

# Whitestone Hill (Ínyansánj Pahá)

State Historic Site



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*everyone.*

## Understanding History and Building a Peaceful Future

We invite you to learn about Whitestone Hill and reflect on what happened here on Sept. 3, 1863. You are about to encounter a painful history. The Whitestone massacre stands as one of the deadliest killings on North Dakota soil. We are striving to tell this story as accurately as possible, incorporating first-hand accounts of those involved as well as information from descendants of Native Americans and U.S. soldiers.

State Historical Society of North Dakota staff worked with members of the Crow Creek, Sisseton-Wahpeton, Spirit Lake, and Standing Rock nations, Dickey County community members, the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission, the Whitestone Historical Society, historians, and archaeologists to gather information and shape this experience for visitors.

After the attack, many survivors from both sides found it too painful to discuss openly. For this reason, there are probably first-hand accounts that are still unknown. Even the location of the attack remains somewhat uncertain.

What we can say with certainty is that innocent people, including elders, women, and children, were killed in an unwarranted act of violence. We are committed to enhancing cultural understanding, respecting diverse values, and creating opportunities to build a peaceful world.

**Note:** These interpretive panels contain graphics and language that may be upsetting to some visitors.



*In 2020, a group of Dakota and Lakota descendants from across the northern Plains undertook their first of four annual healing rides in memory of ancestors at Whitestone. The horseback ride started in Fort Thompson, South Dakota, and stretched 187 miles to Whitestone Hill. The ride ended on Sept. 3, the anniversary of the massacre.*

View these panels online. [bit.ly/WhitestoneHill](https://bit.ly/WhitestoneHill)

# A Place of Remembrance

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*They never had any reason to believe they were regarded as enemies by our Government until they were fired upon by our troops.*

—Causes Hail, a 19th-century Dakota speaking about his relatives who were there



*This image of the massacre is based on a sketch by commanding officer Gen. Alfred Sully. Harper's Weekly published it several weeks after the massacre of Sept. 3, 1863. SHSND Manuscripts 10548*

In September 1863, between 150 and 300 Dakota men, women, and children were massacred here at Ínyansán Pahá (Creamy-White Stone Hill), a holy place for Dakota people since time immemorial.

The attack resulted in more Native American casualties than any other conflict between U.S. soldiers and American Indians in North Dakota. The losses may have even been higher than those at Sand Creek, Colorado, in 1864 and Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890.

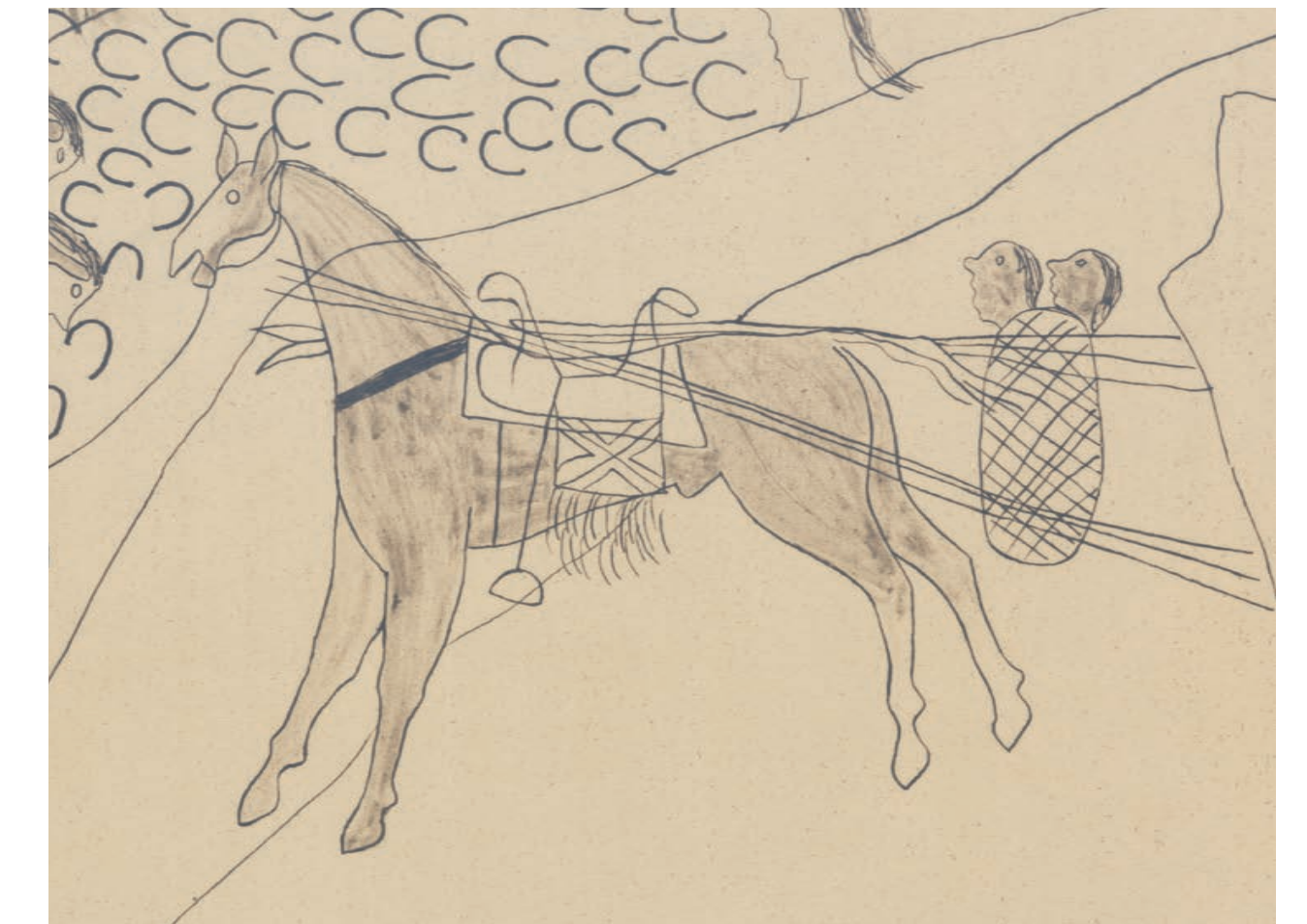
Whitestone is a sacred place to several Dakota and Lakota bands, especially the Iháŋkthūŋwaŋna (Yanktonais), who would come here to pray and perform ceremonies then and today. During late summers in the 1800s, multiple bands gathered in the surrounding region to hunt bison and make jerky. The main hunting camp might shift locations from year to year, but in 1863, the camp was gathered here around Big Stone Lake.

In late afternoon on Sept. 3, three military units under Gen. Alfred Sully approached and surrounded this camp as part of a military response to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. While Sully asked camp leaders whether any U.S. enemies were present, one unit opened fire without orders to shoot. A second unit joined in, killing an estimated 150 to 300 adults and children before the survivors escaped. Soldiers later concluded

they had probably killed some of their own as well during the chaos. Over the next two days, Sully and his troops took 156 people prisoner and plundered or destroyed all food, lodging, possessions, horses, and dogs.

Almost all of those present during the attack were at peace with the United States. Over time, we have learned the names of many of those families and bands. Their descendants describe the attack as a massacre on a peaceful camp.

