁴

Second in order of importance is the Little Big Horn River, which has its source in the northern limits of the Big Horn Mountains, almost due west of Sheridan, Wyoming. This river flows northward some 120 miles to join the Big Horn at Hardin, Montana. Along the hills and ridges overlooking this peaceful river General Custer and his small band of gallant troopers were wiped out by superior numbers of hostile Sioux in the famous Battle of the Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876. Today the spot is a national monument and a national cemetery. A gray granite obelisk—grim reminder of the past—marks the spot where the 237 enlisted men who perished with Custer are interred in a common grave. This fact is only mentioned incidentally in passing—since this paper is not intended to be a chronicle of military campaigns—to point out how, quite by accident, an otherwise unknown and insignificant stream has lent its name to a famous battle that has been studied by every American schoolboy.

The third and least significant stream of this region is Pryor Creek, which rises in the Pryor Mountains in the extreme western part of

⁴The American Educator Encyclopedia, (1955 ed.), II, p. 431.

the reservation area, flows in a northeasterly direction, and enters the Yellowstone at Huntley, Montana.

Irrigation farming is carried on extensively in the narrow valleys of the three streams mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs. The most important crop is alfalfa. Sugar beets rank next in importance, and the Holly Sugar Company maintains a plant at Hardin for the processing of beets into sugar. Stock-raising, dairying, and bee-culture provide further diversification.

Like most other areas in eastern Montana, the Crow Reservation has been affected by a good deal of activity in the quest for oil. Figures on this and the following page, regarding the production of oil and the exploitation of other natural resources are the result of an interview between the writer and an official of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.⁵ At the present time (January, 1956) 89,208.58 acres of Indian lands are under lease to oil companies. Wells have been drilled and oil is being produced in two distinct areas on the Crow Reservation, namely the Ash Creek area, with four wells in the extreme southeastern corner of the reservation bordering the Wyoming state line, and the Soap Creek area with six wells, located about fourteen miles south of the village of Saint Xavier. The average production of oil is 363.50 barrels per day. In addition, one gas well is in production in the Hardin area.

In recent years considerable interest has been evidenced in

⁵ Interview with Mr. F. F. Duffrey, Land Lease Agent, Crow Indian Agency, January 19, 1956. Quoted by permission.

uranium prospecting permits on the reservation, but as yet nothing of a serious nature has developed, and no leases have been requested.

One lease is in effect for the mining of a clay mineral for use in the manufacture of brick.

One point of general interest is the fact that the majority of Indian allotments on the Crow Reservation were allotted to individuals with the provision that all mineral rights, including gas and oil, are reserved to the Crow Tribe until the year 1970, after which time they will revert to the individual allottee. Hence the individuals affected, although leases are made on their land, do not benefit from the income or royalties, except indirectly through per capita payments. This provision is effective through legislation (Act of June 4, 1920). Moreover, even though the individual allottees sell their allotments or receive fee simple title thereto, the minerals are so reserved under the above Act that their income is from sale of the surface only. There are, however, some allotments which do not carry this restriction, having been made in the early days (Act of February 8, 1887) but these are in the minority.

A topic of more than passing interest to residents of the Hardin-Billings area is the construction of the proposed Yellowtail Dam, which would be built by the Bureau of Reclamation at Big Horn Canyon, some forty-five miles southwest of Hardin. Part of the money for this project (four million dollars) was appropriated by the first session of the 84th Congress.⁶ The only remaining obstacle to actual construction of the

⁶The Hardin Tribune-Herald, vol. 48, No. 36, September 3, 1955.

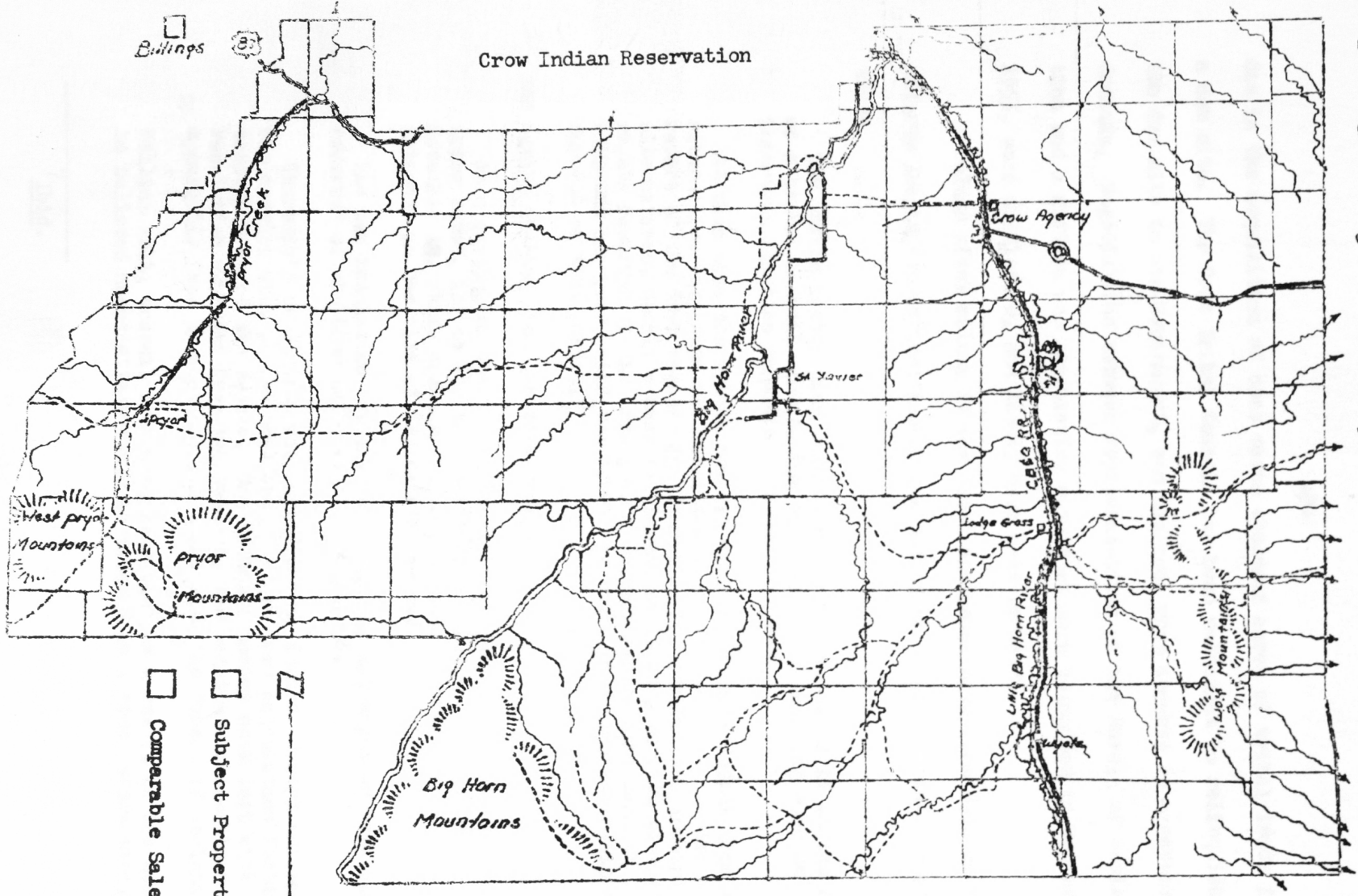


Fig. 38

Figure 2

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38

dam is the acquisition of some seven thousand acres of tribal lands for a dam site. The Crow Tribal Council has been reluctant to relinquish the dam site to the Government, and has made what amounts to excessive demands. Negotiations between representatives of the Bureau of Reclamation and a fifteen man negotiating committee were commenced in September, 1955, were deadlocked, and lately have been resumed.

Column after column in the local newspaper have been devoted to efforts leading to acquisition of the dam site. A press release states that:

The Indian negotiating committee has set September 16 as the date of a tribal council meeting for the purpose of deciding upon an important question regarding the negotiations.

At that time the tribal council will be asked to decide upon what alternative they wish the committee to negotiate upon. A previous report of the Crow negotiating committee had offered two possible alternatives, namely a cash settlement of \$5,000,000 with mineral rights reserved to the tribe, or a 60 year rental agreement at \$150,000 per year, with the lands reverting to tribal ownership at the end of that period.⁷

and again, quoting from the same source:

At a meeting of the Tribal Council in Crow Agency, the Crow tribe voted, 119 to 63, to rescind resolution No. 56, passed November 12, which demanded \$1,000,000 annual rental for tribal interest in the site of Yellowtail dam and reservoir.

The new resolution "rescinded, annulled, and expunged from the records" of the Crow tribe resolution No. 56.

Thursday's resolution was introduced by Edward (Posey) Whitman who carried most of the arguments for the Crow negotiation faction through most of the debate. The tribal attorney said that with the resolution expunged from the records, the negotiation committee is apparently free to continue its talks with the Bureau of Reclamation.

William Hall, council chairman, said that as a result of the action, he believed negotiations would be resumed in a "very short time."

⁷Ibid.

In urging his people to be reasonable to allow for a better chance of getting a more favorable settlement on the dam site, Whiteman said that if the case goes to court it may last for years and cited court costs.

Bert Kronmiller, tribal attorney, explained to the tribe the process of condemnation and said that papers for the suit were already in the hands of the Justice Department in Washington, D. C.

He said he learned condemnation action could be expected right after the first of the year.⁸

From the above press releases it is apparent that sometime between September 16 and November 12, 1955, the negotiating committee for some unexplained reason decided to limit negotiations to one alternative only, namely the annual rental one, and to raise the rental from \$150,000 a year to \$1,000,000—a rental over twice the amount that the Government pays for the Panama Canal Zone!

The initial offer of the Bureau of Reclamation for outright purchase of the dam site was \$1,500,000.⁹

Meanwhile the controversy rages apace over the desirability of building the dam at all. Wherever men gather—in barbershops, bars, and restaurants—the conversation eventually turns to the Yellowtail Dam. Chambers of Commerce in both Hardin and Billings, service clubs, and professional groups were among the first to urge construction of the dam. Businessmen naturally expect to benefit from the spending of huge payrolls on and near the reservation. Hotel and motel operators hope to keep their rooms filled with no slack seasons. On the other hand are

⁸ Ibid., Vol. 49, No. 1, January 5, 1956.

⁹ Ibid., Vol. 48, No. 31, August 4, 1955.

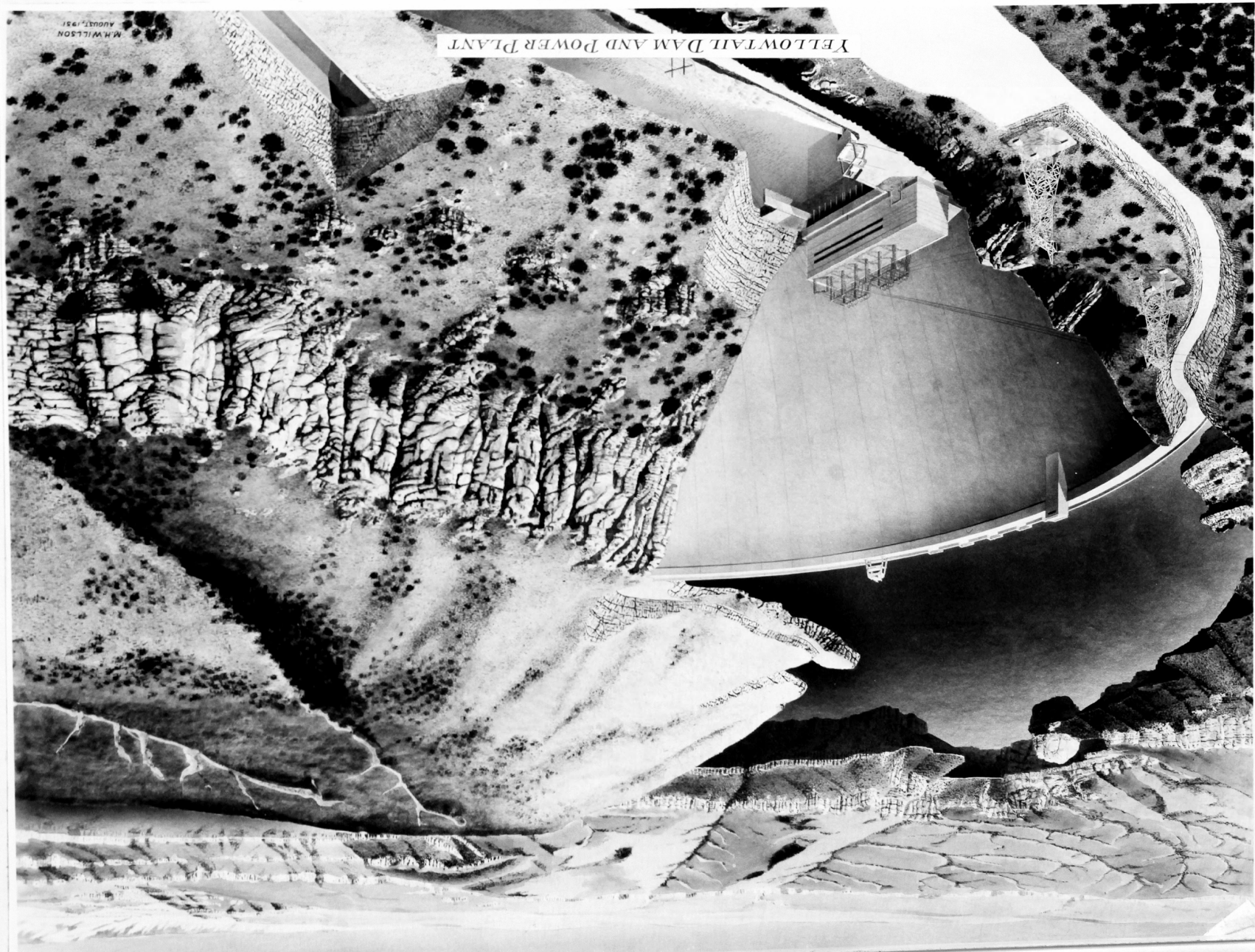
those who oppose the construction of the dam with just as much fervor. They argue that the dam is not necessary at this time, since most farm crops are already in over-production, and farm income is down ten per cent from a year ago, therefore why add to the dilemma by putting more acres of land under irrigation. Consumers fear that shopkeepers will be tempted to raise the prices on goods and services. Taxpayers view with misgivings the influx of huge numbers of workmen with their families, fearing that additional school facilities will have to be provided and that law enforcement agencies may have to be expanded.

The Indians seem to be generally confused and demoralized by the whole proceedings. On the surface it would appear that most of the Crows hope for a speedy settlement of the dam site controversy so that they can start enjoying the proceeds. Some of the Indians fear that the building of the dam will inundate the tribal buffalo and elk ranges adjoining Big Horn Canyon, thereby diminishing the tribal food supply. This is not likely to happen, since the reservoir will be confined to steep canyon walls and will not spill out onto lands on either side of the canyon.

One of the most vociferous opponents of the Yellowtail dam, strangely enough, is the man for whom it was named, Robert Yellowtail. Mr. Yellowtail, who describes himself as a bitter foe of Senator Murray has consistently led the opposition to the negotiations in the tribal council, and has sought to stir up sentiment against the project by appealing to the public over a Billings radio station.

At this writing all indications are that the Yellowtail Dam---

Figure 2



a bane or a blessing--will be built. It will be built because those who are promoting it are organized. The writer makes this prediction not as a proponent or an opponent of the Yellowtail Dam Project, but as a detached observer.

The Crow Reservation boasts several towns and villages of considerable size. The Crow Indians, being of a sociable nature, seem to prefer to huddle in compact villages in close proximity to each other, rather than to live on their allotted lands. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, and many Indian families have developed prosperous farms and ranches, but for the most part, the Crows prefer to lease their lands to white settlers and to live in town.

Hardin, although situated just off the reservation, is the shopping and recreation center of the Crow Reservation. This clean, attractive city of 2,500 people is the county seat of Big Horn County. Summertime visitors to Hardin, after driving the fifty miles from Billings over the parched plains, are delighted with its parks and trees. Paved streets, a delightful residential section, a business district that contains just about every kind of mercantile establishment, numerous churches with thriving congregations, and adequate and well-staffed schools make Hardin almost an ideal place in which to live. The Big Horn County Court House, constructed of native yellow sandstone during PWA days, would be a credit to a city twice the size of Hardin.

Fourteen miles south of Hardin on US 87 is the town of Crow Agency. This town is the real heart of the Crow Reservation, since

here are located the government offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Government employees live quite apart in snug cottages facing a large grassy park or compound on which the Agency is located. A modern hospital staffed by competent doctors and nurses and administered by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare watches over the health of the Indian people. The largest concentration of Indian population on the Crow Reservation is at Crow Agency.

Traveling down US 87 six or seven miles from Crow Agency, one comes to the hamlet of Garryowen, which consists of one general store and post office and a grain elevator. Of interest to the student of history primarily because its name was derived from the regimental song of the Seventh U. S. Cavalry, Garryowen is near the spot where the memorable Battle of the Little Big Horn was fought that June Sunday eighty years ago.

Lodge Grass, located along the Little Big Horn River on US 87 at a point about nineteen miles south of Crow Agency, is the center of a prosperous farming and ranching area.

Wyola, located some ten miles from the Wyoming state line on the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains, is the southernmost of the reservation towns. The Wyola area has long been famous for the production of an excellent grade of beef cattle.

The inland village of Saint Xavier which lies some thirty miles southwest of Hardin along the Big Horn River is the center of a rich irrigated area. An excellent surfaced highway stretches from Hardin to Saint Xavier and leads almost to the Yellowtail Dam site.

The last of the reservation settlements is the town of Pryor, which claims distinction as having been the home of the cowboy author, Will James. Chief Plenty Coups of the Crow Tribe also made his home at Pryor, and the substantial log building that was once his home now houses a museum. Pryor, owing to its isolated location in the extreme western end of the reservation, actually has closer ties with the city of Billings than with any of the other reservation towns. It is not unusual to meet people who have lived on the reservation for years and have never been to Pryor.

Big Horn County and the Crow Reservation are served by one trunk line railway, the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy. This railway has its southern terminal in Kansas City, Missouri, and its northern terminal in Billings. Thus excellent facilities are available for residents of the reservation area to visit the great cities of the Missouri and Mississippi valleys. Railway stations are maintained at Hardin, Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, and Wyola.

Daily bus service as a supplementary means of travel is provided by the Burlington Trailways, Inc., a subsidiary of the Burlington Railway system. These busses operate between Denver and Billings, serving the towns of Hardin, Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, and Wyola.

An excellent network of surfaced highways connects various points on the Crow Reservation with each other and with the outside world. The principal thoroughfare is US 87. Running from Billings, Montana, to Sheridan, Wyoming, and points south, this important highway passes through Hardin, Crow Agency, Garryowen, Lodge Grass, and Wyola. State Highway

No. 8 connects US 87 with US 212. It has its junction with US 87 at a point about one mile south of Crow Agency. Route 8 passes through Cuddy, Lame Deer, and Ashland and connects with US 212 at Broadus. This route provides the motorist with the most direct and expeditious access to the Black Hills region of South Dakota. Route 47 from Hardin to Custer is widely used as a cut-off road for traffic bound for Miles City and points east. It actually saves travelers seventy-six miles in driving from Hardin to Miles City. Good county roads connect other outlying parts of the reservation with US 87 or Route 8. A graveled road built and maintained by the Bureau of Indian Affairs connects Crow Agency and Saint Xavier.

Telephone service is quite an innovation to most of the reservation areas. Only within the past year or so has this important communications medium been made available to an ever increasing number of subscribers. The Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company, with branch offices located in Hardin, has recently completed the installation of dial type telephones over large areas of the reservation. Telegraph service has long been a convenience provided by agents of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railway Company.

The only newspaper published in Big Horn County is The Hardin Tribune-Herald, a weekly with excellent coverage. Local correspondents report the news from widely separated points in Big Horn County, and also from isolated communities in the southern half of adjacent Rosebud County. The Billings Gazette, a daily newspaper, also enjoys a wide circulation on the Reservation. Four Billings radio stations, KGHZ,

KRMV, KOOK, and KOYN reach most reservation listeners. At the present time one Billings broadcasting station, KOOK, has a television program, and one additional station, KQHL, is about to embark on television. Up to the present time television reception has been neither satisfactory nor dependable in most of the reservation area.

Two motion picture theatres in Hardin and one in Lodge Grass provide additional facilities for entertainment and relaxation.

The Big Horn County Free Library, located at Hardin provides excellent service to the reading public. This library has an unusually large collection of children's literature. The selection of books dealing with Indian lore and ranch life is also quite complete.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

"Revenge, cried Rain-in-the-Face,
Revenge upon all the race,
Of the white chief with yellow hair;
And the mountains dark and high,
From their crags re-echoed the cry,
Of his anger and despair."

The Revenge of Rain-in-the-Face

The Crows—the westernmost of the Plains Indians—are a buffalo-hunting tribe speaking a Siouan language.¹ Historically their homeland was in the valley of the Big Horn River in Montana, but they eventually came to claim for their hunting-grounds most of what is now eastern Montana, and northern Wyoming, where they often came into violent conflict with roving bands of Sioux and Blackfeet. The Crows are known to have ranged as far west as the headwaters of the Missouri River² near where the town of Three Forks now stands. One of the principal ranges of the Rocky Mountains—the Absarokce Range—which lies in Park County, Montana, just north of the Yellowstone National Park, is named for the Crow Indians.

Actually the appellation "Crow" is a misnomer. The ancient name

¹The American Educator Encyclopedia, (1955 ed.), III, 989.

²Katherine B. Judson, Montana, The Land of Shining Mountains, (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1918), p. 33.

of the Crow Tribe was "Absa-Rokee," which translated means "Children of the large-beaked bird."³ ("Absa" meaning "large-beaked" and "Rokee" meaning "children or offspring.") Other tribes in referring to them would often wave their arms up and down in pantomime fashion, imitating the flapping of a bird's wings in flight. Thus the first white men who came to the Crow Country called the inhabitant tribe Crow Indians.

Very old traditions among these people place the origin of the Absarokee or Crows in a "land of many lakes" in what is now probably the State of Minnesota. The tribe gradually worked its way westward and in time settled in more or less permanent villages along the Missouri River in what is now North and South Dakota. These villages were to a large extent composed of lodges covered with earth, and for this reason the people who dwelt in them became known as the "people who lived in earthen lodges" (Hidatsa).

About four hundred years ago the tribe split up into two groups or factions and while one remained, the other migrated toward the high mountain country that other tribes had often mentioned.⁴ This splinter group became known as the Absarokee or Crows. Those who remained behind in North Dakota were known as the Minnetarees or Gros Ventres (Big Bellies).⁵ Today this parent group or main stem of the tribe inhabit

³ Joe Medicine Crow, Tribal Land Clerk, "The Crow Indian," a brief outline of history and general information, p. 1. (mimeographed. 2pp.)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Report No. 147, Cultural and Economic Status of the Crow People, Crow Reservation, Montana, (Billings, Montana: Missouri River Investigations Project, December, 1955), p. 2. (mimeographed)

the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. The Lewis and Clark party, while in winter quarters at Fort Mandan during the winter of 1804-05, made contact and established friendly relations with the Gros Ventres. Captain William Clark records in his journal datelined Wednesday, January 16, 1805, one such visit from the Gros Ventres:

One of the 1st War Chiefs of the big belles nation Came to see us to day with one man and his Squar to wate on him. . . . We shot the air gun, and gave two shots with the Cannon which pleased them verry much, 4 men of ours who have been hunting returned one frosted.⁶

At the time of the separation there were probably not more than five hundred people in the migrating group, but by the middle of the year 1800, before the ravages of smallpox which greatly reduced the tribe, the population had increased to around four thousand, and the tribe was accustomed to travel about in two and sometimes three bands.⁷

This historic division of the Crows into bands which dates back to the days of nomadic wandering has continued even down to the present day. Thus there are River Crows and Mountain Crows. The two bands are closely related and speak the same language and embrace the same customs; the only noticeable difference seems to be in the place of residence. The River Crows have long preferred the environs bordering on the Yellowstone River, while the Mountain Crows favor the upland regions bordering

⁶ Bernard DeVoto, The Journals of Lewis and Clark, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1953), p. 77. (The edition of the Journals by Reuben Gold Thwaites, which is listed in the bibliography, would have been more suitable for scholarly use, but it was unavailable at the time this paper was written.)

⁷ Medicine Crow, loc. cit.

the Big Horn and other southern tributaries of the Yellowstone.

About the time of their separation from the main tribe or soon thereafter, the Absarokee or Crows acquired the horse, and abandoned agricultural pursuits as a means of livelihood. They were ever on the move following the hunt or waging constant warfare with other tribes of the plains and mountains.

The Crows were occupying this eastern part of what is now the State of Montana (then Louisiana Territory) when the Lewis and Clark Expedition passed through it in 1805 and again in 1806, and a common assumption even among some historians is that members of this famous party were the first white men to contact Crow Indians. As a matter of fact, this belief cannot be substantiated by a single entry in the journals of Lewis and Clark. There is no concrete evidence that members of Captain Clark's detachment ever saw or spoke to Crow Indians. The Crows certainly were aware of the presence of white men in Crow territory, however, as will be pointed out in a later paragraph. Captain Clark does make mention of the Crow Indians in an offhand manner, but merely as information which he had been able to gather from the Mandans and Minnetarees. Writing under the date of Monday, November 12, 1804, he says in part:

The Mandans Speaks a language peculiar to themselves verry much (blank in MS.) they can raise about 350 men the Minnetarees (Minnetarees) about 80 and the Big bellies about 500 or 650 men. The Mandans and the beaux have the same word for water. The Big bellies or Minnetarees & raven (Crow) Indians Speaks nearly the same language and the presumption is they were originally the same nation. The Raven Indians have 400 Lodges & about 1200 men, & follow the buffalo, or hunt for their subsistence in the plains & on the Court Noi (Black Hills) & Rock Mountains, & are at war with the Sioux

(and) Snake Indians.⁸

Although the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition were the first white men actually known to have set foot in what is now the State of Montana—in spite of the fact that a goodly number of writers have accorded this distinction to a previous exploring expedition⁹—they were not the first to visit the lower Yellowstone valley. This honor seems to have belonged to a French-Canadian, Francois Antoine Larocque. One writer who gained some prominence as an author of books dealing with Montana history says of this voyageur:

Francois Antoine Larocque was the first white man to visit the Crow people. This happened in the summer of 1805. Larocque was a trader and explorer in the employ of the Northwest Fur Company of

⁹Quite a number of historians place the Verendrye brothers as the first white man to penetrate the Crow Country in 1742 or 1743. They may and they may not have. That they visited the Mandan villages along the Missouri River in 1742 is a well-known fact, and from that point they are supposed to have set out in search of a great river, which according to Indian reports ran down to the ocean. The Verendrye brothers kept very complete journals of their travels, but their route is difficult to follow because every time they encountered a new tribe of Indians they conferred on it a name of their own choosing, and no such Indians were ever heard of before or since. The fact that on January 1, 1743, they recorded seeing mountains toward the distant west which they called the "Shining Mountains" may have led some writers to believe that they had come as far as the Big Horn Mountains in Montana or Wyoming.

The Verendrye brothers are said to have carried along with them a supply of lead plates or discs, bearing an inscription on each in the French language claiming the region that they were traversing for the King of France. No such documentary evidence, pointing to the visit of these famous brothers, has ever turned up in Montana. Quite a few have been found in South Dakota. The "Shining Mountains" were probably the Black Hills.

Montreal. The Crows received him in the most friendly spirit. . . .¹⁰

This man, Larocque, whom Captain William Clark describes in his journals as "a clerk of the N W Company" had visited the American outpost at Fort Mandan on several occasions during the winter of 1804-05. He, along with others in the employ of the North West Fur Company, had even been an overnight guest of the two American captains, Sergeant Patrick Cass says so in his diary. The purpose of these visits seems to have been:

. . . to ascertain our motives for visiting that country, and to gain information with respect to the change of government.¹¹

Mr. Larocque had even tried to attach himself to the expedition for the obvious purpose of sharing in its results, but his request had been refused. In regard to Larocque's proposition, the following entry is found in the journal of Captain Clark under the date of Wednesday, January 30, 1805:

Mr. La Roche paid us a visit, & we gave him an answer respecting the request he made when last here of accompanying us on our journey &c. (refused)¹²

The two American captains in their dealings with the representatives of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had been careful to point out that American sovereignty extended over the area they were traversing and that the Indians who inhabited it were subject

¹⁰W. C. Abbott, Montana In The Making, (Billings, Montana: The Gazette Printing Company, 1943), p. 32.

¹¹Entry in the diary of Sgt. Patrick Cass, December 16, 1804. DeVoto, op. cit. p. 73.

¹²DeVoto, op. cit. p. 76.

to the jurisdiction of the United States. They had even announced an American trade policy which would permit British subjects to continue trading with these villages, but would require them to meet stiff competition at the hands of American companies. They had held out the threat of establishing government trading posts in the event competition did not bring an end to prevailing inflationary practices of the British traders.

The French-Canadian, Larocque, who seems to have enjoyed considerable prestige as a "principal" or executive in the employ of the North West Company, had met with disappointment in his attempts to join the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Somewhat piqued, he decided to "seize time by the forelock" and do a little exploring on his own account. Since the Lewis and Clark party would travel up the Missouri River to its head-waters, thereby taking a route that would to a large extent bypass the Crow Country, he would travel overland to this rich source of furs and hides and establish relations with Absarokee or Crows, and thus anticipate the arrival of Lewis and Clark by about a year. Accordingly, after making preparations for this journey into what was then unknown territory, he set out from the Mandan villages with a party of friendly Crows who were returning from a visit to their relatives, the Minnetarees or Gros Ventres. In August, 1805, he came upon the Crows encamped near the Big Horn Mountains.¹³ Larocque explored the valleys of the Big Horn and the lower Yellowstone rather thoroughly for about

¹³ Abbott, op. cit. p. 84.

two months, then returned to the Mandan villages, and thence to his post in Canada.

Although Laroque had prospected the Crow Country for the obvious purpose of spying out new and hitherto untapped sources of raw furs for his company--and it may be surmised that he fully intended to follow up his preliminary work with the establishment of a string of fur-trading posts--no further effort at the economic penetration of the Crow Country was made by the North West Fur Company. Various theories have been advanced as the reason that the North West Company did not press for the development of the Crow fur trade. One is that President Jefferson raised the question of the propriety of a British subject working in territory belonging to the United States. Whether this was the case or not is obscure. A more plausible reason would be that after the merger of the North West Company with the XY Company which occurred early in the spring of 1805, the board of directors of the new and enlarged trading company may have decided in favor of expansion toward the Pacific as a more profitable business venture than running a race with the Americans for the Crow fur trade. In reference to this merger, Captain Clark made the following entry in his journal:

2nd of March 1805 Saturday

Mr. Laroque a Clerk of the NW Company visit us, he latterly returned from the Establishments on the Assiniboin River, with Merchandise the trade with the Indians. Mr. L. informs us the N.W. & XY Companies have joined, & the head of the N.W. Co. is Dead Mr. McFavish of Montreal. ¹⁴

¹⁴Devoto, op. cit. p. 64.

The Lewis and Clark party spent the winter of 1805-06 at Fort Clatsop at the mouth of the Columbia River, and set out on their return journey on Sunday, March 23, 1806. They followed the same route they had taken on their westward journey. At a point on the Bitterroot River a few miles south of Missoula, Montana, they stopped for two days to rest and complete their plans whereby Captain Lewis could take a detachment of men and explore the headwaters of the Marias River. He was to leave three men at the portage of the Great Falls to raise the cache and put the equipment in shape for the return journey down the Missouri River. Captain Clark, on the other hand, would take the rest of the party to the forks of the Beaverhead where boats had been left the previous fall. After everything had been put in readiness, he would select a detachment to convey the boats and other supplies to the Great Falls of the Missouri where they were to assist those whom Lewis had left there to portage the whole outfit around the falls. As soon as they had completed their assignments, the combined detachments were then to proceed down the Missouri by boat, picking up Lewis and his men at the mouth of the Marias. Captain Lewis and his detachment were to camp at the mouth of the Yellowstone and await the arrival of Clark and his men. Captain Clark was to travel overland from the Beaverhead to some navigable point on the Yellowstone. After they had constructed dugouts from whatever materials might be found, Captain Clark and the others were to float down the Yellowstone to its mouth, where the rendezvous had been agreed upon. The united party would then continue on down the Missouri to the Mandan villages and thence to Saint Louis.

This plan worked very well—up to a certain point. One night while Clark's party was camped along the Yellowstone during the process of fashioning dugout canoes from cottonwood logs, the Crows, famous among the Plains Indians as the most accomplished of horse thieves, sneaked up and stole half of the horses.

Captain Clark without further delay, ordered Sergeant Pryor and three other men to take the rest of the horses to the rendezvous at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and from there to the Mandan villages. Horses were valuable; they could be traded to the villagers for corn and other products. In addition he gave Sergeant Pryor one other assignment: as soon as possible after arrival at the Mandan villages he was to deliver a letter to one Hugh Henny, the Northwesterner who during the winter at Fort Mandan had most favorably impressed both captains. This letter offered Henny, who had made contacts and traded with the Teton Sioux, the job of persuading several Sioux chiefs to accompany the Lewis and Clark party to Washington to meet the "Great White Father" and to be generally impressed and mollified, and as a still further inducement, the position of agent for the Sioux at an agency which Lewis had advised the Government to establish on the Cheyenne River.

This was a clever diplomatic move, and if it had succeeded might have gone far in making allies of the war-like Sioux. The only trouble was that it failed to materialize. On Pryor's second night out the crafty Crows managed to steal all the horses. This left no trading stock to exchange for commodities to give Henny as presents for the Sioux, and the letter was never delivered.