Sully had a history of insubordinate troops. In the aftermath, he downplayed this grave loss of command by making unsubstantiated accusations against the camp and creating an impression that the attack was a well-coordinated battle against enemies of the United States following the U.S.-Dakota War in Minnesota.



*During the attack, some mothers tried to save their babies and toddlers by tying them to dog and horse drags and shooing them away. The next morning, some of the disoriented animals were still dragging the crying children among the broken tipis and dead bodies, a haunting image described by survivors from both sides. Detail of SHSND 10085*



*Descendants of Yanktonai leader Mahtó Nupá (Two Bears) dedicating a monument in 1942 to the American Indians who died at Whitestone. This is one of the earliest memorials to Indigenous victims of violence in the United States. A group of Ellendale area residents erected this monument, including 19-year-old Clinton Hess, who carved the bronze mold.*

*Two Bears' family are, left to right, Eugene Looking Horse (boy in overalls), his mother, Agnes Looking Horse, James All Yellow, Alberta Two Bears (girl standing in front), her grandfather Basil Two Bears, his wife, Annie Two Bears, and Frank Young Bear. Basil was Two Bears' grandson. SHSND 00004/-0002.000#00046*

# A Sacred Gathering Place

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***Spirits were high in the camp on this day.  
 This was the day after the big hunt.***

–Napé Hóte Wiŋ (Gray Hand Woman or Mary Big Moccasin), 9-year-old Dakota survivor



*A Dakota tipi camp at Standing Rock Indian Reservation photographed by Frank Bennett Fiske in 1910. SHSND MSS 10105 1952-0131*

According to tribal tradition, Whitestone has been a sacred gathering place since time immemorial. Some Dakotas and Lakotas say this is a place where the divine lawgiver, White Buffalo Calf Woman, has appeared on Earth. Her teachings, including the use of the čhaŋnúŋpa, or sacred ceremonial pipe, define the Dakota and Lakota people. This makes Whitestone one of the holiest places in Dakota and Lakota country, where people still gather to pray and perform ceremonies.

According to descendants, there was a festival atmosphere here in September 1863 as tribal bands arrived, reuniting families and friends. According to Gen. Alfred Sully, about 4,000 people and 400 tipis surrounded Big Stone Lake. Pvt. J.C. Luce, who was there on Sept. 3, called the gathering “a whole Indian city of teepees.”

### A Bison Hunting Paradise

Big Stone Lake is on the eastern edge of the Missouri Coteau. Covered in mixed-grass prairie and wetlands, this habitat was a paradise for bison. In mid and late summer, bison congregated here by the tens of thousands to graze and rut. By September they were well fed, providing the fattiest, most-filling meat of the year for tribal members. Many bands who otherwise travelled separately, especially Yanktonais, assembled to surround and kill an entire herd. Most meat was processed into jerky and tallow to feed the people and trade.

**Gen. Alfred Sully estimated that there were 400,000 to 500,000 pounds of bison jerky in the Whitestone camp, illustrating how successful bison hunting could be as a way of life.**

If the Whitestone camp made <b>400,000</b> pounds of jerky,	and it takes about <b>2.5</b> pounds of meat to make a pound of jerky,	then the camp may have butchered roughly <b>1 million</b> pounds of meat.
If they butchered <b>1 million</b> pounds of meat	and each bison provides an average of <b>400</b> pounds,	then they may have killed <b>2,500</b> bison.
If bison jerky was worth about <b>\$4</b> per ounce at 2023 retail prices,	and the people made <b>400,000</b> pounds of jerky,	then its 2023 value would be <b>\$25.6 million</b> .

# Who Was Here on Sept. 3, 1863?

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## The OČÉTI ŠAKÓWIN (Seven Council Fires)

### LAKOTA

Western Council Fires  
(*Lakota Dialect*)

Tetons

Húŋkpap̃ha or Uncpapa

Itazipco or Sans Arc

Minniconjou

Oglala

Oohanunpa or Two Kettle

Sičhán̄ǵu or Brulé

Sihásapa or Blackfeet

### DAKOTA

Middle Council Fires  
(*Nakota Dialect*)

Yanktonai

Yankton

Eastern Council Fires  
(*Dakota Dialect*)

Santee

Mdewakanton

Sisseton

Wahpekute

Wahpeton

Most people camping at Whitestone in 1863 were Yanktonai Dakotas. Some Isányathi (Santee Dakotas) and Sičhán̄ǵu (Brulé Lakotas), and possibly Húŋkpap̃ha Lakotas and Sihásapa (Blackfeet Lakotas) were also present. According to oral tradition, some had been making their way from Bdé Hąŋska (Long Lake), southeast of today's Bismarck.



Wise Spirit, a Yanktonai shown in the early 1900s with Shoot Holy and their families, was a spiritual leader in Two Bears' band. Wise Spirit was at Whitestone on Sept. 3. SHSND 1952/-0000.000#03744

Main divisions, bands, and sub-bands of the Dakota and Lakota nations, also known as the Sioux or Očéti Šakówin (Seven Council Fires).

# Works Progress Administration Adds Amenities for Visitors

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*Martin Fuhrer, the first State Historical Society of North Dakota caretaker at Whitestone Hill, stands in front of the new "combination shelter." From 1936 to 1941, the federal Works Progress Administration built two shelters, the entrance gate, and the steps up the hill using local fieldstones. They also constructed a coffer dam on Big Stone Lake, improved roads, and planted trees.*

*The State Historical Society manages this state historic site and 59 additional museums and sites. SHSND 10548-VOL-001-p00031*

# Yanktonai Seasonal Routes

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Nomadic tribes like the Dakotas and Lakotas had structured travel patterns. They typically traveled between specific rivers in winter and the high plains in summer with stops at ceremonial, trade, and additional locations on the way. These routes, which varied over time and from band to band, are sometimes called seasonal rounds.

Using the Yanktonais as an example, we can roughly reconstruct a seasonal round in the 19th century. The Yanktonais were the largest Dakota or Lakota group at Whitestone in 1863. Their homeland centered in eastern North Dakota and eastern South Dakota.

### Spring

As the grass began to green, Yanktonai bands would move from river bottom areas of the James and Missouri rivers to the high plains to hunt. By the 1850s and 1860s, bands led by Akíčhita Čík`ada (Little Soldier), Mahtó Nunpá (Two Bears), and others would first plant gardens in the river bottoms before leaving for the high plains. For example, the Dirt Lodges band, with about 12 to 15 earthlodges along the James River, planted about 40 acres of crops in 1863, including 20 acres of corn as well as beans, peas, turnips, and potatoes.

### Summer

Almost all bands hunted throughout the summer, but gathering wild crops was important, too. In June, many dug up and dried típsinǵa, or prairie turnips. The sweet, starchy roots were easy to store and use for soup. As the season progressed, they picked wild fruits along creeks and rivers including juneberries, currants, gooseberries, chokecherries, buffalo berries, plums, and grapes.

Throughout summer, bands would begin joining into larger camps. By late summer, when bison were at their fattest, these groups included enough hunters to attempt to surround and kill a herd.