But Sergeant Pryor proved to be a complete master of the situation. Though left afoot in a wild country with his outfit and his commanding officer outdistancing him by the hour in complete ignorance of his plight, Sergeant Pryor shot some buffalo and from the hides made two bullboats in the manner of the Mandan Indians. Embarking his small detachment in these strange craft, he floated down the Yellowstone and soon overtook Captain Clark and his men.

Meanwhile Captain Lewis and his men who had gone to explore the headwaters of the Marias had experienced some excitement which, but for quick thinking, would have proved disastrous. They had unexpectedly fallen in with a band of Piegans, one of the three Blackfeet tribes, who on this occasion appeared to be quite friendly. The Indians invited Lewis and his men to camp with them for the night. Toward morning the Indians observing that the soldier on guard had carelessly laid down his gun, disarmed the party and started to run off the horses. A scuffle ensued in which two Indians were killed. Lewis, by his own account, shot one through the belly, and a soldier stabbed one. The Indians were apparently unaware that the white men carried side arms besides the usual rifles. The Lewis party then decamped and made haste to join the rest of the detachment which by prearrangement should have been about due to arrive at the mouth of the Marias. They rode hard all that day and until two o'clock of the next morning, then rested until daybreak. On the day after the encounter with the Blackfeet they arrived at the mouth of the Marias just as the canoes were approaching. There was joy and deep satisfaction in the captain's heart to know that the men whom he

had left at the Great Falls to attend to bringing the boats around the portage had suffered no loss nor met with any serious accident. Stripping and abandoning the horses, they transferred their baggage to the canoes and proceeded down the Missouri to join Captain Clark and the rest of the party a few miles below the mouth of the Yellowstone. The united party then continued on down the Missouri to the Mandan villages, where Charbonneau and his wife, Sacajawea, were paid off and left the party. John Colter at his own request was paid off and given an honorable discharge in order to remain in the West and engage in the fur trade. The remainder of the party continued on down the Missouri to Saint Louis, arriving there September 26, 1806.

The first exploring expedition to venture into the unknown territory of the Northwest had succeeded. It had succeeded because it was intelligently conceived and intelligently carried out. What had been a blank, not only on the map, but even in the minds and thoughts of men—an area of rumor, guess, and fantasy—could now be filled in with something like reality.

Almost on the heels of Lewis and Clark came the fur traders and trappers—intrepid mountain men—who were to establish trading posts along the main streams and rivers. Fort Manuel Lisa, which was built at the confluence of the Big Horn and the Yellowstone, is regarded by historians as the pioneer trading post in Montana. From all accounts, it was established in the summer of 1807. The exact spot where Fort Manuel Lisa stood is unknown, since all traces of the buildings have disappeared. Professor Abbott gives the probable location as the south bank of the

Yellowstone and the east bank of the Big Horn.¹⁵ His reasoning must have been that Lisa would be inclined to select the spot with the best strategic location, the one that could most easily be defended in case of Indian attack. Fort Lisa might have become the nucleus of a permanent settlement but for unrest among the Indians occasioned by the war of 1812. After a brief existence of only four years, it was abandoned and later burned by the Indians—probably the Blackfeet.

Manuel Lisa may be thought of as a prototype of this transitional period. He was a Spaniard by birth, the son of an official in the old Spanish administration of Louisiana, and had moved to Saint Louis from New Orleans only a few years before the transfer of the Louisiana Territory to the jurisdiction of the United States. In 1896 the Historical Society of Montana published some interesting information which gives the scholar a rather keen insight into the personal characteristics that Manuel Lisa possessed. This account states in part:

He was a man of kind and upright character, of undoubted business ability and indomitable energy, who possessed a thorough knowledge of the aboriginal peculiarities and characteristics and who had great influence with the Indians with whom he was thrown, being liberal and just in his dealings with them. Furthermore, he was of that venturesome and independent spirit which found its chiefest delight in overcoming the dangers and enduring the hardships incident to the venturesome life of the trader within that terra incognita of ninety years ago that then stretched over all the vast water-shed of the Missouri River.

Together with Captain William Clark and ten others, in 1808, he helped to inaugurate and establish the Missouri Fur Company, and was thereafter its head and front for a number of years. His methods may best be explained by an abstract from one of his letters,

¹⁵Abbott, op. cit. p. 84.

which also serves to explain the man:

"First, I put into my operations great activity. I go a great distance while some are considering whether they will go to-day or to-morrow. I impose upon myself great privations. Ten months of the year I am buried in the depths of a forest at a great distance from my own house. I appear as a benefactor, not as a pillager of the Indian. * * * *Beside, my blacksmiths work incessantly for them, charging nothing. I lend them traps, only demanding a preference in their trade. My establishments are the refuge of the weak, and of the old men no longer able to follow their lodges; and by these means I have secured the confidence and friendship of the natives and the consequent choice of their trade.¹⁶

Captain William Clark had become Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Saint Louis with authority extending over all the Indian tribes of the vast Louisiana Territory. He had appointed Lisa as his sub-agent in the upper Missouri region. Lisa's services were very useful to the Government during the War of 1812, when British traders across the international border in Canada were trying to lure the Indians away from allegiance to the United States. Through his great influence, Manual Lisa was able to keep most of the Indians from taking part in this war on the side of the British.

The fact that the Crow Indians have been allies of the United States Government since the War of 1812 appears to be due in a large degree to the wisdom and foresight of Manual Lisa and other men of his calibre who followed the biblical admonition of "good measure pressed down and flowing over." Lisa had been joined in his fur-trading enterprise by John Colter of Lewis and Clark fame who knew the country well.

One early-day writer, who did much to rescue the history of the

¹⁶Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana, Vol. II, (Helena, Montana: State Publishing Co., 1896), p. 228.

fur-trading establishments on the Yellowstone from the obscurity into which it had fallen, describes the methods employed by the Missouri Fur Company as follows:

It was the design of the company to abandon the timid methods of the former trade, plunge at once deep into the wilderness, ascend the stream to its uttermost navigable waters, and by establishing posts at the most available points monopolize the trade of the entire region. It had in its employ about 250 men--partly American hunters, but mainly Creoles and Canadian voyageurs, who in various flotillas, conducted by some of the partners, were put in motion, and before the close of the year 1809 posts had been established among the Sioux, Arickarees and Mandans, and a principal one, whose garrison comprised the larger part of the company's employees, "at the Three Forks of the Missouri."¹⁷

This fort "at the Three Forks of the Missouri" was a very favorable location because of the fact that the nearby streams abounded in beaver, but its drawbacks were even greater, for it was near the route where roving bands of Blackfeet passed to and fro on their forays against the neighboring tribes. Manuel Lisa had hoped to overcome the hostility of the Blackfeet for the sake of their fur trade. But these Indians were in almost constant communication with the posts of the British traders in Canada, from which they received arms, ammunition, and all the other supplies that they required, so that they were quite independent of this fort. Besides, as a consequence of the slaying of two of their tribesmen by Captain Lewis and his men in 1806, they had formed a most profound hatred of the Americans, a feeling which the British traders were willing to encourage.

¹⁷ Excerpt from Lieut. James H. Bradley's Journal, Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana, Vol. II, (Helena, Montana: State Publishing Co., 1896), p. 147

Not only did the Blackfeet refuse to patronize the fort, but they also set themselves the task of its destruction. They ran off the livestock, lurked in the vicinity to harass and ambuscade the hunting and trapping parties, and even laid siege to the fort itself. The situation became so untenable that the fort had to be abandoned.

The fort built "at the Three Forks of the Missouri" by the Missouri Fur Company was situated on a tongue of land between the Madison and Jefferson Rivers about two miles above the point where they merge. From all early accounts, it was a double stockade of logs set three feet in the ground and enclosing an area of about three hundred feet square. Lieutenant Bradley visited the site in 1870 and says that the outlines of the fort were still intact then.¹⁸ With the passing of time, a legend grew up that the fort was one in which the Lewis and Clark party had spent a winter on the way to the Pacific Ocean. This error concerning the original purpose of the fort is even prevalent today among some intelligent, well-educated men.

After the abandonment and consequent destruction of Fort Lisa, the abortive attempt to maintain a fur-trading establishment in territory frequented by the fierce and war-like Blackfeet, and a series of outrages against its property and employees, the Missouri Fur Company withdrew from any further activity in the upper Missouri. Even in the face of such disasters, the company found in balancing its books that the original capital of forty thousand dollars was intact, besides it still had the three trading posts below the mouth of the Yellowstone.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 148.

The company reorganized, and although it made no further attempts to trade in this region, it prospered elsewhere. The financial panic of 1819, which followed the War of 1812, forced the Missouri Fur Company to suspend operations, and ultimately brought about its dissolution.

After the abandonment of Lisa's fort at the mouth of the Big Horn, the Crows were left without a trading post for a great many years, but roving bands of independent traders and trappers that penetrated the Crow Country after about the year 1822 kept them reasonably well supplied with such goods as they required. Toward the close of the 1820's the American Fur Company began to extend its operations to the upper Missouri, and in 1829 built Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone.

From this point the American Fur Company moved with all speed to gain possession of the most advantageous spots for trade along the upper Missouri and its tributaries. Agents of this company established more or less permanent posts which became not only the commercial but the social centers as well for all this vast region. The early-day trading posts were veritable outposts of civilization in the wilderness. At these wilderness crossroads trappers, traders, merchants, missionaries, scientists, artists, and soldiers-of-fortune met and swapped yarns and rubbed shoulders with blanketed Indians.

Although the American Fur Company was very energetic in promoting its interests in other parts of what is now the State of Montana, particularly the region of the hostile and treacherous Blackfeet, it did not lose sight of the fact that the Crow Country was also a fertile field for its endeavors. Trade with the friendly Crows had always been

highly profitable and attended with less risk than in dealing with most tribes of the plains and mountains. Consequently, Fort Cass was established for the exclusive benefit of the Crow trade at a point about three miles below the mouth of the Big Horn in the fall of 1832. The Crows were anxious to have a trading-post located in their country, but vacillated in their choice of location, and at their request it was changed several times. Thus besides Fort Cass, there was established at various points along the Yellowstone one trading-post after the other. Some of these were Fort Van Buren, Fort Alexander, and Fort Sarpy. Other trading-posts of a more or less temporary nature were established in the Crow Country from time to time, but their existence was of such a brief duration as to preclude mention here.

The years between 1830 and 1860 may be thought of as the "Golden Age" of the fur trade in Montana. During all this period the American Fur Company, headed by John Jacob Astor, enjoyed a dominant role in the business of fur trading in the Crow Country. By the middle of the 1860's gold seekers were commencing to come in and to occupy the high mountain valleys, and beavers were becoming less plentiful. Toward the close of the decade the American Fur Company disposed of all of its interests above Fort Union and withdrew from further activity in the upper Missouri region. The great days of fur trading in the Crow Country were now a thing of the past.

Present-day Crow Indians take great pride in the fact that their tribe is a "treaty tribe"—that they have always enjoyed the most friendly relations with their white brothers—in contrast to the Sioux and the

Northern Cheyennes of the neighboring Tongue River Indian Reservation, whom they regard as a conquered and "occupied" people. The aforementioned tribes, on the other hand, look upon the Crows with considerable disdain, casting them in the role of opportunists—quintlings of another day.

The Crows had been among the first of the many tribes inhabiting what is now the State of Montana to sign a treaty of friendship with agents of the United States Government. According to a Government publication, this occurred on August 4, 1825, and is to be found in Volume VII, page 266, of Statutes at Large.¹⁹ Almost twenty years earlier Manuel Lisa had gone into the Crow Country to develop a thriving fur trade with this tribe and with a commission to act as sub-agent for Captain Clark in dealing with all of the Indian tribes of the vast upper Missouri.

The first formal treaty that involved the grant of lands to be signed with the Crow Tribe, was the so-called Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1851. This treaty established the boundaries of the "Indian Country" for several tribes. It specifically set aside for the exclusive use and benefit of the Crow Tribe an area of 33,531,174 acres.²⁰ Abbott says in his remarks about this first treaty of Fort Laramie:

When the plains tribes signed the Fort Laramie Treaty, they had no idea of what they were signing away. They did not know that the

¹⁹ Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30, Handbook of American Indians, Part II, (Washington, The Government Printing Office, 1907), p. 807.

²⁰ Medicine Crow, loc. cit.

"Great Medicine Road of the Whites" as they called the Overland Trail would divide the great buffalo herds, and that one section of it would retreat to Indian Territory and Northern Texas, while the other section of it took refuge in the wilds of Northern Wyoming and Central and Southern Montana.²¹

Between the signing of the first and second Treaties of Fort Laramie, while the Civil War was still in progress, gold had been discovered in the Rocky Mountains at Virginia City. Immediately the gold rush was on. Eager gold miners, anxious to reach the Montana diggings, began to demand a shorter and more direct route to the gold fields than the customary one along the Overland Trail to Fort Hall and thence through the mountains to Virginia City. In 1864 John Bozeman had blazed a new trail which cut the distance appreciably. This new route left the Overland Trail at Fort Laramie, crossed the headwaters of the Powder and Rosebud Rivers, passed to the east of the Big Horn Mountains, and led up the valley of the Yellowstone, across the Bozeman Pass, into the Gallatin valley, and thence across the mountains to Virginia City. This route took the emigrant wagon trains right through the heart of the buffalo country, and was a direct violation of the Treaty of Fort Laramie. Meanwhile the Ogallala Sioux, who had been forced out of their Black Hills home by an earlier gold rush to that area and had come on out to the Crow Country to continue their resistance to the white invasion, raised serious objections to the new "Medicine Road of the Whites." Led by their determined chief Red Cloud, and reinforced by disgruntled elements of the Northern Cheyennes and perhaps by Indians from numerous

²¹Abbott, op. cit. p. 289.

other bands, the Sioux harassed the Bozeman Road for almost two years. They ran off livestock, burned wagon trains, and intercepted small parties of emigrants and soldiers. In 1866 word came from Washington for the army to build a chain of forts to protect the emigrant trains. These were Fort Reno, Fort Phil Kearney, and Fort C. F. Smith. While the first two were established in what is now the State of Wyoming, the third one, Fort C. F. Smith, was located right in the heart of the Crow Country, at the point where the Bozeman Road forded the Big Horn River.

The first Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1851 was superseded by a second Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868. By virtue of the terms of this treaty the Crow Reservation was reduced to 8,000,409.20 acres.²² The Sioux were to get a reservation of sizable proportions comprising much of what is now western North and South Dakota and eastern Montana. Besides this reservation which they were to have for their exclusive use forever, or "as long as the grass grows and the water flows," they were to be allowed hunting privileges on lands off their reservation as far west as the Big Horn River. This was hardly a solution to the problem of the Plains Indians, inasmuch as the area where the Sioux were to be accorded hunting rights had been solemnly pledged to their traditional enemies, the Crows, in the first Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1851.

An Act of Congress in 1882 resulted in still further reduction of the tribal domain and in compensation therefor, the Government agreed to build houses for the Crows and to purchase livestock for them. By

²²Medicine Crow, loc. cit.

this time the tribe had already come in and settled on the confines of the reservation for about ten years.²³ More land was ceded to the Government in 1890 for the sum of \$946,000, and in 1905 the last large land cession was made leaving about three million acres for tribal use. The Crow Indians have long felt that the Government failed to give them adequate payment for the lands it acquired at an average cost of less than five cents an acre, not to mention the deposits of oil and valuable minerals contained in the areas thus ceded. Legal action was instituted to recover additional compensation, and at the present time a suit is pending in the Court of Indian Claims against the Government.

The present Crow Agency is the third reservation headquarters to bear that name. The first was established in 1870 on Mission Creek in the Yellowstone valley some ten miles downstream from the present site of Livingston. The first set of buildings at this site was constructed of cottonwood logs arranged in the form of a crude fort. Fire consumed this first structure a few months after it was built, and for the second stockade material of a more durable nature, adobe, was selected. Thomas B. Leforge resided at the old Mission agency most of the time it was in existence. His description of it is the only one that has come to the attention of the writer and is, perhaps, the only one extant. He describes it thus:

The agency stockade was two hundred feet square. It consisted of buildings set beside each other, facing inward and having their backs toward the outside. These buildings were of adobe material, except two of them. The living quarters mainly were outside of and

²³ Ibid.

immediately adjacent to the stockade. All agency and residence structures had port-holes for shooting from the interior.²⁴

Hostile attacks on the old Mission agency by bands of marauding Sioux or Blackfeet gave residents of that pioneer outpost many anxious moments. Leforge says that acts of violence against travelers or the threatening of the fort itself were almost weekly occurrences.²⁵

In 1874 the agency was moved some sixty or seventy miles eastward to a new site on Rosebud Creek in the valley of the Stillwater River, about a mile from the present site of Absarokes. This change in the location of reservation headquarters was necessitated not by the frequency of Indian attack, but due to the fact that the reservation boundaries had been greatly altered by treaty agreement, and the old agency location would now be off the reservation. Leforge says that he and another dispatch-carrier, Mitch Buoyer, were detailed by General Clapp, the agent, for this important task of selecting the exact spot where the new agency would be located, since by their frequent travels they were well acquainted with local geography.²⁶

Lieutenant Bradley visited the second Crow Agency in April, 1876, in connection with his duties of enlisting a number of Crow scouts for the approaching campaign against the Sioux and Northern Cheyennes, and recorded his impressions of the establishment in his journal under the date of Friday, April 8, 1876. He states in part:

²⁴Thomas B. Marquis, M. D., Memoirs Of a White Crow Indian (Thomas B. Leforge) (New York: The Century Co., 1928). pp. 71-72.