### Fall

After drying tons of bison jerky to trade, many bands travelled northwest to the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara villages on the Upper Missouri. This was a major shopping and trading destination since the villages offered corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and other crops. Neighboring fur trade posts also offered Euro-American goods for sale and trade.

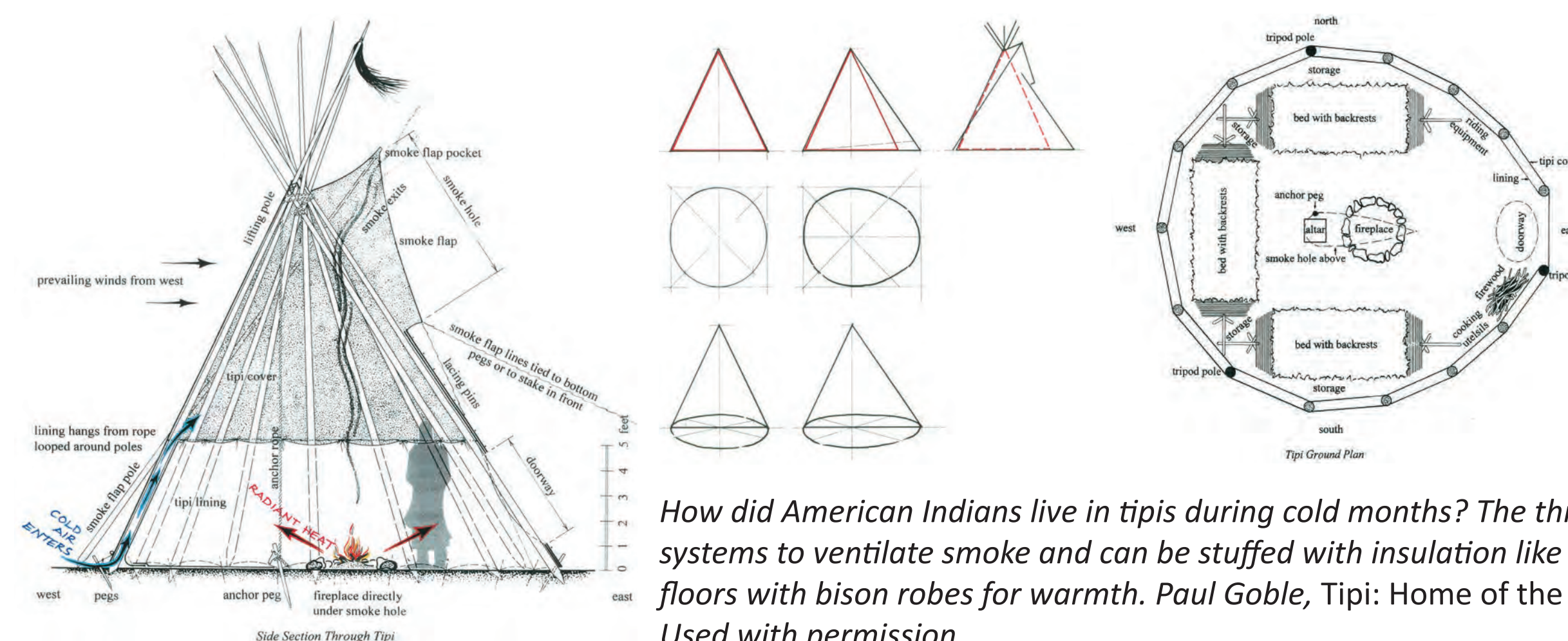


*The flavors, colors, textures, and preparation methods of corn at that time, including these Mandan varieties, were even more diverse than those available today.*

### Winter

As weather turned cold in late fall, bands separated and returned to the shelter of the river valleys, where they typically set up tipis. A few Yanktonai bands built earthlodges. The people continued hunting bison on river bottoms and tapped boxelder trees for their sweet, herbal-flavored sap.

Even with their near constant movement, Dakotas and Lakotas had deep connections to places where they repeatedly returned. Multiple places served as home. Some places were for feasts, prayer, celebration, or purification. Many would anticipate returning to the spot where they met a spouse, gave birth to a child, or buried a loved one.



*How did American Indians live in tipis during cold months? The thipi (Dakota for "to dwell"), has systems to ventilate smoke and can be stuffed with insulation like grass. People lined the earthen floors with bison robes for warmth. Paul Goble, Tipi: Home of the Nomadic Buffalo Hunters. Used with permission.*

# Yanktonai Seasonal Routes

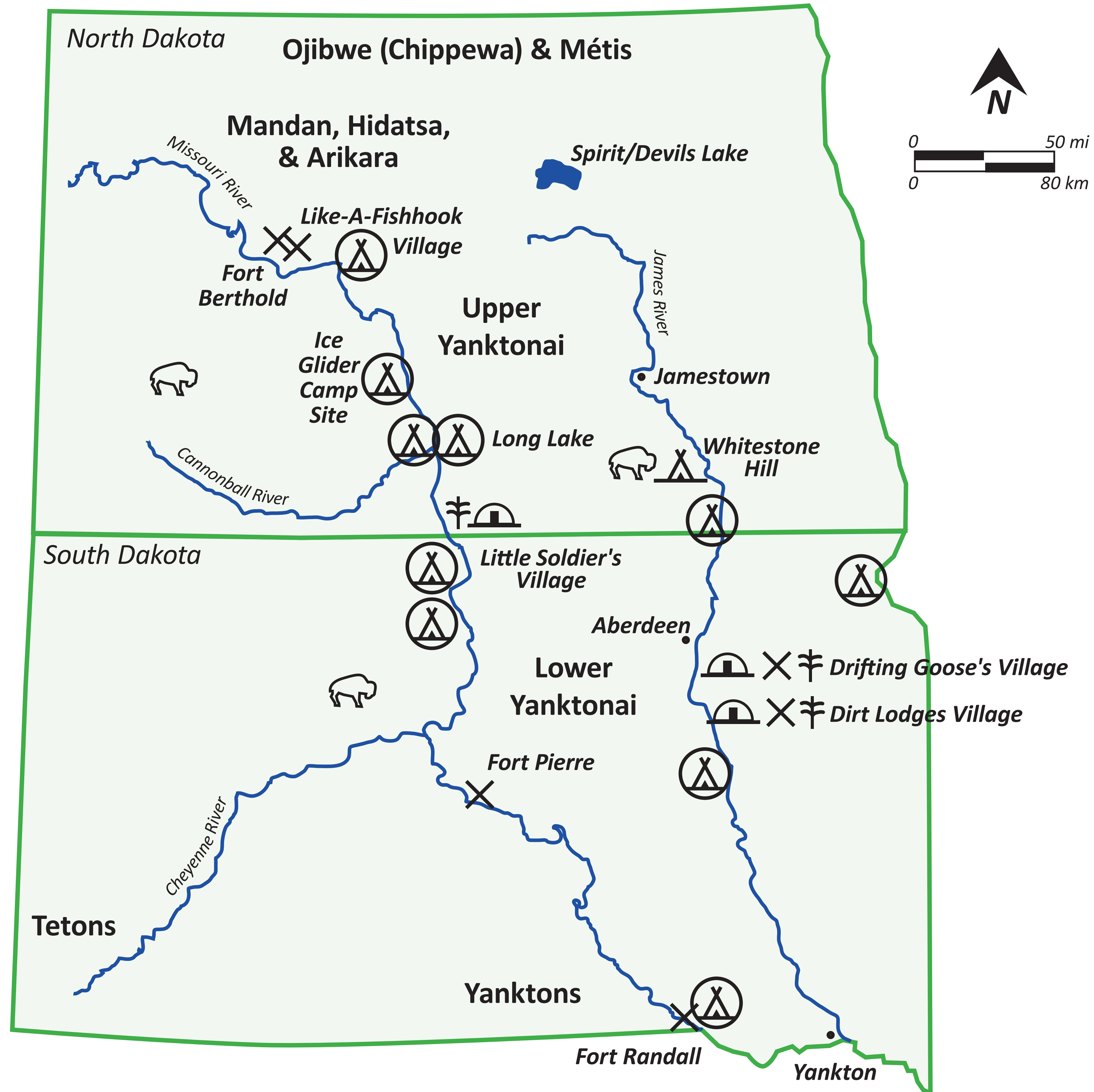
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## Key