²⁵Ibid., p. 67.

²⁶Ibid., p. 110.

The agency buildings are well built structures of adobe, and are so arranged that, with the addition of a heavy plank wall they enclose a square space of considerable extent. They occupy an elevated plateau overlooking the valley, and the place would be quite defensible against an Indian attack. It is said to have cost only \$40,000, and, if true, the money has been more honestly expended than is customary in the Indian Bureau. . . .²⁷

In 1884, a short time after the historic Battle of the Little Big Horn, the agency was brought east to the valley of the Little Big Horn where it has remained to the present time.

The fact that the Crow Indians had been allies of the Government since the War of 1812 stood the Army in good stead during the turbulent Indian wars of the frontier. Had the Crows joined with their traditional enemies, the fierce and war-like Sioux in resisting the inroads of the whites, the history of these border conflicts might have been far more prolonged and complicated than was the case.

Crow and Shoshone scouts were with General Crook at the Battle of the Rosebud, when the Ogallala Sioux under Crazy Horse fought Crook's command to a standstill. Crazy Horse had prepared an ambush for General Crook in the defile of a narrow canyon, and had hoped to defeat him by luring the soldiers into it. His plans were very well devised and he came very near succeeding.

General Custer, too, had been accompanied into the field by a number of Indian scouts. Besides the Arikara scouts who had been with the troopers ever since they left Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory, there were several Crow scouts who had been detached from

²⁷ Excerpt from Lieut. James H. Bradley's Journal, Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana, Vol. II, (Helena, Montana: State Publishing Co., 1896), p. 157

General Gibbon's command and placed at the disposal of Custer.

Lieutenant James H. Bradley of the Seventh Infantry had visited the Crow Agency for the avowed purpose of enlisting a detachment of Crow Scouts for the coming campaign against the Sioux. That this officer had been successful in his mission, there cannot be the slightest doubt. The writer has been accorded the courtesy of examining at first hand photostatic copies of the muster roll of old Fort Ellis bearing on this campaign which are on deposit in the archives of the Custer Battlefield Museum. This roll lists the names of the twenty-three Crow Indians and two whites who were enlisted as scouts specifically for this campaign. Further documentary evidence in support of the claim that Crow scouts had a definite part in the plans of the Army is set forth in Lieutenant Bradley's Journal, wherein he states:

Monday, April 14th. . . I completed the desired number of enlistments to-day, swore them in on the point of a knife--said to be a binding oath among them--. . . The detachment consists of twenty-three Crow Indians and two squaw men--Leforgey and Bravo--who have lived among the Crows.²³

The detachment of Crows who had volunteered to aid the Army in locating the enemy encampment, except for the six who chafing under military discipline had defected and returned to the Crow Agency, accompanied the forces of General Gibbon as far as the mouth of the Rosebud. There General Gibbon's command bivouaced, awaiting the arrival of General Terry's troops and the steamboat Far West, which was on its way up the Missouri and the Yellowstone with supplies.

²³Ibid., p. 163.

With the arrival of the steamer and the entire Seventh Cavalry on June 21, 1876, a council of war was held on the decks of the Far West and a plan of operations was drawn up. General Custer was present and took part in its deliberations. At this point in the military planning, the decision was made to furnish Custer with part of the Crow scouts because of the superior knowledge they possessed of the territory he was about to traverse. Lieutenant Bradley was directed to select a detail for that purpose. He says so in his journal:

I selected my six best men, and they joined him at the mouth of the Rosebud. Our guide, Mitch Bouyer, accompanies him also. This leaves us wholly without a guide, while Custer had one of the very best that the country affords. Surely he is being afforded every facility to make a successful pursuit.²⁹

Over half a century later, White-Man-Runs-Him, last surviving scout who led Custer to the Sioux encampment on the Little Big Horn, recalled his companions who accompanied Custer into the field. They were Curley, Hairy Moccasin, Goes Ahead, White Swan, and Half Yellow Face.³⁰

Just after daybreak on the twenty-fifth of June, the scouts are said to have reported to Custer that they had located the Sioux encampment in the valley of the Little Big Horn, but Custer replied that he did not believe them. At about the same time Custer became aware of the fact that his presence in the area was known because during the night march a box containing hardtack had been lost and a detachment

²⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

³⁰ Coe Hayne, Red Men On the Big Horn, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1929), p. 5.

sent back to recover it came across some Indians trying to pry it open. When this was reported to General Custer, he seemed to decide on immediate attack.

According to the eye-witness account of Trooper Theodore W. Goldin, Custer's faithful guide pointed out to that high officer the magnitude of his undertaking.³¹ He states:

In the talk, just about the time the division was made in the command, Mitch Bowyer, a half-breed Crow interpreter, said to Gen. Custer that he would find more Indians in the valley than he could handle with his command. Custer replied that if he (Bowyer) was afraid to go he could stay behind. Bowyer replied that he was not afraid to go wherever Custer did, or something to that effect, but that if they did go in there neither of them would come out alive.³²

Mitch Bowyer's warning delivered at the zero hour seems to have irked Custer and given rise to the belief on the part of that gentleman that Bowyer's being one-half Sioux (not a half-breed Crow as stated in the above extract) had given him a somewhat prejudiced point of view when the fighting qualities of his kinsmen were under consideration. Anyway, Mitch Bowyer, against his own better judgment remained with Custer and rode to what he must have felt was certain doom.

The fact that most of the Crow scouts quit the scene of battle in its early stages has been seized upon by some writers and described

³¹Trooper Goldin's account of the Custer and Reno battle is perhaps the most dramatic one in existence. He is regarded as the last soldier to see Custer alive since he had been detailed as Custer's orderly on that ill-fated day and witnessed the opening phase of the battle. That his life was spared was owing to the fact that he was sent as a messenger with a dispatch to Major Reno. This was perhaps the much discussed plea for aid that never came.

³²Cyrus Townsend Brady, LL.D., Indian Fights and Fighters, (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, Page and Co., 1916), pp. 190-91.

as an act of cowardice. To put the matter straight, it should be pointed out that the scouts committed no breach of military discipline when they left the scene of action. The sole purpose of enlisting the Crow scouts had been to find the enemy; they were under no obligations to fight the enemy, nor were they expected to do so. This latter activity was the responsibility of the soldiers. From Lieutenant Bradley's own description of the weapons his scouts carried at least one member of the detachment was armed with nothing more formidable than a bow and arrows.³³ The inference that may be drawn is that such weapons as the scouts carried were for their own protection when away from the base of operations on scouting missions or for the taking of game.

Volumes have, of course, been written on the abortive campaign of 1876 against the Sioux and there is no point in going into it here. The only purpose of touching on the subject at all has been to point out what role the Crow scouts had in it. Various theories have been advanced as to what actually happened in the Custer Battle when the flower of the Army, the noble Seventh Cavalry, under the command of an experienced Indian fighter was cut to ribbons in the space of a few hours. Whatever transpired on the fateful Sunday afternoon must forever remain a mystery since there were no survivors.

With the annihilation of Custer's command the pioneer period in the Crow Country, which had begun so auspiciously seventy years earlier with the coming of Lewis and Clark and the first fur traders, drew to a

³³Lieut. James H. Bradley's Journal, Contributions To The Historical Society of Montana, Vol. II, (Helena, Montana: State Publishing Co., 1896), p. 163

close. Custer's crushing defeat brought to a head the difficult question of the Indian problem on the frontier. From that time on, resistance to the Indian threat stiffened and various military commanders smarting under the "massacre" of Custer and his men, were bent on reprisal and revenge. These reprisals often took the form of wanton slaughter in which innocent women and children were killed as was the case at the Battle of the Slim Buttes and the Battle of Wounded Knee. The "boys in blue" sent to round up the recalcitrant Sioux often took the attitude that "the only good Indian was a dead Indian." Killing Indians became a sport and the troopers vied with each other in sending as many braves as possible to the "happy hunting grounds," particularly if these braves were of the Sioux nation.

CHAPTER III

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS

"A stone's throw out on either hand
From that well-ordered road we tread,
And all the world is wild and strange
Churl and ghoul and Djinn and sprite
Shall bear us company to-night,
For we have reached the Oldest Land
Wherein the powers of darkness range."
From The Dawn To The Dusk

The division of the Absarokee or Crows into two and sometimes three bands has been described in a previous chapter. Each of these bands was politically independent. According to one informant who is regarded as an authority on Crow customs and habits, a warrior was required to complete four difficult war deeds, each in risk of his life in order to become eligible for chief.¹ This statement is borne out by the findings of Professor Lowie of the University of California who studied the Crow Indians off and on for a period of twenty-five years.² These four creditable exploits were: leading a successful raid, stealing a horse from within an enemy camp, being first to touch the person of an enemy, and snatching a weapon from the hand of an enemy. A man acquired social prestige according to his skill and prowess in affairs which were

¹Joe Medicine Crow, Tribal Land Clerk, "The Crow Indian," a brief outline of history and general information, p. 2. (mimeographed. 2 pp.)

²Robert H. Lowie, The Crow Indians, (New York, N. Y.: Farrar & Rinehart, 1935), p. 5.

purely military. A warrior who had scored at least once on each of these counts ranked among the elite; on the other hand, to lack all of these standardized points marked a man as a nonentity. Men who had thus attained social prominence made up a hard core of social leaders—a military aristocracy. They constituted the band council and one of them became the head of the camp. Lewis says that a chief thus came to power, but that he was neither a ruler nor a judge and in general did not have power over life and death.³ The squaw-man Leforge who spent the greater part of his adult life among the Crow Indians and therefore was in a position to know whereof he spoke says in his book that the camp chief was ordinarily spoken of as the "lucky man."⁴ It was his responsibility to determine when the camp should move and where. When a band of Crows was on the move, the proper position for the chief to assume was at the head of the procession. Nobody was allowed to cross over in front of him; he had to have at all times a clear and unobstructed view of the countryside ahead of him.

Other public officials of the Crow Indian tribal organization, according to Leforge, were: chief medicine man or religious leader, chief weather-prophet, camp criers or heralds, and the dog-soldiers.⁵ Concerning the role that the dog-soldiers played in the tribal organization, Leforge says in part:

The dog-soldiers were the police force, or regular army, of the chief of the band or tribe. Each body of dog-soldiers had its chief,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Thomas B. Marquis, M. D. Memoirs Of a White Crow Indian (Thomas H. Leforge), (New York: The Century Company, 1928), p. 142.

⁵ Ibid.

and he acted often upon his own initiative. Even the individual dog-soldiers occasionally took measures of law enforcement without waiting for orders. But they all were under the general direction of the tribal or subordinate chief. These policemen enforced all camp rules or rules of the march. They restrained anxious ones who might rush prematurely forward when a body of hunters was stalking game. They held back, likewise, whatever warriors in time of battle might put the general plan out of adjustment by hasty or inconsiderate action in an effort to gain personal glory or advantage. In every way the dog-soldiers were the immediate directors of conduct.⁶

Youths and young men between the ages of fifteen and thirty years made up the fighting strength of the Crow Tribe. It was considered as much an act of valor to go out in search of horses of the enemy as to seek contact with the enemy in person. Horses thus taken were promptly given away, and the hero was paraded around the encampment, acclaimed, and given other horses. The point thus proven was that the aspiring young warrior had not entered upon his brave and cunning exploit for personal avarice, but for the glory and honor of the tribe. In allowing his tribesmen to strip him of the spoils of war, he had demonstrated beyond all doubt his confidence that the tribe would deal generously with him on some future occasion. Among the Crows a man's wealth was proof of the esteem in which he was held by his own people. What he owned was not what he had gained by personal effort, but came mostly in the form of gifts from admirers. The Indians certainly didn't have the white man's concept of the inviolability of property rights, and while they were not outright socialists, they closely approached that kind of philosophy in their economics at least. While a man might own a great deal of property, it was presumably at the command of the least of his

⁶ Ibid., pp. 145-56.

tribesmen if he should ask for it but pride kept him from asking except in case of dire necessity.⁷

Every full-fledged warrior had a war-bonnet, although seldom was there an opportunity to use it since fighting usually occurred on sudden contact. The usual adornment of a warrior going into battle was the single eagle feather sticking up from the crown of the head and worn as a part of the everyday dress.⁸

Complicated systems of war honors were based on counting coups, a French-Canadian term adopted to designate the formal token or signal of victory in battle as used among most of the Plains Indians. Coups were usually counted—that is taken for the four creditable exploits mentioned in a preceding paragraph. These were leadership of a successful raid, stealing a horse from within the confines of an enemy camp, being first to touch the person of an enemy, either before or just after death, and snatching a weapon from the hand of an enemy. The stroke (coup) might be made with whatever was most convenient, even the open hand, the simple touch scoring the victory. Part of the regalia of every warrior was a special coupstick, a slender rod, well decorated, which was carried in parades and used on other ceremonial occasions. The warrior who could strike the tipi of the enemy in a charge upon a home camp thus counted coup upon it and was allowed to reproduce its particular design upon the next new tipi that he made for his own use and to perpetuate the pattern in his family. In this way he was said

⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 173-74.

to have "captured" the tipi. The famous Sioux chief, Red Cloud, stated in 1891 that he had personally counted coup eighty times.⁹

Red paint smeared over the face and body was the choice of the Indians for personal adornment and well-being although other colors were used as fancy dictated. Leforge says that the preference of red among the Crows stemmed from a long past incident in which four giants fought among themselves in heaven.¹⁰ Their blood fell upon the earth and the people dabbled in it so that they might become godlike. Thereafter red was the favorite color for it was believed to strengthen both the body and the soul.

According to Leforge, painting for death did not require any special coloring.¹¹ The only event that did require a special color was the return from successful combat, when black was used to signify victory accomplished and the fires of wrath burned out.

The lot of captives taken in battle differed according to circumstances but was often in sharp contrast to the white man's concepts of chivalry. Captured women got off easily; they usually were married to Crow men and thereafter performed the ordinary feminine tasks. Male captives, especially young boys, might also be spared, Professor Lewis says,¹² since they might be needed for certain roles in the sacred Sun

⁹Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30, Handbook of American Indians, Part I, (Washington, The Government Printing Office, 1907), p. 354.

¹⁰Marquis, op. cit. pp. 194-95.

¹¹Ibid., p. 195.

¹²Lewis, op. cit. p. 229.

Captives
usually

Dance. But when moved to fury over their own losses or the quality of the resistance offered by the enemy, the Crows did not refrain from torture.¹³ Mutilation of their dead enemies and the mangling and dismemberment of corpses was a common practice among the Plains Indians. The Crows, however, were not a belligerent tribe and, as far as is known, there was never any concerted effort to oust the trespassing Sioux or Cheyennes from Crow territory. Minor operations seemed to have gratified the sporting urge and the craving for revenge.¹⁴

According to Leforge, the Crows never made a practice of killing white men and he records only one authentic instance of a white man losing his life at the hands of the Crow Indians.¹⁵ This was in 1887, at the time of an insurrection involving only a minor part of the tribe led by Wraps-Up-His-Tail, a medicine man. The man killed was one of a contingent of troops charging the rioting Indians. The Crows, however, had no scruples against robbing white men if the opportunity presented itself, as when they divested the Lewis and Clark party of all its horses in 1806.

Among the Crows, as among most other primitive societies, the family was the basic unit of social organization and what may be regarded as a secondary unit, was the clan, which was composed of distantly related families on the mother's side of the family tree. An individual belonged to his or her mother's clan but not to the father's clan. As the tribe

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Marquis, op. cit. p. 186.

increased in numbers it was divided into sub-tribes or bands for convenience of government and travel.

Today the family is still the primary unit of modern Crow society, while the clan system, long on the road to obsolescence, has lately shown some signs of revival. The current controversy over the construction of the proposed Yellowtail Dam Project has aroused old antipathies and made the line of cleavage between River and Mountain Crows more pronounced than within the memory of most living men.

In the days of old, the woman's position in the family was more or less that of a drudge. Besides the usual domestic duties of cooking, sewing, tanning hides, cutting up meat and "jerking" it, digging roots, gathering and drying berries, and making life in general comfortable for her lord and master, the wife was expected to take over such duties as packing for the move and pitching and striking the tipi. The wife was also accustomed to fettering her husband's other feminine admirers, feasting them and sending them laden with gifts on their way. An Indian woman was not jealous of her husband but prided herself on the fact that her spouse was attractive to other women. Leforge says that his squaw, Cherry, was a gentle and beloved mate.¹⁶ She even arranged his hair, keeping it scented with sweet-grass, made his bed, prepared for him the sweat-bath lodge whenever he wanted to use it, and did everything possible to make a man comfortable and happy.¹⁷ The husband's position in the family was the dominant one and he enjoyed a "double standard" to

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 277.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

the extent that he could have several wives if he chose to do so. All this is changed now and the role of the wife in modern Crow society has undergone radical changes. Nowadays it is the wife who carries the money belt, attends to the family shopping, drives the family car, and makes most of the decisions for herself and the family.