- ✕ Trade Location
- 🏠 Yanktonai Earthlodge Village
- ⛛ Camp Site
- 🌾 Crop Land
- 🐄 Hunting Area
- ⛛ Winter Camp Site
- Current City

# Dakota and U.S. Relations Before 1863

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Multiple survivors spoke of their shock at being attacked by U.S. forces. They thought they were at peace with the United States.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition established the first U.S. diplomatic relations with Dakota and Lakota (Očéti Šakówiŋ) bands on the northern Plains in 1804. From then until the 1860s, interactions with the

U.S. government could be tense but were typically non-violent. Even though the U.S. government increasingly tried to control Dakota and Lakota bands and take over their territories, most bands and leaders thought these issues could best be resolved through peaceful means. Some bands defended their interests by force, but even these conflicts seldom developed into extended warfare.

Over these years, many Dakotas and Americans traded, exchanged gifts, smoked the sacred pipe, negotiated treaties, and hosted feasts. Multiple American Presidents welcomed Dakota leaders to visit at the White House in Washington, D.C. The American government and private companies built trading posts for Dakotas. Congress once sent physicians to vaccinate Dakotas against smallpox. Some American officers and Dakota leaders formed friendships. There were some Dakota women who married white men.

Each band was independent. The Dakota nation is a group of relatives who share a way of life, but were not one political entity. American government officials and military officers understood these separations enough to use the terms “friendly” and “hostile” to distinguish bands that were and were not at peace with them. Government officials were usually careful not to hold the entire Očéti Šakówiŋ responsible for the actions of individual bands or war parties.

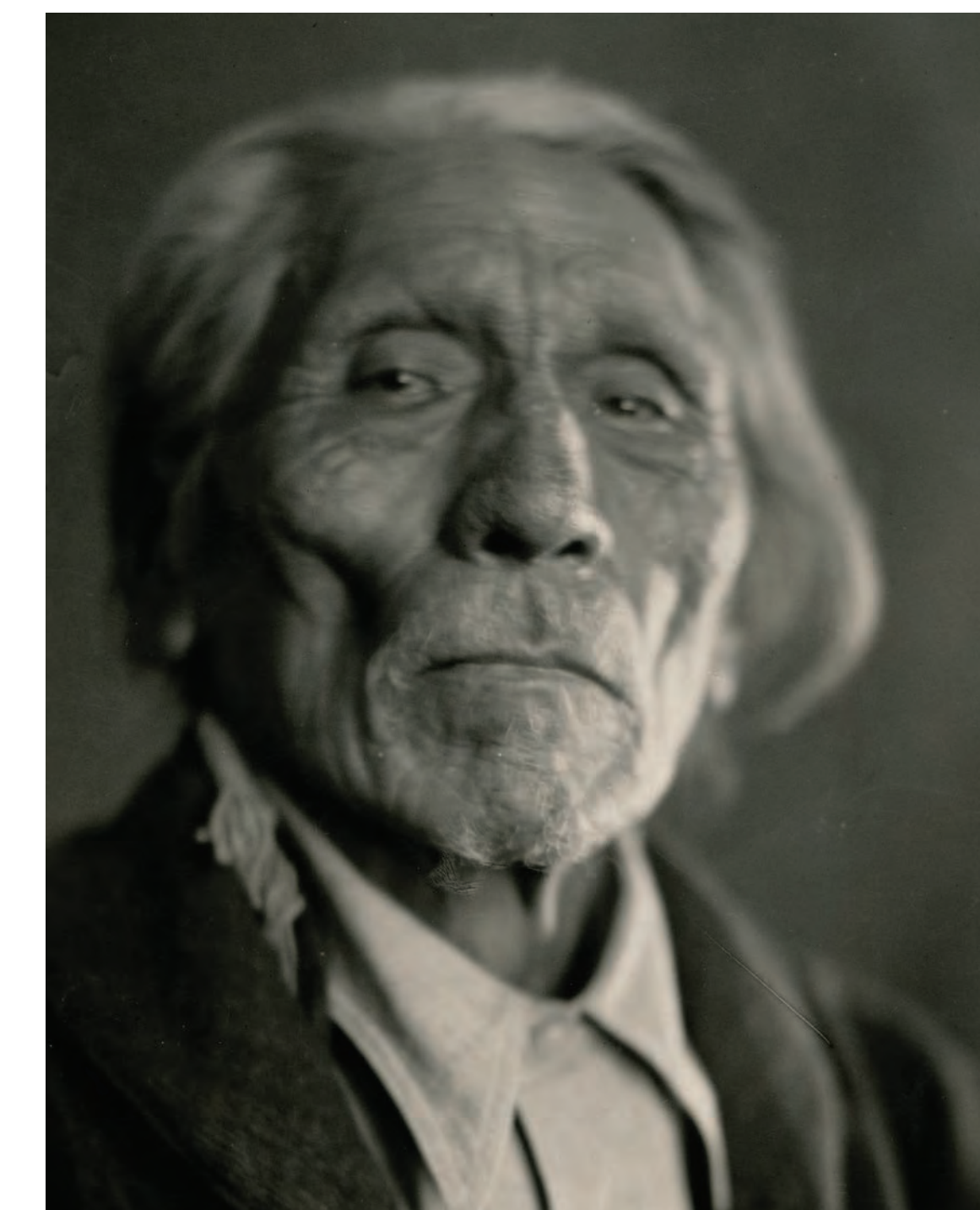


*A representation of the Two Bears family lodge in 1950. In 1933, Two Bears' daughter Mato Cinca identified this as the spot where her family's lodge had stood. She was about 11 years old on the day of the massacre. SHSND A/-514#00003*

Dakota and Lakota leaders extended similar considerations toward Americans. They generally recognized the difference between theft or violence committed by local settlers and the actions of the U.S. government in Washington, D.C.

When the U.S. Dakota-War of 1862 broke out, the vast majority of Dakota and Lakota people and bands did not attack. Many headmen worked to distinguish their bands as friendly to the United States, often at great personal risk. Some Sisseton and Wahpeton leaders, including Iron Walker, Solomon Two Stars, Paul Mazakutemane, and Gabriel Renville, steadfastly refused to join the fighting. Other headmen worked to free Euro-American captives from their own Santee relatives.

The massacre at Whitestone, however, played a major role in turning many survivors into enemies of the United States, setting the direction for decades of conflict on the northern Plains. Many surviving Dakota leaders, including Little Soldier, Big Head, and Two Bears, would fight against the United States and Lt. Col. George Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn 13 years later.



*Yanktonai leaders and Whitestone survivors Mahtó Nupá (Two Bears, left) and Akíčhita Čík`ada (Little Soldier, right) pursued friendly relationships with the United States. Little Soldier signed a treaty in 1825 in which the United States promised to receive his band “into their friendship, and under their protection.”  
Left: SHSND 00022-H-00015  
Right: SHSND 1952-05870*



# The Impact of the U.S.-Dakota War

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A panel from the Gág-Heller-Schwendinger Panorama (1891-1893) depicting U.S.-Dakota War fighting at Acton, Minnesota. Minnesota Historical Society

In 1862, some Dakota bands, mostly members of the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute Santee bands, attacked Euro-American homes and communities in southern Minnesota. This was called the U.S.-Dakota War. These Dakota bands killed more than 600 settlers, including men, women, and children. An estimated 40,000 Euro-Americans fled their homes. Local militias fought back, ending the raids after

about six weeks. The militias took thousands of Dakotas prisoner, including many who were innocent. On Dec. 26, they hanged 38 Dakota prisoners in Mankato, the largest mass execution in American history. Meanwhile, other Dakotas fled west or into Canada.

Some settlers understood that most Dakotas were neutral or supported peace during this conflict. Many Dakota leaders condemned the attacks, and some took steps to protect settler families.

However, rumors of additional attacks swirled through Euro-American communities. Minnesota Gov. Alexander Ramsey demanded that all Dakotas be pursued and punished. Gen. John Pope sent out two military campaigns in 1863 to capture or kill bands of Dakota people, one under Gen. Henry Hastings Sibley and another under Gen. Alfred Sully.

*It is my purpose utterly to exterminate the Sioux if I have the power to do so and even if it requires a campaign lasting the whole of next year. Destroy everything belonging to them and force them out to the plains, unless, as I suggest, you can capture them. They are to be treated as maniacs or wild beasts, and by no means as people with whom treaties or compromises can be made.*

—Gen. John Pope to Gen. Henry Sibley, Sept. 28, 1862

A year had passed, and finding any more enemy bands would have been virtually impossible. However, based on public sentiment in and around Minnesota, the military troops felt pressured to take dramatic measures, including violence, to help Midwesterners feel safe. Countless newspaper editorials preserve a record of these sentiments.

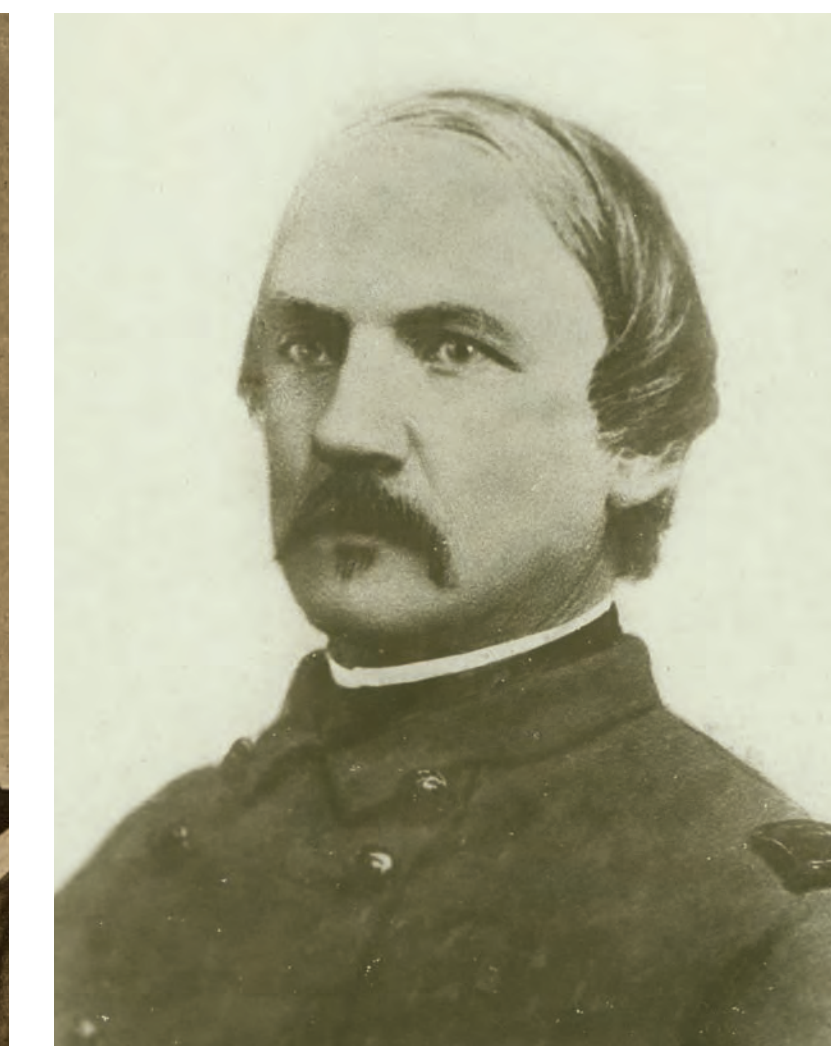
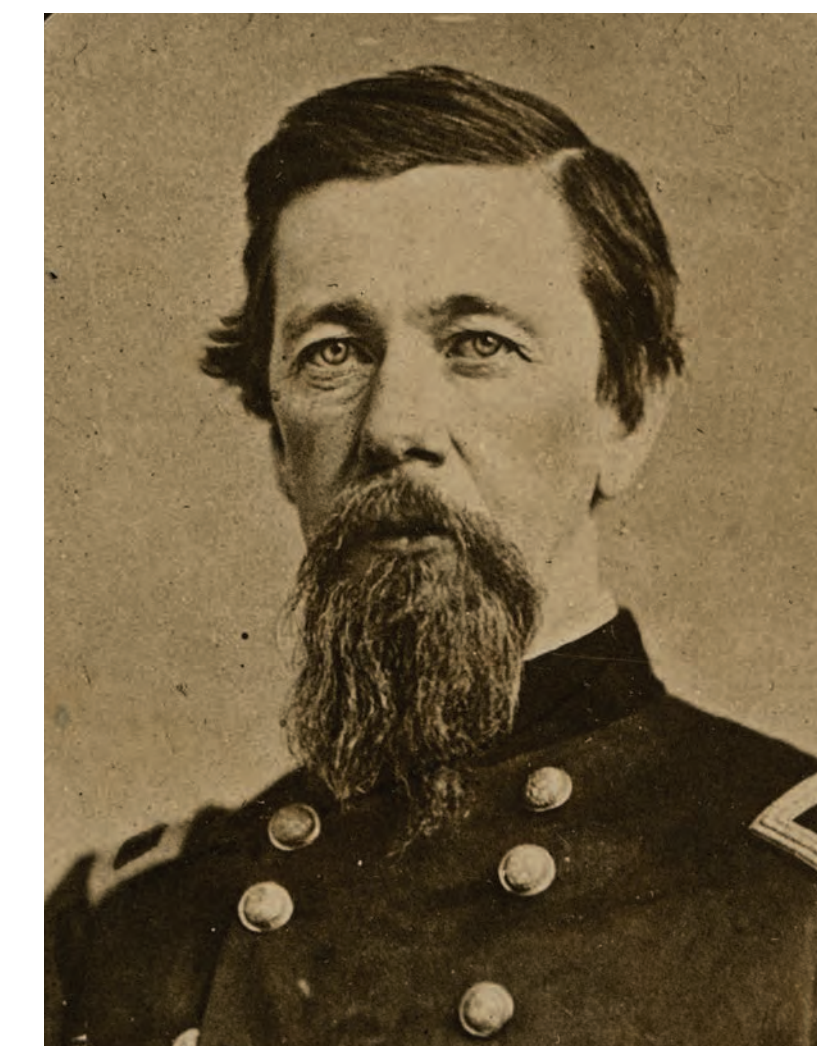
*The life of a single citizen of the United States is worth more than their whole nation in the eyes of the Government—until every Indian tribe in the Northwest is made to feel the irresistible power of the Government, and is rendered forever incapable of lifting a hostile hand against it—the war has not ended and ought not to end.*