Marriages were usually the occasions for elaborate exchange of gifts a custom which may have led some writers to speak of "bartered brides." A suitor offered gifts of horses to the young woman's family, particularly to her brothers, and meat to her mother.¹⁸ On the other hand, they sent presents to him; the young woman, too, received gifts of food, clothing, and household goods from relatives and friends, so that the bride's dowry sometimes offset or equaled in value the amount of compensation offered by the groom. Lewis says that a man who thus paid for the eldest of several sisters had the right to marry the rest of the girls as they grew up, cousins often being reckoned as sisters.¹⁹

Since marriage was an entirely secular affair, divorce was common and required no ceremony. A man might divorce his wife for any one of a number of reasons, among which were crankiness, adultery, or sheer caprice. The abduction of wives was a common practice and kidnapper's clubs actually existed for the forcible seizure and spiriting away of wives. A man who took back a kidnapped wife lost face and became an object of derision--almost an outcast.

The rule of exogamy was strictly observed among the Crows; that

¹⁸ Lewis, op. cit. p. 50.

¹⁹ ibid., p. 51.

is, members of the same clan were not supposed to marry. An individual who broke this rule was ridiculed and became the laughing-stock of the village. People spoke of such a person as though he had married his own sister, even if the blood relationship was a distant one or none at all.

The reason for this taboo, Professor Lowie explains, was that children born of such marriages would belong at the same time to both the father's and mother's clan, a situation that was bound to lead to embarrassment, since an individual ordinarily owed such a different set of duties to the paternal and maternal kin with corresponding different attitudes on their part toward him.²⁰ Blending of the two was certain to lead to confusion.

A complicated system of taboos applied in a person's relationships with his in-laws. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the mother-in-law taboo which has persisted among the Crows even down to the present hour. A man avoids any direct contact or conversation with his wife's mother or grandmother. If he has anything to say to her, he says it through an intermediary, who, in turn, relays it. A woman, on the other hand, never speaks directly to her daughter's or granddaughter's husband, nor looks at him. In the olden days when a man was accustomed to taking as many wives as he chose, the prohibition extended to their respective mothers and grandmothers. On the other hand, it included not only the son-in-law, but also his brothers but apparently not his more distant kinsmen.

²⁰ ibid., p. 45.

The son-in-law of a Crow man must at all times be treated with the utmost deference. The father-in-law was ever mindful of the high qualities of his son-in-law and made it a point to tell others what a fine man his daughter had married. Perhaps a high sense of family pride prompted a man to portray his son-in-law in the most favorable light and to hold him up for approbation. At any rate, Leforge says that a son-in-law was always addressed as "my son" and appeared to receive at all times more consideration and attention than the natural sons.²¹

These highly dignified relations that a man had with his father-in-law were extended to include the brothers of his wife. A man must at all times be circumspect in dealing with his brother-in-law. These relatives by marriage were always considerate of each other, but never allowed themselves to become familiar. Brothers-in-law never joked nor jested with each other; their conversation had to be serious. Each of them might be inclined to vulgar speech, but when they came into common company, all vulgarity was carefully avoided.²² For a man to tell a ribald joke or make an indecent remark in the presence of his brother-in-law was a serious breach of etiquette, and the one thus offended went at once out of his kinsman's company. Leforge says that he personally never knew of a single instance of a man being thus wronged by his brother-in-law, but that if it did happen, the only way the guilty party could redeem himself was by the giving away of many presents, even to his complete impoverishment.²³

²¹ Marquis, op. cit. p. 166.

²² Ibid., p. 168.

²³ Ibid.

A man had to be discreet in his conduct toward all of the relatives of his wife. He was not permitted to assume an air of familiarity in addressing his brother-in-law's wife. He could, however, engage in pleasantries with the cousins of his wife since they were at the edge of the proscribed bounds, although not entirely outside.

With one's own brother's wife a man might be on terms of the greatest familiarity. Likewise, custom dictated that he could treat his wife's sister with what amounted to utmost license taking liberties that in white society would be considered extremely shocking and highly improper.²⁴

Leforge maintains that there was a taboo against pronouncing the personal name of the dead except insofar as the same name applied to the living.²⁵ Departed Indians were spoken of only in a descriptive way as though the names were not known to the speaker. Thus, one might speak of a dead associate as "the man who ran away from the enemy" or "the woman who beaded my moccasins."

Speaking one's own name in ordinary daily existence was also avoided. To do so was considered a boastful act. To announce one's identity to the enemy was, however, permissible or even an indication of bravery. Theoretically, this proved that the warrior was willing that the enemy should know him and thus be able to seek him out when he was ready to fight. Contending hostiles often harangued each other at great length from a safe distance, shaking their coupsticks at each other and

²⁴Lewis, op. cit. p. 28.

²⁵Marquis, op. cit. p. 169.

throwing out challenges to battle.

Adoption has long been a universal custom among the Grows and the practice is still in common usage even in present times. Grandparents usually adopt one or more grandchildren; Lettice even records adoption as a standard custom whereby a young couple will give the first-born child as a present to the father's parents when it is about a year old and can be weaned.²⁶ Although adoption as a standard practice is usually an arrangement involving the paternal grandparents and infant children, there is apparently no taboo against the adoption of infants and even older children by persons other than the grandparents. The writer has personally known of several such cases involving the adoption of grade school children.

The number of natural offspring in any family is not readily discernible. If one says, "This is my son," or "This is my father," or makes any similar declaration, the statement is never questioned. The fact that a couple has many children when by all reckoning they should have few or none, or, conversely, if they have none or but few when it appears they should have had many, is not considered a polite subject for conversation.

Illegitimacy apparently poses no social problems whatever. Certainly no stigma is attached to the child born out of wedlock. Such children are accepted by the rank and file of the tribe, are duly inscribed in the tribal rolls and ordinarily make their home with the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 165.

mother and the maternal grandparents. Some Crow women have produced an amazing number of children without benefit of clergy.

In the event of death a peculiar set of behavior patterns is obtained. Lowie noted that the corpse was never taken out of the regular entrance lest some other inmate die soon after.²⁷ This custom still prevails among some of the older Indians and as late as a year ago, the writer learned of an instance wherein the body of an aged Indian was handed through the window to the undertaker waiting outside. In the old days burial was never made in the ground but the corpse, after being painted and arrayed in its best clothes, was wrapped up in canvas or some other fabric and placed on a platform. Disposal took two main forms-- either in the fork of a tree or on a scaffold of four forked poles set well off the ground and out of the reach of wolves and other predatory animals. Burial platforms were still very much in evidence on the reservation in the not too distant past. After nature had accomplished its work, the bones were sometimes taken down and concealed in a pile of loose rocks. Occasionally the favorite horse of the deceased would be led to the spot and shot. In the case of the death of an important chief, a special method was used. His tipi was painted with horizontal red stripes and the body was placed in it on a four-pole scaffold.²⁸ Then the tipi was left to be destroyed by the inexorable forces of time and nature.

The whole camp mourned over a warrior slain by the enemy. His

²⁷Lowie, op. cit. p. 66.

²⁸Ibid., p. 67.

body lay in state outside of his lodge with a feather fan in his hand and the chest exposed. His close relatives went into seclusion for a period of two months and never engaged in merriment until his death had been avenged by the killing of a member of the offending tribe. The custom that prevailed among the Crows was for friends and kinsmen of the slain warrior to display their grief by self-mutilation. This included disfiguring the face, chopping off fingers and hacking off the hair.

When a person died from natural causes only members of the immediate family disfigured themselves. Such practices under the influence of Christian missionaries have by now become obsolete. There is, however, still a great display of mourning at present-day funerals. The age-old custom of disposing of the deceased person's belongings by giving them away or destroying them still prevails. As recently as two years ago an instance was brought to the attention of the writer where at the burial of a child a practically new baby carriage was consigned to the open grave after the casket had been lowered into place.

Clothing was important to the Plains Indians for its esthetic as well as its protective values but very little is known of the ancient garb of the Crow Indians. Professor Lowie thinks this older covering may have been a skin kilt something like that worn by the main Sun Dancer.²⁹ However, there is no question about what was worn in the historic period. Tanned skins of the deer family generally furnished material for both masculine and feminine attire. The typical costume of

²⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

the Crow man was of tanned buckskin and consisted of a shirt, a breechcloth, long leggings reaching up to the hips, low moccasins, and a buffalo robe, which was worn over the shoulders in winter. The shirt which hung free over the hips was provided with sleeves and was designed to be drawn over the head. In summer when lounging about their lodges, the custom was for Crow men to wear nothing but the breechcloth.³⁰ Full clothing was worn only in winter and the leggings were designed to protect the legs from brambles and briars when either riding or walking through brushy country.

Lowie says that the chief item of a woman's costume was a long dress of deer or mountain-sheep skin that reached from the neck almost to the feet.³¹ Often this garment was richly ornamented with elk teeth and trimmed with ermine skins. Calico dresses as a substitute for the historic garb of Crow women were somewhat shorter and are still worn by some of the older women with a wide leather belt to confine the garment at the waist. Moccasins and leggings reaching to the knee completed the costume of Crow women.

Both masculine and feminine clothing were generally fringed at the free edges and beautifully decorated with designs worked in porcupine-quill embroidery or beadwork.

In most cases the articles of clothing in a child's wardrobe were miniature replicas of those worn by their parents.

The current practice among the older Crow men of arranging the

³⁰Marquis, op. cit. p. 170.

³¹Lowie, op. cit. p. 82.

hair in three braids—a long thick queue down the back and a shorter one over each ear is ascribed to Nez Perce influence. The basic style in the old days was to part the hair in the middle and let it fall loosely down the back and over the sides of the face.

Crow men have apparently been more ready and willing to adopt the European style of dress than have Crow women. According to a survey of the entire Indian resident population of the reservation made in 1952, canvassers found that in only thirteen per cent of the homes visited the oldest male in the household was wearing the typical male dress of long braids and a high-crowned, wide-brimmed black hat. At the same time, the adult women in sixty-three per cent of the households were wearing the high moccasins or leggings, blankets or shawls, wide leather belts, and long braids typical of Crow female dress. High school girls and young women resist a return to the native dress, but after marriage a woman is expected to "return to the blanket." This is an enigma that has puzzled observers no end. Some deep and compelling reason, the group mores perhaps, must be the answer.

³²Ibid., p. 83.

³³United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Report No. 147, Cultural and Economic Status of the Crow People, Crow Reservation, Montana, (Billings, Montana: Missouri River Investigations Project, December 1955), p. 14. (Miscographed. 50 pp.)

CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

"Look, you have cast out Love! What Gods are these
You bid me please?
The Three in One, the One in Three? Not so!
To my own Gods I go.
It may be they shall give me greater ease
Than your cold Christ and tangled Trinities.
--The Convert

In the olden days the many tribes of the Northwest were constantly at war with each other. The cultural pattern of the Crow Tribe was therefore militaristic. Search for military prowess led to all sorts of religious experiences and dedications. To strengthen the spirit and thereby prepare oneself for mortal combat was a matter of the utmost importance. No warrior would dream of going on the warpath without first making a pilgrimage to some lonely mountain-top or sacred spirit cave and purifying himself by daily devotions of prayer, penance, fast, and meditation. One of the favorite spots for the Crow Indians to repair to for this type of devotional day-dreaming was the top of Cryer Mountain. This awe-inspiring place was popularly regarded as being endowed with supernatural powers, and pilgrimages there took on a special religious significance. The squaw-man Leforge who lived with the Crow Indians for over forty years and was perhaps the first white man to witness the enactment of such Crow ceremonies as the sacred Sun Dance, has preserved for posterity in written form a most interesting

account of life in a primitive society largely untouched by the influence of Western civilization. Mr. Leforge tells in his Memoirs how, as a young man, he in the company of a bosom friend, Barney Bravo, experienced a most extensive undertaking of this sort for the benefit of his soul as was the custom of his adopted people. He states in part:

. . . We got a medicine man to prepare us. He put us through the sweat-bath, then pricked flesh from our arms and legs and gave it to the Sun. We journeyed out toward the Pryor Mountains and located ourselves there on a high cliff plateau. We stayed there four days and four nights without any food. During the days we conversed but little, devoting ourselves to prayer and meditation. At night we rolled in our blankets and slept. About the third day I saw an eagle soaring over me. After that when it was daylight, I could look up at any time and see this eagle. Right now, looking back more than fifty years to that time, I am not sure whether this was an actual eagle or the vision of enraptured mind. Anyhow, the eagle became my medicine-animal. For many years thereafter I believed firmly in its protective influence over me. Bravo said he kept seeing a raven but I did not observe any such bird, although we were there together all the time. The raven became his medicine animal. To the white-man side of my mentality, this all seems foolish, but even in this part of my mind there is no certain conviction that the white man's notions about such mysteries are any better than the Indian's notions.¹

In the hours just before engaging the enemy in combat, Crow warriors would devote much time and energy to "making medicine," that is, imitating the vocal sounds and bodily actions of their own special medicine-animals which they believed protected them in time of peril. Thus there would be a menagerie-like mingling of sounds like the woofing of a bear, the howling of a wolf, the chattering of a magpie, the screaming of an eagle, the hooting of an owl, the whooping of a crane, etc.

¹Thomas H. Marquis, M. D., Memoirs of a White Crow Indian (Thomas H. Leforge), (New York: The Century Co., 1928) pp. 132-33.

Although old-time Crow Indians recognized a supreme being whom they called the First Maker, they did not worship this deity directly, but sought to incur its favor and goodness through the worship and invocation of certain animals and natural objects which they regarded as endowed with supernatural powers granted them by the First Maker.² Medicine men, both healers and seers, were well versed in the secrets of nature through intensive study and were thought to be quite capable of curing various ailments and coping with unusual situations. The medicine man was, however, not a priestly go-between, and when hard put to it, the Indian did not hesitate to seek divinity face to face.³ But people did not depend upon the medicine men for spiritual guidance and often affiliated with various religious organizations founded by them. There was, however, no set form of public worship for the entire population; the people worshipped their own respective "gods" individually or in small groups.

A direct revelation or a vision was obviously the panacea for all human ills, the one sure basis of earthly success. It might come as an unsought blessing, but only by a lucky stroke; hence a Crow strove for it by seeking the favor of supernatural powers.⁴ To any major disaster, any overwhelming situation, there was an automatic response: one merely sought a revelation. Every Crow, buffeted by circumstance,

²Joe Medicine Crow, Tribal Land Clerk, "The Crow Indian," a brief outline of history and general information, p. 2. (manuscripted. 2 pp.).

³Robert H. Lowie, The Crow Indians, (New York: Farrer and Rinehart, 1935). p. 237.

⁴Ibid.

cast down by defeat, or consumed by the fires of ambition set out in quest of a vision.

As success was attributed to revelations, so conversely, failure was due to the lack of them. Not every person who set out in quest of a vision experienced one. For these poor souls some measure of security was found in the form of dreams. But the Indians made a distinction between ordinary dreams and revelations. Only those dreams that proved their worth as harbingers of good fortune were considered as somewhat equivalent to revelations.⁵

The supreme test for both the visionary and the tribe was whether the revelation materialized. The Crows did not expect every one who claimed supernatural powers to be equally successful. Failure of a vision to come to fruition might be due to any one of several causes: the visitant was not strong enough, or the seer failed to do what he was told, or trickery may have entered in to deceive the god-seeker.⁶ Sometimes a mischievous being or animal masquerading in the form of another person or animal would dupe the visionary by giving the wrong kind of advice or issuing a false set of instructions.

In every generation there were medicine men who even now are remembered for the extraordinary powers they possessed. Professor Lewis discovered some interesting information about these men whose role loomed large in the life of the Crow people. He states in part:

. . . In 1687 Wraps-up-his-tail led an abortive uprising against

⁵Ibid., p. 238.

⁶Ibid., p. 238.

the Government. He had gained a small following by demonstrations of miraculous power. Gros-ventre saw him paint his face by merely pointing at the sun; Muskrat was present when he cut down pines by moving his sword, as he intended to do in mowing down the soldiers. Why then did he fail? "Half of his vision was true; in part he was fooled." And there was a second reason: "His vision was to come true in the spring when it thundered, but he waited until the fall."⁷

Sometimes rival shamans gave a public demonstration of their powers. Lowie was able to extract the following eye-witness account from an informant:

. . . Gray-bull saw a contest with two sides laying wagers against each other. One medicine-man rose and said he would knock all his opponents over on one side with his hand. They began to sing against him and defied him, but he danced by the door and the fire, made a motion with one arm as if to push them, and all fell toward one side. The spectators cheered. Then one man from the other group got up, ran around the fire four times, hooted like an owl, and disappeared. "We did not know how he went up but heard him hooting from the top of the lodge." Whether such scenes are due to sleight-of-hand, hypnotism, collusion, or what not, thoroughly intelligent Indians⁸ accepted them at face value and as proof of supernatural blessing.

In the face of such testimony, is it any wonder then, that present-day Crow Indians are torn between the old and the new? As one young Indian remarked to the writer in a recent conversation, "When you listen to the old folks, you've just got to believe them."