—St. Cloud Democrat, Oct. 30, 1862

*Let it be a war of extermination.*

—T.M. Newsom, letter to the editor, St. Paul Daily Press, Aug. 30, 1862

For this military campaign, Sully's forces of about 1,300 soldiers gathered at Fort Randall on the southeastern border of what is now South Dakota preparing to ride north. Two main units, the 6th Iowa Cavalry and the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry, were new and consisted of local volunteers.



Left to right: Generals John Pope, Alfred Sully, and Henry Hastings Sibley. Pope intended for Sully and Sibley to surround fleeing Dakotas from the south and east, respectively. Left to right: SHSND 00123/-0000.000#00029; A/-4269#00001; and A/-3200#00001

# Motives of the Sully Expedition of 1863

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Gen. Alfred Sully painted this watercolor of an earlier expedition crossing the James River around 1856. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University 1084434

*My husband's great-grandfather was a soldier with Sully's troops at Whitestone Hill. The only thing that he comments on is that he vowed to be a better man and better person sometime following.*

—Anonymous email to State Historical Society, 2018

Gen. Alfred Sully's troops hastily opened fire on a camp of Dakotas without knowing whether they were allies or enemies. Who were these soldiers, and what was on their minds that day? While we cannot know with certainty, letters, diaries, and reports reveal a variety of attitudes.

## Friendship

A number of the soldiers actually had warm feelings towards the Yanktonais for helping free American prisoners during the U.S.-Dakota War. In about June, some Iowa soldiers hosted a feast for 16 Yanktonai leaders at Fort Randall, calling them "firm and abiding friends." It is doubtful they knew they were attacking Yanktonais that September.

## Indifference

Some soldiers had enlisted to fight in the Civil War to help preserve the Union or end slavery. They were disappointed to be sent on an unrelated campaign to find Native Americans on the northern Plains. Sgt. J.H. Drips of the 6th Iowa wrote of being "recruited under false pretenses." Some wrote that they would be glad to attack any Dakota camp to finish the expedition and join the "real" war against the Confederates.

## Racism

This was a time when mainstream intellectuals actively promoted racism as part of a misguided understanding of evolution and "survival of the fittest." Many soldiers' letters and diaries are filled with examples of similar genocidal attitudes and disregard for non-European lives.

*I wish they would all die. ... It would save us the trouble of killing them next summer.*

—Henry J. Wieneke, 6th Iowa Cavalry

An 1863 murder at Fort Randall in today's South Dakota illustrates the genocidal attitude of certain soldiers. While Sully's expedition was stationed there about three months before the Whitestone massacre, 16 soldiers shot an elder named Puffy Eyes or Pouting Eye and six additional Lakotas in the back. Puffy Eyes was a U.S. ally who had recently negotiated the release of Euro-American prisoners from other Dakota bands. Sully was initially outraged about the shooting, but dropped the investigation. His indifference may have signaled to his troops that he was willing to tolerate the murder of innocent Dakotas.

## Revenge

Some soldiers wanted revenge against all Dakotas. Their thoughts mirrored the violent rhetoric of Midwestern newspapers.

During the expedition, news reached the 2nd Nebraska that five children of their own Henson Wiseman had been killed by a party of Dakotas. This killing may have intensified some soldiers' feelings of revenge toward all Dakotas.

## Fear

Sully had a recent blemish on his Civil War record. He had been removed from his previous command after the Battle of Fredericksburg in Virginia for failure to discipline mutinying soldiers. Attacking the Dakotas, he thought, would return him to the good graces of his senior officers.

However, low water on the Missouri River delayed Sully's departure northward for months. His commanding officer, Gen. John Pope, feared that Sully might not find and subdue

the Dakotas before winter. Pope wrote angry letters to Sully, demanding that he do something decisive, implying that otherwise Sully would be accountable for any future Dakota attacks on American civilians.

*Such a failure as you anticipate must not happen, as it will be impossible for you to explain it satisfactorily.*

—Gen. John Pope to Gen. Alfred Sully, Aug. 5, 1863



Pvt. George P. Belden of the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry sketched the tipis and trading post at Fort Randall, where Sully's troops killed Puffy Eyes and five other allied Lakotas. Nebraska State Historical Society Photograph Collections 7294-3688.

# The Initial Encounter

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On the afternoon of Sept. 3, Maj. A.E. House and about 300 soldiers from the 6th Iowa approached the Whitestone camp. Several Dakota leaders including Two Bears, All Around Black, Big Head, and Black Prairie Dog spoke with them on a ridge about 300 yards north of the camp. Big Head carried an empty flour sack as a white flag of truce.

House demanded the unconditional surrender of the camp. Since the camp was inhabited by numerous bands,



Column by platoons en route, a watercolor by Gen. Alfred Sully from an earlier expedition, circa. 1856. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University 1309557

each a sovereign entity, no one person could speak for or surrender the entire camp. The leaders offered to surrender themselves instead. To this day, these men are honored by their descendants for taking this risk.

House rejected this offer. Hoping to keep the people at the camp until Gen. Alfred Sully could catch up, House sent three men to find Sully and most of the soldiers, who were about 6 miles away. The camp suspected trouble and began to pack up and flee.