Every sacred object revealed in a vision singly or in combinations, was dressed up and arranged in a bundle or bag. These may be regarded essentially as fetishes. A fetish could be a curiously-shaped rock, a chickenhawk feather, a weasel-skin stuffed with buffalo hair, or just about any other portable object. Since fetishes were regarded as bringing good luck, they were invested with supernatural powers, carried

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 239.

about, and sometimes invoked.

The opening of the sacred medicine bag ordinarily was an occasion requiring special ceremonies. In most instances the bag was first smoked with incense, either of sweet-grass or wild carrot root. The bag and its contents were elevated and lowered four times before being opened. Leforge describes in great detail the opening of medicine bag in the household of his son-in-law, Little Nest. He says in part:

. . . About once a year, perhaps more often, Little Nest has the family ceremony of opening this bag and making religious use of its contents. A certain phase of the moon is essential to the proceeding. He notifies his people of the impending ceremony, and a feast is prepared. After the feast he calls into assemblage his family, including such acceptable visitors as may be present. Every one must keep very quiet; no one must go out; it is a solemn occasion. Finally after a time of silent meditation, he says, "I hear a voice from the mountain." Then he reverently opens the bag and displays the contained objects. . . . I do not understand the significance of all this ceremony, but my daughter knows all about it. I do not feel at liberty to tell everything I have been told about it, since to them it is an affair of the utmost sacredness. . . .⁹

The Sun Dance was the grandest of the Crow ceremonies and the one best integrated. Leforge says the purpose of the Sun Dance was to worship and propitiate the First Maker, or the Person Above.¹⁰ Professor Lowie holds quite a different view. He says that the Sun Dance was a prayer of vengeance in which a man overcome with sorrow at the killing of a kinsman sought the most effective means of getting a vision whereby he might take revenge upon the offending tribe.¹¹ Whatever the underlying motives might have been, the fact remains that the Sun Dance was

⁹Marquis, op. cit. pp. 193-94.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 134.

¹¹Lowie, op. cit. p. 297.

the greatest ceremony of the Plains tribes. Unfortunately neither time nor space permits a full and detailed account of the tribal Sun Dance in the type of project that the writer has undertaken, hence the subject has been treated only incidentally with an occasional remark or two.

The tribal Sun Dance was strongly opposed by Christian missionaries because of its self-torture features and finding no favor in official circles, it was to a large extent suppressed among all the Plains Indians. It has lost part of its rites where it has survived, and has come to be largely a spectacle to entertain tourists rather than a great religious ceremony. With the disappearance of tribal organization and tribal interests, there is no doubt of the ultimate doom of the Sun Dance.

The same thing might be said of the rest of the Crow tribal dances: the Sacred Pipe Dance, the Round Daring Ceremony and others. Only a half-hearted interest keeps them alive. Their passing is only a matter of time.

Crow ceremonialism is characterized by the mystic number four. This has already been alluded to in some of the preceding paragraphs: the shaman ran around the fire four times before hooting like an owl and then ascending to the top of the lodge; the medicine bag was elevated and lowered that number of times before being opened. In one story of creation three birds fell to bring up mud from the depths, finally the hell-diver succeeds. In ceremonial smoking four puffs of smoke were

offered--one to each of the cardinal directions. Characteristic, too, was the fourfold repetition of acts or songs which entered so conspicuously into Crow ceremonialism.

Ceremonial smoking partook of the nature of a devotional act since two or more persons using the same pipe constituted a friendship-cementing circle. If the smoking circle occurred in some one's lodge, the owner of that habitation proposed the smoke and presided over the ceremony. The one making the proposition might go out and invite special friends to come and smoke with him. The pipe was then reverently taken out of its receptacle, loaded, and lit by its owner. He then took six puffs--one upward in reverence for the Great Spirit, one downward the propitiate the evil spirits, and one to each of the four points of the compass. He then passed the lighted pipe to his right. If more than one smoker sat at his right side the pipe was passed from hand to hand until it reached the last one on that side. Then it was passed back, each one along the way taking his puffs and then handing it on to the next. The passing was always done with the right hand only. The ceremonial pipe thus came again into possession of the owner, who sent it in the same way to the extreme left side of his circle where it was smoked and sent on its way back along this left side to be puffed by each in turn as the return trip was made. The receiver of the pipe held his hand passively open, the presenter thrusting it into his open hand as though conferring a gift upon one not expecting it and therefore all the more pleased at receiving it.

If a pipe was smoked out, it was passed from hand to hand back to

the presiding smoker who dumped the ashes out upon the bare ground—never upon grass or other vegetation. When the bowl had been allowed to cool, the pipe was again loaded, lit, the customary six whiffs were taken, and the general smoking was resumed. One might be permitted to break into a smoking circle at any time without invitation. Such breaking in was considered a compliment to the host and a sign of friendly feeling toward the others present. The newcomer, however, had to take a place at the left side of the chief position. If suitable room could not be found there, he ousted some youth or boy and took his place. Ordinarily the young males were tolerated in smoking circles that were purely of a social nature and when their presence was not a hindrance to their elders, but they were not allowed to join any circle that was in the nature of a council or a business meeting. Women definitely had no part in smoking formalities.

Crow beliefs in the hereafter have little to do with religion but they may as well be treated in the present context as any other. According to the Professor Lowie, the soul stays near the corpse, hence the owl-like cry sometimes heard there.¹² This must be merely a temporary adobe since the dead are believed to live in a camp of their own. Actually the hereafter seems to have interested the Crows but little; there were no well-defined beliefs beyond the acceptance of survival in a superior kind of existence. Such notions as were generally held were derived from the experiences of tribesmen who, according to tradition, died but

¹² Ibid., p. 69.

returned to life.

Ghosts of the departed and spirits of all kinds had a prominent place in the mental life of the Crows, and to a certain extent this is true even today. The Indians are inherently superstitious; custom forbids any direct reference to the personal name of the deceased. Moreover, ghosts haunt the graves of the dead, hoot like owls, and appear in the form of whirlwinds. Whenever a Crow sees a whirlwind, he thus addresses it, "Where you are going, it is bad, go by yourself."¹³ To liken a person to a ghost is considered one of the gravest personal insults.

In the olden days when burial groves were very much in evidence, the Crows cautiously avoided any trails or paths leading past these arboreal cemeteries. Leforge relates one amusing incident that occurred when he was serving as official interpreter at the old Absarokee Agency.

He states in part:

. . . there were at a certain place along the Stillwater two dead squaws on scaffolds by the roadside. Many Indians were afraid to go along the trail by this wayside cemetery. One day I proposed to one of them that I, being in an official government position, could give him a written pass that would get him safely through this dangerous area. I gave him the "pass" it warded off all harm. After that I wrote a good many other protective missives in which the ghosts were commanded not to frighten or do any injury to the bearer. One government employee took up this safe-conduct idea as a business proposition. He charged each Indian a buffalo robe for procuring this freedom from annoyance by the unseen agencies. He was soon found out and was relieved from all further duty there.¹⁴

Paradoxical as it may seem, the white men often capitalize on the Indians fear of "unseen agencies" and use it as a means of taking unfair

¹³Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁴Marquis, op. cit. p. 116.

advantage of him. Patrolmen in a near-by city have hit upon the idea of enlisting the aid of ghosts to keep the streets cleared of intoxicated Indians. The police merely round up the inebriates, haul them across the bridge a scant distance from the edge of town and dump them out. The Indians will not walk back to town because they believe the bridge to be haunted since it is within sight of the spot where a few years ago a number of Indians plunged to their deaths from a high clay bluff overlooking the Big Horn River.

Crow folklore abounds with a great many tales having to do with the creation of the world. The Indians, like other members of the human family both primitive and otherwise, often raised the question of "Who created the world, and how did he come to do it?" Generation after generation of Indians discussed the subject around their camp-fires until in the course of a great many centuries they developed a mythology which in their simple-minded way, explained the riddle of creation. Yet there was no one standard version of the creation story; each narrator worked into his tale slightly different incidents, but at the same time made his story conform to one central theory. Professor Lewis recorded no fewer than six different versions of the creation story, and even then had by no means exhausted the list.¹⁵

Both Catholic and Protestant churches have maintained active missionary programs on the Crow Reservation for a great many years and at the present time four Catholic and three Baptist missions are in

¹⁵Lewis, op. cit. p. 132.

operation. These two great religious denominations working side by side in apparent harmony and accord seem to follow the line of thought that there is room enough for all. At any rate, their missions have been fruitful to the extent that by now nearly all members of the tribe, with the exception of comparatively few individuals, profess membership in one denomination or other. Besides these two pioneer denominations, evangelical churches of the Pentecostal or Full Gospel variety have made their appearance on the reservation in recent years. Whether their work proves to be of a permanent nature or not remains to be seen.

Catholic missionary enterprises on the Crow Indian Reservation cover a span of about seventy years or from 1836 to the present time. The groundwork for this activity actually dates back to much earlier times. As early as 1840 Bishop Rosati of Saint Louis, Missouri, had appointed the Rev. Peter J. DeSmet, a member of the Jesuit Order, to make a survey of the religious needs of all the Indian tribes of the Northwest. Bishop Rosati had been prompted to do this in response to repeated visits from delegations of Flathead Indians from western Montana. The story of how these Indians traveled all the way to Saint Louis from the remote vastnesses of the Bitterroot Mountains to plead for black-robed priests to be sent to them is a saga unparalleled in the annals of Christendom.

Father DeSmet set out on his significant westward journey from Saint Louis with a band of fur traders on March 27, 1840.¹⁶ They

¹⁶L. B. Palladino, S. J., Indian and White in the Northwest, (Lancaster, Pa.: Wickersham Publishing Co., 1922), p. 31.

traveled by boat up the Missouri and the Platte. From the headwaters of the Platte, they crossed over to the headwaters of the Snake River. On June 30 of that year he was met at Green River, Wyoming, by a delegation of Flatheads who had come eight hundred miles to receive him. With joyful hearts they escorted the "Black Robe" over into the valley of the Jefferson River where the entire Flathead Tribe was encamped. On the banks of that river at the lower end of the Boulder valley is the spot where Christianity was first preached in Montana. The Rev. Richard Walsh says of this pioneer missionary:

On July 26, 1840, Father DeSmet celebrated the first Mass to be offered in what is now Montana near what is known today as Three Forks. Shortly after his first visit, in August of the same year, Father DeSmet returned to St. Louis. But he promised that he would be back in the spring of the next year with more missionaries. In 1841 Father DeSmet came back with two more priests, the Rev. Nicholas Point, S. J., and the Rev. Gregory Mengarini, S. J., and two lay brothers.¹⁷

In the course of his return journey to Saint Louis after meeting with the Flatheads in the Jefferson valley, Father DeSmet visited the Blackfeet and Crow people. Everywhere he was received with the most profound honor and respect. Each tribe seemed anxious to have "Black Robes" come to live and labor among them. Father DeSmet continued on down the Yellowstone and the Missouri visiting the Sioux and other tribes enroute. For the most of the return trip he had only one companion, and yet he made the entire trip in safety and arrived at Saint Louis in the fall of 1840.

¹⁷ Rev. Richard Walsh, "Beginnings of Catholicism in Montana 1840-1904," The Eastern (Great Falls) Montana Catholic Register, Sec. Three, December 3, 1954, p. 11.

These initial contacts that Father DeSmet made with members of the Crow Tribe he renewed and strengthened from time to time. Thus he again visited the Crows in 1844, and met with chiefs of the Crow Tribe in 1851 when deliberations were under way which led to the first Treaty of Fort Laramie.

Although Father DeSmet was the first priest to see Crow Indians, the Rev. Peter Barcelo, S. J., was the first priest to minister to the Crows, and on his very first visit in 1880 to the outlying mission stations he is said to have baptized 114 Crow children.¹⁸

Mission work of a permanent nature among the Crows did not get under way until 1886. In that year the Rev. Urban Grassi, S. J., and the Rev. Peter Frando, S. J., selected a site in the Big Horn valley for a permanent mission and the following year, 1887, Rev. Joseph Dandini, S. J., and Father Frando arrived at the site to commence construction of the present Saint Francis Xavier's Mission. This mission—the pioneer Christian missionary enterprise on the Crow Indian Reservation—is located along the Big Horn River about thirty miles southwest of Hardin. Other mission stations as a natural outgrowth of the Saint Xavier Mission were established from time to time to minister to the spiritual needs of the Indians at widely separated points on the Crow Reservation, but the Saint Xavier Mission has always been the headquarters from which these activities have been directed.

The story of the contribution of the mission schools to the

¹⁸ Palladino, op. cit. p. 255.

educational development of the Crow Indians, of the coming of the Sisters to staff these schools, of their prosperity and their eventual decline, is an interesting study that has been reserved for a succeeding chapter.

Protestant missionary societies, by and large, did not underwrite any work among the Indians of the West until after the policy of placing the Indians on permanent reservations had been well established. The various Protestant denominations got together then and by common agreement worked out a plan whereby the different reservations were divided up and apportioned among themselves for missionary effort. Thus to the Baptists fell the privilege and also the responsibility of ministering to the Crows, and their work has become finally established at Lodge Grass, Pryor, and Crow Agency.

Dissatisfaction with the policy which necessitated the placing of very young Crow children in the Government boarding school at Crow Agency is credited with bringing the first Baptist missionaries, Rev. and Mrs. W. A. Petzoldt, to the Lodge Grass mission field.¹⁹ The Crows had heard that on other reservations missionaries had come to conduct elementary schools. The question was raised: why couldn't the same thing be done for the Crows? After due deliberation the Crows decided to send a delegation to Sheridan, Wyoming, to discuss the matter with Rev. Petzoldt, a young Baptist minister who had become their friend.

As a result of this meeting a council was held in June, 1903, between chiefs of the Crow Tribe, Rev. Petzoldt, and two or three other

¹⁹Coe Hayne, Red Men on the Big Horn, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1929), p. 88.

clergymen who represented a national mission board. The Indians realized the solemnity of the occasion and conducted the proceedings in true Indian fashion with dignity and decorum; the medicine pipe was passed around, the object of the council was stated and then one after another, the older Indians spoke.

The outcome of this council¹⁹ which lasted three days was that the Indians went on record as requesting that a missionary and a teacher be sent to the Lodge Grass area as soon as arrangements could be made. The Superintendent of the Crow Indian Reservation approved the plan to open a mission and a school in the valley of the Upper Little Big Horn, where fully five hundred Indians would be within easy access. The Indians on their part promised to assist in the felling of logs and the erection of suitable buildings necessary to a Christian missionary enterprise.

The active ministry of the Rev. and Mrs. W. A. Petzoldt among the Crows thus began on December 1, 1903.²⁰ The Crows had not asked for the Gospel; they had merely asked for a school but the coming of the Petzoldts was also to mean the coming of the Gospel. In their daily living, and by precept and example, these devoted missionaries were to transform the lives and win the hearts of many.

The missionary work of the Baptist Church on the Crow Reservation had been antedated by some dozen years or so by the coming of the Congregationalists to the Crow Agency mission field. In 1891, the American Missionary Association of the Congregational Church sent the

²⁰ibid., p. 90.

Rev. James M. Burgess out to make a survey of the spiritual needs of the Crow people with a view to opening a mission among them.²¹ The result of this visit was that the Congregational Church acquired a twenty-acre site--the gift of the Crow Tribe--and the following year, the Rev. Burgess and his family arrived to supervise the construction of the buildings and to organize the work of the mission. A chapel and a mission house were soon built, and the missionary program of the Church was under way.

The Rev. Burgess continued in charge of the Congregational mission until 1916. In 1921 a transfer of the mission property was effected whereby the American Home Baptist Missionary Society of New York, New York, acquired the mission and the Congregational Church withdrew from further missionary activity on the Crow Reservation. From 1921 to 1923 the work of the Baptist Church in the Crow Agency area was supervised by the Rev. W. A. Petzoldt of Lodge Grass. In 1923 the Rev. C. A. Bentley and his wife arrived to take charge of the newly acquired mission and have remained to the present time.

Today the Baptist mission bears the name of the man who founded it sixty-five years ago. It is known as the Burgess Memorial Church, a fitting tribute to the devotion of a pioneer missionary.

To properly evaluate the impact of Christian missionary programs, both Catholic and Protestant on the acculturation of the Crows is a difficult, if not an impossible task. In the seventy years since the first

²¹Information incident to the history of the Burgess Memorial Church was the result of an interview between the Rev. C. A. Bentley, D. D., pastor of the Church, and the writer on June 22, 1956.

permanent mission work was established among the Crows, there has been no more inspiring chapter in the history of the region than the heroism, self-sacrifice, and devotion to high ideals afforded by the Indian missions. Most of the missionaries have been of finished scholarship and refined habit, and nearly all were of such exceptional ability as to have commanded the attention and respect of any community, or to have acquired wealth and reputation had they chosen to do so. Yet they deliberately faced hardships and privations in the hope that through their efforts some small portion of a darkened world might be made better.

CHAPTER V

THE MISSION SCHOOLS

"When thy word goeth forth, it giveth light and understanding unto the simple."