*Broken up dance. Many divisions of Sioux were camping together when suddenly they dispersed.*

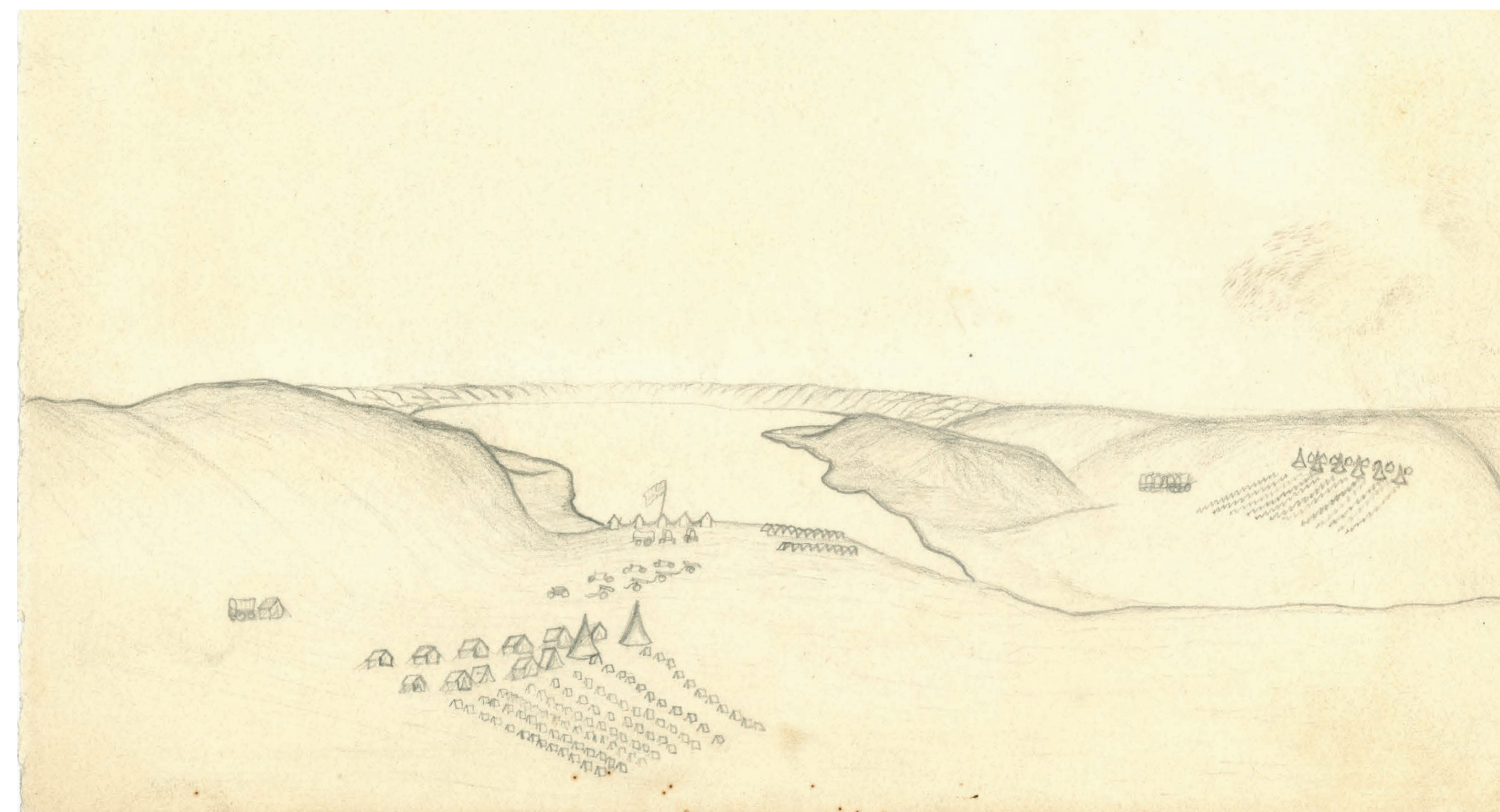
—Iron Shell Winter Count



Maj. A.E. House led the first wave of soldiers to arrive at Whitestone. They demanded that the camp surrender. SHSND 00004/-0001.000#00025



Three of the men remembered for offering to surrender themselves to protect the camp. Left to right, Pispíza Sápa (Black Prairie Dog), Mató Nunpá (Two Bears), and Nasúna Thanjá (Big Head or Big Brain). SHSND 1952/-0000.000#00603; SHSND 00004/-0001.000#00024; SHSND 00160/-0000.000#00009



Pvt. George P. Belden, 2nd Nebraska Cavalry, sketched Gen. Sully's camp on Sept. 2, 1863, the day before the massacre. Nebraska State Historical Society Photograph Collections 7294-3710

# The Attack

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*Since that time I have been in the other life  
the same as dead.*

—Waháchaŋka Ikíkču (Takes-His-Shield), Yanktonai survivor

As soon as Gen. Alfred Sully learned of the people's location at Whitestone from three of Maj. A.E. House's soldiers, he ordered troops to surround the camp and hold everyone in place until the following morning. He planned to investigate whether any enemy bands involved in the U.S.-Dakota War were present. Sully sent the 2nd Nebraska ahead with orders to "assist Major House in keeping the Indians corralled."

When the 2nd Nebraska arrived and saw the 6th Iowa on the hills north of the camp, they rode to the south ridge, forcing the Dakotas and Lakotas to flee up the ravine between the two military units. Both regiments quickly surrounded the people.

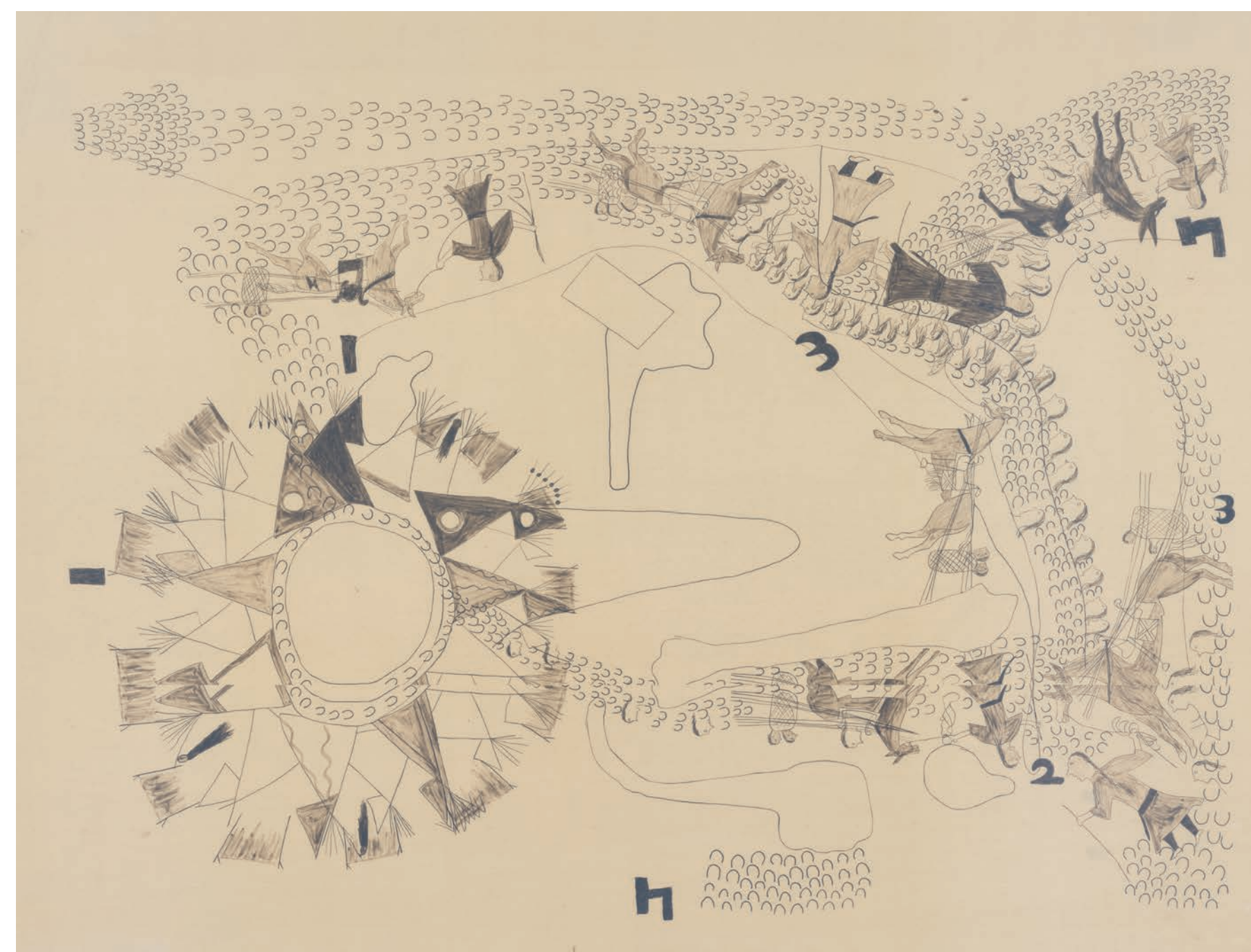
Meanwhile, Sully's unit entered the camp from the west. They parleyed with some tribal leaders, possibly inquiring about any bands or warriors who had fought in the U.S.-Dakota War.