The Psalter

In 1886 the Rev. Peter Frando, S. J., and the Rev. Joseph Bandini, S. J., were able to select the site for the first permanent mission among the Crows. In September, 1887, a school house was ready for occupancy but school was not opened until the following month. The three Ursuline Nuns assigned to conduct the school had been delayed at Saint Paul for lack of sufficient funds to continue their westward journey.

When the Nuns made their belated arrival at Crow Agency on the first of October, they found the country full of the wildest excitement. Stirred up to a pitch of frenzy by Wrasps-Up-His-Tail, a medicine man who claimed to possess extraordinary powers and who had gained quite a following, some of the Crows were up in arms against the whites. The very evening the Ursulines arrived, the Crows made a hostile demonstration against the Agency, riding around the premises and shouting defiance to the whites within. Toward dusk they grew more bold and aggressive and fired several shots into the buildings, terrifying the employees and their families but luckily hitting no one. They made no further attack but all that night they kept up their savage whooping and yelling.

The next morning the hills surrounding the Agency were thick with armed Indians while four companies of soldiers, hastily summoned from nearby Fort Custer, were drawn up in battle array in front of the Agency.

Residents of the Agency implored the Fathers and the Nuns not to set out for the Mission as their route lay between the two opposing forces who at any time might begin the battle. Meanwhile the Indians learned of the arrival of the "Black Robe" and the Nuns at the Agency and came down from their battle stations to welcome them. The troopers, both officers and men, did likewise, and thus the little band of missionaries passed between the two hostile forces respected and honored by both. The Indians not only allowed the party to proceed on its way unmolested, but a number of the warriors even volunteered to escort the travelers to the Mission, twenty-nine miles away.

A few days later there was an engagement between the soldiers and the Indians, but the fighting ended abruptly. One of the loyal Crow scouts picked off the ring-leader who was causing the disturbance. When the Indians saw the imposter, Wrape-Up-His-Tail, fall dead, they at once lost their martial ardor. Thus the "Crow War" ended almost before it had begun.

The little band of Ursulines reaching their destination in safety, began at once to prepare the new school building for the reception of children and by Christmas time, some fifty pupils were in attendance. The facilities soon proved inadequate and two additional school structures and a chapel were completed in 1888. —

The Mission prospered and in 1890, a three-story brick building

was erected to house the boys' school. Enrollment reached a high of 150 children.

Father Palladino was in frequent contact with the Saint Francis Xavier Mission, and in 1893 he wrote:

. . .The school today is in a flourishing condition, and the result of the Fathers' and Sisters' efficient work is the noticeable advancement of their pupils in the paths of both virtue and knowledge. The branches taught and the methods followed here are the same as in all the other Catholic Indian schools, book-learning going hand in hand with useful manual exercise, and everything being directed to make the Indian youth moral and industrious. The Crow children are bright and intelligent, have good retentive memories, and like to be instructed. The girls are, perhaps, somewhat quicker to learn, easier to mould and more responsive to the teacher's care, and, consequently, somewhat more advanced than the boys.¹

The boys' school of Saint Francis Xavier's Mission at the time of its greatest prosperity was conducted by six members of the Society of Jesus, while the girls' school was under the care of eight Ursuline Nuns. For the support of this Mission School, the Government made a yearly allowance for 120 pupils at \$180 each.²

While progress in the education of the younger Crow generation was proceeding at an encouraging rate, the fruit of the Father's missionary zeal had been equally gratifying. By 1891, fifteen years after the founding of the Mission, 1070 persons had received the sacrament of baptism, a figure representing almost one half of the entire Crow population; at the same time sixty-five marriages had been solemnized according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church, and some two hundred had been

¹L. B. Palladino, S. J., Indian and White in the Northwest, (Lancaster, Pa.: Wickersham Publishing Co., 1922), p. 260.

²Ibid., p. 261.

confirmed.³

By 1910 most of the Indians in the area served by the Mission were baptized Catholics, but the Mission was already on the decline. Government support was withdrawn around 1900, and the missionaries had a continual struggle to obtain sufficient funds to keep the school in operation.⁴ Because of time spent in the solicitation of support, the missionaries had less time to devote to the spiritual needs of the people.

The number of pupils continued to dwindle until in 1920 the enrollment stood at five boys and five girls. The next year the school was closed, the Ursulines left, and the Jesuit Fathers continued to minister to the spiritual needs of the Indians at the various mission stations.

In 1935 the school was reopened by the Rev. Charles L. Owens, S. J., and four Sisters of Saint Francis came from Oldenburg, Indiana, to teach. Since the reopening of the school there have been approximately fifty boarding and thirty day students each year. Classes from grades one to twelve were conducted until 1953, when the high school was discontinued. At the present time there are three teachers for the eight grades.

The only other Catholic Mission School on the Crow Indian

³Parish Register, Saint Francis Xavier Mission.

⁴Rev. Richard Walsh, "Beginnings of Catholicism in Montana 1840-1904," The Eastern (Great Falls) Montana Catholic Register, Sec. Three, December 3, 1954, p. 67.

Reservation is Saint Charles' Mission situated on Pryor Creek about two miles southwest of the town of Pryor and about forty miles south of Billings. This school had its beginnings in 1892 when the Jesuit Fathers erected a building. In September of that year three Ursuline Nuns arrived from the Saint Francis Xavier Mission to conduct the school.

Notwithstanding its slow and difficult beginnings, the Mission grew and the school prospered until 1898, when financial difficulties forced it to close its doors. In 1901 the school building was sold to the Government, which took over the operation of the school for a number of years.

From 1926 to 1930 the Jesuits held a day school consisting of one large classroom with a Catholic lay teacher in charge. In 1936 the Sisters of Saint Francis of Oldenburg, Indiana, at the request of Father Owens, came to staff the school once more. They took up their abode in the same building which housed the school but at this writing have built themselves a pleasant convent.

Due to the fact that the Saint Charles Mission has no boarding facilities, it is operated as a day school only. The school offers an elementary program and enrolls around forty pupils. Two Sisters constitute the instructional staff.

Another Catholic Mission School that has long been a significant factor in the educational development of the Crow Indians is Saint Labre's Mission near Ashland. This Mission, although located off the geographical limits of the Crow Indian Reservation, has always extended

a welcome to the Catholic Crow youth, both boys and girls.

Saint Labre's Mission to the Northern Cheyennes actually dates back two or three years before the establishment of Saint Francis Xavier's Mission. In March, 1884, three Ursuline Nuns, accompanied by the Rev. Joseph Zylar, left Miles City for the Rosebud country to open their Mission School among the Cheyennes. The Nuns occupied a cabin which was divided into three compartments.

One of the compartments was improvised as a classroom with benches fashioned from packing cases. This one building served both teachers and pupils for some time. A few years later, through the generosity of Bishop Brendel, who had collected \$5,200 for a building, a new school was erected.

In 1887 the Cheyennes staged a "Ghost Dance" and scared away both Nuns and priests. A fresh outbreak in 1892 closed the school again for a few months. The first permanent records of the school date from 1889, the year the Nuns returned from the first "Ghost Dance" scare. Forty-three Indian children between six and thirteen years of age were enrolled that year.

In November, 1905, Bishop Lenihan visited Saint Labre's Mission and confirmed forty-three children. In 1917 fire destroyed the school, which was soon replaced by the concrete building now serving as convent, dormitory, and dining hall.

The year 1933 marked a change in the school staff for after fifty years of service, the Ursulines withdrew and the School Sisters of Saint Francis of Milwaukee came to take charge. Following this change, the

school developed and expanded its curriculum into a full four-year high school for both Indians and whites. In 1937 the high school was closed because of lack of funds but the grade school continued to operate.

During the years 1945 to 1948 the idea of again expanding the curriculum to include high school courses was realized. Both Indian and white students entered and by 1950, the high school graduated its first class of two seniors.

When the Rev. Marion Reessler, a Capuchin monk, became superior of the Mission in 1952, he began work on the idea of a vocational training program for the students. The school rooms were remodeled so that now the Mission has shops for welding, automotive mechanics, and electricity.

Music, art, and physical education are emphasized in addition to the vocational courses. The hot lunch program is an important part of the total school program. Spacious, airy dormitories house 150 students, and others come in on the school bus or by car.

The Saint Labre Mission features a basketball team which would be a credit to a school of such larger size. It has established an enviable record with impressive scores.

Sister M. Bustalla, O. S. F., is the principal, and eight Sisters, together with four lay teachers, staff the Saint Labre Mission School.

Two Baptist Mission Schools, important adjuncts to the total missionary program of the Baptist denomination were operated at widely separated points on the Crow Indian Reservation for a great many years.

The first such school which has already been referred to in the previous

chepter, was located at Lodge Grass. It was a one-room elementary school, taught by one teacher, under the supervision of the Rev. W. A. Petzoldt, the Baptist missionary. This school was in operation from 1903 to 1920, when the Crow Agency Boarding School was abandoned, and provision was made for the education of the Crow youth in local public schools.

The other school was located at the Big Horn Mission some ten miles south of the village of Saint Xavier. This school, like the one at Lodge Grass, confined itself to an elementary program and was instructed by one teacher. It was in operation from 1905 to 1920.

CHAPTER VI

GOVERNMENT BOARDING SCHOOLS

"Patience accomplish they labor, accomplish they
Work of devotion."

Evangeline

The aborigines of North America had their own systems of education, through which the young were instructed in their coming labors and responsibilities, embracing not only the whole round of economic pursuits—hunting, fishing, handicrafts, agriculture, and household work—but speech, fine arts, customs, etiquette, social obligations, and tribal lore. Through unconscious absorption and constant inculcation the boy and the girl became the accomplished man and woman. Motives of pride or shame, incentives of flattery or disparagement were constantly brought to bear upon the child, male or female, who was the charge, not only of the parents and grandparents, but of the whole tribe.

On the coming of the whites, a whole new era of secular education, designed and undesigned, began. All of the natives, young and old, were the pupils, and all the whites who came into contact with them were the instructors, whether purposely or through the influence of their example and patronage. The undesigned instruction cannot be measured, but its effect was profound. The Indian passed at once from the stone into the iron age. So rapid was the transition among some of

the eastern tribes that it is difficult now to depict their true life in museum collections.

An account of the designed instruction would have to take into consideration all attempts to change the manners, customs, and motives, to teach reading and writing in a foreign tongue, to acquaint the Indians with new arts and industries, and to impress or force upon them the social organization of their conquerors.

Even in colonial times considerable concern was evidenced over the problems of Indian education. Indeed one of the objects in colonizing Virginia, mentioned in the charter of 1606 and repeated in the charter of 1612, was to "bring the infidels and savages to human civility and a settled and quiet government."¹ All of the colonial colleges, such as William and Mary, Dartmouth, and Harvard, made generous provision for the education of Indian youth. Some of the more promising Indian youths were even sent to England to be educated.

After the Revolutionary war and the establishment of the United States Government, the various Christian bodies either instituted day and boarding schools among the Indians or continued the support of those already in existence and these schools to a large extent bore the burden of Indian education.

In 1819 the first appropriation of \$10,000 was made by Congress for Indian education, the superintendents and agents to be nominated by

¹Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30, Handbook of American Indians, Part I, (Washington: The Government Printing Office, 1907), p. 416.

the President. In 1823 twenty-one schools were receiving Government aid and the number was increased to thirty-eight in 1825.² The first contract school for the education of Indian youth was established on the Tualip Reservation in Washington in 1869. The Government entered actively into the field of Indian education in 1873.

The first schools to be established, organized, and financed by the Government for the benefit of its Indian wards were day schools. Later on, the plan was expanded to include boarding schools on the reservations, and finally boarding schools remote from them.

The training in all these schools was designed to bring the Indians closer to civilized life, with a view to ultimate citizenship by enabling them to assimilate the speech, industrial life, family organization, social manners and customs, civil government, knowledge, modes of thinking, and ethical standards of the whites. The change from a nomadic way of life to agriculture and sedentary occupations had a profound effect in instilling within the Indians themselves a sense of continuous responsibility.

In 1879 a school was established at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, by Capt. R. H. Pratt, U. S. A., for the purpose of educating Indian boys and girls by separating them from their tribal life in order to prepare them to live and labor among white people.³ In accordance with this plan they were taught in this school through the high school grades and instruction was given in vocational training and domestic science. In

²Ibid., p. 417.

³Ibid., p. 418.

order to accelerate association with the white population, the "outing system" was adopted, a plan by which the pupils were encouraged to go out during vacation to earn money. Boys and girls were placed on farms and with other families where they could work for their board and room and perhaps earn a little money. Thus the young Indians were trained in home life and learned to associate with white children. They also were able to gain much valuable experience in the use and operation of farm machinery, the care and handling of domestic animals, and in the household arts. Many of these Indian children formed lasting friendships with these families and often corresponded with them for years.

Contract schools for the education of Indian youth were abandoned as of June 30, 1900. Since that time the various religious orders and missionary societies have had to solicit support for their schools from private sources and the total appropriation for Indian education is applied under the law entirely to the Government schools.

The present scheme of education adopted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs is to instruct the pupils in all of the common branches and also to train them in agriculture and animal husbandry, and to make provision for vocational training courses as well as to offer a balanced athletic program. Some of these Indian schools, for instance, Chilocco Indian Industrial School in Oklahoma, and Haskell Institute at Lawrence, Kansas, are model institutions. These schools have earned for themselves through the years such enviable reputations that their graduates readily find employment in either the Government service or private industry. Many a Government clerk in the Indian service learned to operate a typewriter

while a student at Haskell.

In accordance with its established policy of operating on-reservation boarding schools within easy access to the Indian population, the Bureau of Indian Affairs conducted two Government Boarding Schools, one at Crow Agency, and the other at Pryor, for the benefit of the Crow people.

In 1884 the Crow Agency was transferred from its second location in the valley of the Stillwater River to its third and present site in the valley of the Little Big Horn. Soon after this transfer of reservation headquarters was accomplished, work began on the construction of the buildings which were to house the Crow Agency Boarding School. These consisted of three large multi-storied buildings of substantial brick construction grouped around a central campus which enclosed a playground of ample size.

As was customary in most Government Boarding Schools, the institution at Crow Agency operated on a split-shift schedule, that is, those pupils who attended school in the morning were assigned tasks to do in the afternoon, and vice versa. This arrangement gave the Indian children an opportunity to learn many things without being wearied by the monotony of a task continued too long.

Evaluated now, through the fog of many years and by piece-meal bits of information picked up here and there, the reservation boarding school arrangement was indeed a regimented, lock-step type of education. Boys and girls arose in the morning by the bell and went to bed by the bell. There were bells to announce class time and meal time. Bells

signalled when the pupils must finish eating and move into line. Boys and girls moved from class to class and from building to building in formation. The children, under the careful supervision of matron and disciplinarian were very restrained and orderly and never given to outbursts of any kind.

By present-date educational standards the words "disciplinarian" and "matron" connote something unpleasant, but one must bear in mind that this description fits a school that went out of existence by 1920, besides employees of the Government had their own way of saying and doing things.

At the peak of its enrollment, from sixteen to eighteen employees were required to operate the Crow Agency Boarding School. Mrs. Janette Woodruff, who was matron at the school on two different tours of duty, first from 1900 to 1903, and again from 1906 to 1908, says that there were always three and sometimes four classroom teachers, depending on whether or not a kindergarten was in operation, and that most of the time one was necessary on account of the numbers of small children who insisted upon accompanying their older brothers and sisters to school.⁴ Besides the instructional staff, there was a cook and her helper, a laundress and her helper, two seamstresses, and usually a nurse. In addition, there were the industrial teacher and the farmer, and matrons for both boys and girls. These together with the superintendent and his wife made up the staff of the institution.

⁴Janette Woodruff, as told to Cecil Dryden, Indian Oasis, (Caldwell, Idaho: The Carlton Printers, 1939), p. 30.

Mrs. Janette Woodruff, after twenty-nine years in the Indian service, reminisced over her long and eventful career as follows:

Ours was a busy life, and one apart from the outside world of white people. It was a "giving" life that demanded our all. Employees who chafed under these conditions sooner or later bade a long farewell to the Indian service.⁵

After an existence of thirty-five years, the Crow Agency Boarding School was abolished in 1920. The teachers and other employees were transferred to similar positions on other Indian reservations and the pupils were either absorbed in local public schools or allowed to attend the Mission schools.

The Government Boarding School at Fryer operated from 1901 to 1920 in facilities which were acquired from the Saint Charles Mission. This institution was likewise closed in 1920, and arrangements were made for the education of Indian pupils in local public schools.

Government Boarding Schools still operate at many points in the United States, but there have been none on the Crow Indian Reservation since 1920. A few Crow children attend boarding schools off the reservation but the attendance is limited to hardship cases, orphans, and children from broken homes.

⁵Ibid., p. 31.

CHAPTER VII

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"Above all things, I hope the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on this good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty."

Thomas Jefferson

With the closing of the two Government boarding schools on the Crow Indian Reservation in 1920, the educational development of the Crow people entered a new era.

As a consequence of an agreement worked out whereby the Crow Tribe ceded to the State of Montana sections sixteen and thirty-six in each township, Crow children were guaranteed educational opportunities equal in all respects to those afforded to non-Indian children.¹

Public schools for the education of white children had long existed on the reservation, but there is no point in going back to the years before 1920 since this paper is concerned with Indian education only, and the public schools were not affected by Indian enrollment before that year.

In 1920 public schools were already in operation at Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, Oyala, Pryor, Saint Xavier, and at Hardin which

¹United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Report No. 147, Cultural and Economic Status of the Crow People, Crow Reservation, Montana, (Billings, Montana: Missouri River Investigations Project, December, 1955), p. 16. (Miscographed)

is located just off the geographical limits of the Crow Reservation.² Besides these six "town schools," numerous one-room rural schools were located at scattered points on the reservation to serve the educational needs of the children of farm and ranch families. With the construction of more and better roads, these latter schools have to a large extent, been abandoned in favor of consolidation at larger centers of population. Numerous busses now transport the rural children to the "town schools" mentioned at the beginning of the paragraph.

The immediate problems that confronted school boards and superintendents when they were forced to prepare for the influx of large numbers of Indian pupils were those of expansion and integration. The first problem did not present any great difficulty because the areas which had large Indian populations and would be the most directly affected, namely Crow Agency and Pryor, would be able to occupy the facilities formerly used by the respective boarding schools. In other localities the problem could be met by moving in a few more desks or the addition of a classroom or two. But then there was the problem of integration. No one could say just how well the Indians would be received.

Most people adopted a "wait and see" attitude, and when school opened in the fall of 1920, the Indian pupils were enrolled along with the whites with no unhappy results. The integration of Indian with non-Indian children has proceeded smoothly through the years until by now, in the words of an official of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, "The

²Records on file in the Office of the County Superintendent of Schools, Hardin, Montana.

Crows are one of the best integrated tribes in the Northwest."³

In all of the public schools on the reservation, the Indian pupils receive the same attention and instruction as the whites. The same textbooks and other instructional materials are supplied to both groups. On the other hand, the curriculum is not "watered down" nor courses made easier for the benefit of the Indian pupils. The same high standards of achievement are expected of both Indians and whites.

In all of the classroom and extra-curricular activities, Indian and non-Indian pupils compete on as near an equal basis as is humanly possible to devise. They take the same tests and examinations, are called upon to recite, make oral and written reports, take part in plays and programs, sing in the chorus, play in the band, and engage in playground games and athletic contests. In the latter activity, the Indian pupils really excel. Naturally athletic and possessed of tremendous vitality and endurance, the Crow boys make splendid basketball players. To see even some of the grade school teams in action is a thrilling experience. The Crow youths seem "born the saddle," are able to mount and ride almost as soon as they learn to walk, and develop into superb horsemen. At local rodeos and horse shows, Crow high school boys often win top honors, such as "best all-around cowboy, best horse wrangler, best calf roper," etc.

In all of the public schools in Big Horn County instruction is given according to the following law:

³Interview between Mr. James Crawford, Assistant Director, Community Services, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Area Office, Billings, Montana, and the writer, June 29, 1956.

Courses of Instruction. All public schools shall be taught in the English language, and instruction shall be given in the following branches, viz: Reading, penmanship, written arithmetic, mental arithmetic, orthography, geography, English grammar, physiology and hygiene, with special reference to the effect of alcoholic stimulants and narcotics on the human system, civics (state and federal), United States history, the history of Montana, music, art, elementary agriculture, including cooperative economics. (As amended by Chapter 158, Laws of 1937.)⁴

The State Course of Study prescribed by the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction is used as a guide in presenting the subjects required by law. Individual classroom teachers are, however, allowed wide latitude in the presentation of subject matter. No roadblocks are set up, nor curbs to individual initiative imposed, so long as the end result is conducive to the education of the young. As a result of this policy, some of the teachers have developed ingenious methods for the instruction of the young, particularly in the field of primary education.

Visual and auditory aids consisting of both silent and sound films, filmstrips, and slides are employed as a means of supplementing regular classroom routine and making the instruction more meaningful. Occasional field trips and excursions to points of interest in Billings and other nearby cities arouse interest and enthusiasm on the part of both pupils and parents. The most recent railway excursion, sponsored by the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railway Company in cooperation with the schools of Big Horn County, was participated in by hundreds of grade school children. There were so many requests from parents to

⁴School Laws of the State of Montana (Great Falls, Montana: Tribune Printing and Supply Company, 1953), p. 80.

accompany the tour as sponsors and chaperones that additional coaches had to be provided. Some of the pupils, and even a few parents, took their first train ride on this occasion. The annual Shrine Circus is another event that grade school children await with keen anticipation. All of these experiences provide opportunities for vicarious or incidental learning away from the classrooms.

The Crow Agency School, as part of its enrichment program has in progress a wide-reading program through which boys and girls are encouraged to read a great number of good books appropriate to the grade level during the course of the school year. This is in no way a contest and no rewards are given. The program has been worked out in cooperation with the Big Horn County Free Library in Hardin. According to this plan, the two librarians, Mrs. Mildred Hollend and Mrs. Helen Iwant, come to the school with books every other Wednesday. A period is set aside for library in the morning on these days. Folding dining tables are set up in the gymnasium for the display and selection of books. Then the pupils are brought in room by room to select and exchange books. The librarians keep their own records, thus relieving the teachers of an additional burden. This library program has worked out very satisfactorily, and there has been a phenomenal increase in the circulation of books. In the first year for which records were kept, the circulation amounted to 4092 volumes and the following year, the circulation had almost doubled to 7201 volumes. Besides the services provided by the Big Horn County Free Library, each classroom in the building has its own library.

Mindful of the fact that "Health is the first of all liberties," the public schools on the reservation are ever alert to the physical, medical, and sanitary conditions affecting the lives of their pupils. These schools are indeed fortunate in having available the services of Montana Public Health District No. 1, Dr. E. K. Kilbourne, public health officer, and Miss Christine Heiser, R. N., public health nurse, make periodic visits to all schools on the reservation, administering inoculations and vaccinations, and are also available for consultations. Cumulative health records are kept for each child, thus his clinical history is readily available should one have occasion to refer to it. Mr. Howard Morton, the district sanitarian, and his assistant, Mr. Francis Harris, make regular inspections of school plants and playgrounds, pointing out deficiencies and instances where improvement is desired. Both nurse and sanitarian are available for discussions and lectures pertaining to their respective fields. In recent years these specialists have been happy to come to schools and discuss such subjects as playground safety, sanitation in the home, feminine hygiene, care of the hair and the nails, etc.

Department heads and employees of the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the Crow Agency are always pleased to come to the schools and discuss such subjects as conservation, flood control, the prevention of forest fires, etc. Inasmuch as part of this instruction is always given by Indian assistants, it is all the more impressive.

Each of the six "town schools" mentioned in a preceding paragraph has in effect a hot lunch program which is deemed an integral part of the

total school program. Most of these schools have had hot lunch programs for a number of years. Through contracts entered into between the various school districts and the Department of Public Instruction, certain surplus foodstuffs purchased by the Department of Agriculture are made available to the schools at a very small cost. The State Department of Public Instruction also reimburses each school district a few cents for each lunch served. The Division of Indian Education of the Department of Public Instruction pays the entire cost of lunches for needy Indian children, provided they meet certain criteria. During the year 1954-55 this office reimbursed the schools of Big Horn County the sum of \$14,174.84 for lunches served to needy Indian children.⁵

Inasmuch as the cost of administering and educational program on an Indian reservation would be prohibitive and an unjust burden on the taxpayers due to the large amounts of tax-exempt Indian lands in such areas, the Federal Government reimburses the local school districts, provided they meet certain criteria. Indian education reimbursement is based upon need correlated with effort. The eligibility of Indian pupils is also taken into consideration when measuring the impact of Indian education upon the local school district. Pupils eligible for school reimbursement, as determined by the Federal Government, are those who meet the following criteria:

⁵Mary M. Condon, Annual Report 1954-55, State Department of Public Instruction, Division of Indian Education, to United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, p. 25. (Mimeographed. 27 pp.)

1. One-fourth degree of Indian blood or more
2. Enrolled on the Government rolls of an Indian reservation
3. Residence on tax-exempt land.⁶

Four school districts in Big Horn County qualify for Indian education reimbursement under the above criteria. In the year 1954-55 they received the sum of \$83,061.93 in aid.⁷

Instruction in grades one through eight is provided in public schools located at Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, Wyoala, Saint Xavier, and Pryor. In the Hardin public schools the elementary program ends at the sixth grade, and a junior high school enrolls the pupils in grades seven, eight, and nine. This is the only junior high school in the county.

Only two high schools are maintained in Big Horn County. These are located at Hardin and Lodge Grass. Both maintain splendid educational programs, offering vocational training courses along with the traditional college preparatory courses.

The number of Indian youth attending the two high schools in the county is increasing each year and the present number of Indian high school graduates is estimated at three hundred.⁸

Attendance at non-segregated high schools appears to give the pupils of Indian blood more confidence and initiative so that integration is more natural and less difficult. There is no question but that the high school is playing an important part in the integration of people of Indian blood into communities away from the reservation.

⁶Ibid., p. 20

⁷Ibid., p. 25.

⁸Ibid., p. 2.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Northwest of Sheridan, Wyoming, and southeast of Billings, Montana, some 3,500 Crow Indians are today occupying a reservation of sizable proportions somewhat near the center of their old tribal domain. The tribe is divided into two bands but there is free intercourse back and forth and such differences as do persist are due to the influence of individual personalities. The ancient name of the Crows was "Absa-Rokee," which early-day interpreters mistakenly translated into "Crow" Indians.

The Crows speak a language of Hidatsa-Siouan origin and very old traditions place the origin of the tribe in a "land of many lakes," probably near the source of the Mississippi River. From this region they migrated westward, and in time came to take up their abode on the edge of the Great Plains and the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. They were leading a nomadic existence in this area when first contacted by white men one hundred and fifty years ago.

The Crows at this time had a well defined tribal organization with chiefs, sub-chiefs, camp chiefs, and a police system. Early-day accounts record the absence of crime, lawlessness, and rowdyism among the Crow people.

Complicated systems of war honors provided the route by which aspiring young warriors might gain social prominence and rise to positions

of authority in the tribe. The government of the tribe was entirely in the hands of this military autocracy.

The vast herds of buffalo which once roamed the Crow Country provided food, clothing, and shelter for members of the tribe, and with the coming of the white traders tanned buffalo robes found a ready market in the pioneer fur-trading establishments of the frontier, Buffalo robes were the chief stock-in-trade of the Crows for a great many years. They could be swapped for arms, ammunition, knives, and all other commodities that the Indians required.

The Crow Indians were constantly at war with their traditional enemies, the Sioux and Blackfeet. Early accounts record no full scale invasions of enemy territory, however. Sporadic forays and skirmishes seem to have gratified the craving for revenge and satisfied the sporting urge. The Crows were expert horsemen, and the fact that they were able to protect their hunting grounds against their enemies speaks for the military prowess of the Crow people.

At an early date the Crows established peaceful relations with the white people. The first treaty between the Crow Tribe and the United States Government was arranged in 1825 and other treaties followed in 1851 and 1868. The Crows have been allies of the United States Government since the War of 1812.

Crow Indian scouts served with the Army during the frontier wars in which the hostile Sioux were rounded up and placed on reservations. The annihilation of Custer's command could have been prevented if Custer had heeded the advice of his scouts.

Christian missionary interest in the Crows dates back over a century to the time when Father DeSmet first visited the tribe in 1840. Permanent missions, however, were not established among the Crows until about seventy years ago. Both Catholic and Baptist Churches have had active missionary programs on the reservation for a great many years and at the present time, the majority of the tribe professes membership in one denomination or the other.

Formal education of the Crows did not get under way until after the Crow Agency had been moved to its present location in the valley of the Little Big Horn River in the year 1884. Soon thereafter a Government Boarding School was opened at the agency and a second such institution was opened at Pryor in 1901. These two boarding schools served the education needs of the Crows until they were abolished in 1920.

At about the same time the Crow Agency Boarding School was established, Catholic missionaries arrived on the reservation to open the Saint Xavier Mission School in the valley of the Big Horn River. This Mission school, except for an interregnum of fourteen years between 1921 and 1935, has continued in operation to the present time. The Saint Charles Mission School at Pryor was a natural outgrowth of the work of the Catholic Church in the Pryor area. It was conducted as a boarding school from 1892 to 1898 when it was forced to close its doors due to financial difficulties. It was operated as a day school from 1920 to 1926, and from 1936 to the present time. The impact of these two Mission schools on the education development of the Crows has been profound.

The Baptist Church conducted two Mission schools, one at Lodge

Crows, and the other at the Big Horn Mission for a great many years. These two schools were discontinued in 1920 when arrangements were made for the education of Indian children in local public schools.

The education of the Crows entered a new phase when the two Government Boarding Schools on the reservation were closed in 1920. Since that time the Crow children have attended local public schools.

The integration of Indian with non-Indian children had made long strides since the public schools first opened their doors for the enrollment of Indian children in 1920. Integration appears to contribute to the Indian pupil's well-being, gives him a feeling of security, and helps to develop his self-confidence.

Mr. H. R. Salyer, Superintendent of Schools in School District 17-H which comprises much of the reservation area, including the Hardin city system, has been in direct contact with the education of Indian youth for the past twenty-five years. Mr. Salyer made the following observation concerning the education progress of the Crow people:

The education program among the Crow people has made splendid progress during the last ten years. The steady improvement in the number of pupils completing the eighth grade and graduating from high schools is a healthy indication that the people of Indian blood are beginning to recognize the importance of education in the struggle for existence under the American way of life.¹

Most Indian parents seem anxious to have their children educated and have by now ceased to be indifferent. The results of seventy years of effort are immeasurable. Many of the Crows now take their places beside the whites in the industrial pursuits and in the higher walks of

¹Interview between Mr. H. R. Salyer, Superintendent of Schools in School District 17-H, and the writer, June 25, 1956.

life as well. The best evidence that the Crow Indian is educable is the impressive list of those who have succeeded.

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Strand, Mrs. Lura P. County Superintendent of Schools, Big Horn County,
Hardin, Montana

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

MANPOWER AND MATERIAL FOR THE YELLOWTAIL DAM PROJECT

Commenting on the vast amount of manpower and material that would be required in the construction of the proposed \$96,000,000 Yellowtail Dam, The Hardin Tribune-Herald, under the date of August 4, 1955, stated that:

Construction of the Yellowtail Dam would require a peak construction force of 1,500 men and would require six years to build, according to a report by J. Carter Johnson of the Billings Chamber of Commerce, based on facts obtained from the Bureau of Reclamation.

Actual construction would require 19,600,000 man hours of labor, and start a chain reaction which would mean employment of additional thousands not directly connected with activity at the dam site.

Construction of the dam, power plant and other structures would mean comparable expenditure for cement, steel, lumber and other materials. Hardware, electrical supplies, machinery, and other materials would require additional thousands of man-hours of work in mines, factories, and transportation, Johnson continued.

About 3,240,000 tons (1,800,000 cubic yards) of gravel and 675,000 tons (565,000 cubic yards) of sand would be processed at the site. Johnson said it would require 49,000 railroad cars to carry the material needed.

He said 84 trains with 30 cars each would be needed to haul all the cement required, 47 trains of 40 cars for fly ash used with the cement, 4 trains of 35 cars for reinforcement steel, 2 trains of 35 cars for penstocks, gates, and valves, 3 trains of 35 cars for turbines and generators, 15 cars for trash racks and 21 cars for cooling pipe.

This would be a total of 4,846 railroad cars of material.

The dam and power plant would cost approximately one fourth as much as would the Hoover Dam and power plant if built today.

Based on quantity of items used at the Hoover (formerly Boulder) Dam, one fourth of the materials would require 4,700 paint brushes, 3,500 shovels, 6,000 pairs of rubber boots, 21,800 hacksaw blades, 323,000 flashlights, 3,260 protective hats, 4,500 kegs of nails, 3,200 water buckets, 5,000 sheets of emery paper and 125 miles of manila rope.

Probably 1,200,000 gallons of gasoline, 130,000 gallons of lubricating oil and 195,000 pounds of grease would be required.

Materials for the Hoover Dam came from all but two states. More than \$17,000,000 was spent in California, \$4,000,000 in Pennsylvania, \$2,000,000 in Wisconsin and New York, \$1,000,000 in six states and \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 in five states. While many purchases would be made from nearby dealers, materials would come from throughout the nation for Yellowtail, Johnson pointed out.

He also stressed importance of the project to Montana's irrigation. In addition to 45,000 acres in Big Horn County expected to be irrigated directly from the dam, there is a total of 36,700 acres in proposed pumping projects.

These are planned on high bench areas along the Yellowstone from Forsyth to Big Timber, and would use Yellowtail Dam power to pump river water to lands now semi-arid.

The Bureau of Reclamation listed 10,000 acres for three proposed projects in Rosebud County; 9,900 acres for two in Treasure County; 14,100 acres for four in eastern Yellowstone County; 2,400 acres for two in western Yellowstone County; and 300 acres for one in Sweet Grass County.