Suddenly a gun fired in the area of the ravine. Several soldiers later reported that one 2nd Nebraska soldier acted without orders and shot his gun. Soldiers later disagreed about this individual's identity. Soon the rest of the 2nd Nebraska opened fire on the trapped men, women, and children, and the 6th Iowa joined in, killing an estimated 150 to 300 people. In the words of Pvt. Milton Spencer of the 6th Iowa, they "poured in a deadly volley."

Pvt. George P. Belden of the 2nd Nebraska wrote in his 1875 biography that the firing began in his unit.

*There was no order to fire, but every soldier leveled his carbine. An Indian was now seen advancing, wrapped in a garrison flag, and crying, "How! How!" moving his hand up and down, as if shaking hands. As yet not a gun had been fired, and the Indians stood wrapped in their blankets, their arms concealed, and only the top of a bow in sight here and there. They were very cool, and stood perfectly still. The Indian in the flag continued to advance, and when he was close to our line, a little Dutchman on the left fired and killed him.*

—Pvt. George P. Belden, 2nd Nebraska



Survivor Waháchaŋka Ikíkču (Takes-His-Shield) guided Richard Cottonwood to draw this pictograph of the Whitestone attack in 1914. According to the Ellendale North Dakota Record, survivors Takes-His-Shield, Red Bow, Holy Horse, and Red Fish met at the Seldom-in Club in Ellendale on Sept. 3 of that year, discussed the attack, and mapped the events. SHSND 10085/MAP.007#00062-color.

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard (Good Earth Woman) of the Standing Rock nation shared an account passed down from her great-great grandmother, Napé Hóte Wiŋ (Gray Hand Woman or Mary Big Moccasin), who was 9 years old on the day of the attack.

*She said they were having their evening meal just as the sun was setting when the soldiers came and surrounded them. They started shooting, everyone was running and yelling. People were tying children to their horses and dogs and running. It was all confused. All she felt was a large pain hit her in the hip as she went down crying for her mother, but everyone was running. She laid there until morning when the soldier found her and loaded her into a wagon.*

—LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, 2013

Gunfire began at twilight and continued after dark. Some soldiers may have accidentally shot each other on opposite sides of the ravine. Twelve Iowan and two Nebraskan soldiers were killed. Soldiers' horses bucked and became uncontrollable in the chaos. This created an opportunity for most Dakotas and Lakotas to escape, but 156 were taken prisoner. The soldiers spent the night on the hilltops.

*It is to be regretted that I could not have had an hour or two more of daylight, for I feel sure that if I had I could have annihilated the enemy.*

—Gen. Alfred Sully's Report to Gen. John Pope, Sept. 11, 1863

*The night was one of pandemonium. With the barking of dogs, the neighing of ponies, the wailing of [women] and children in the black darkness of the night will never be forgotten.*

—Pvt. Z.T. Mullen, 2nd Nebraska

Descendants of Šúŋkakandúta (Red Horse), who was a boy at the time of the massacre, have an account that he rounded up stray horses during the attack to help his relatives flee. This honor song recognizes his contributions.

**Wókitaŋ tiwáhe teŋíya ečun.**

**It is harrowing to do for a small family.**

**Šúŋkawakaŋ manúŋ wedo.**

**He took horses. It is so.**

**Šúŋkakandúta  
Red Horse**

—Red Horse's Honor Song

# Destroying the Camp for Hunger and Hardship

Whitestone Hill (Ínyansán Pahá) State Historic Site



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*We could not tell until morning what we had done. In the morning the sight was hard to behold. Both Indians (men, women and children) and soldiers and their horses lay strewn over the field and piled up on each other.*

—J.J. Worley, 2nd Nebraska

Over the next two days, soldiers shot some of the wounded and dying, in violation of military standards of the time. Lost and orphaned children were turned over to their Dakota prisoners. They rounded up healthy horses and shot wounded ones, as well as more than 1,000 dogs.



*This cooking kettle found at Whitestone many years later may be one of thousands of Dakota possessions that Gen. Sully's troops destroyed. SHSND 1979.26.1*

*There was liberty given to the soldiers & all to plunder what they could of their robes & fancy fixings. ... We busied ourselves today in strolling about the field & picking up whatever we wanted. Many of us before night had made leggings, made saddle robes & Mittens, trimmed our bridles with Indian fixings, replenished our outfit of cooking utensils, cups, plates, knives, spoons, camp kettles, till you could not rest, & as our own kettles were nearly worn out these came in play.*

—Cpl. Henry Peirce, 2nd Nebraska

The soldiers' goal was to leave the survivors destitute before winter. On Sept. 5, soldiers loaded 400,000 to 500,000 pounds of jerky, hundreds of tipis, and other objects into wagons and set them on fire. F.E. Caldwell of the 2nd Nebraska wrote, "the melted tallow ran down that valley in a stream. Hatchets, camp kettles, and all things that would sink were thrown into a small lake."

Soldiers took 156 captured adults and children to Fort Thompson on the Crow Creek Reservation in present-day South Dakota. They were held as prisoners of war, some for seven years.

*I hope you will not believe all that is said of "Sully's Successful Expedition," against the Sioux. I don't think he ought to brag of it at all, because it was, what no decent man would have done, he pitched into their camp and just slaughtered them, worse a great deal than what the Indians did in 1862, he killed very few men and took no hostile ones prisoners ... and now he returns saying that we need fear no more, for he has "wiped out all hostile Indians from Dakota." If he had killed men instead of women & children, then it would have been a success, and the worse of it, they had no hostile intention whatever, the Nebraska 2nd pitched into them without orders, while the Iowa 6th were shaking hands with them on one side, they even shot their own men.*

—Samuel Brown to his father, Joseph R. Brown, Nov. 13, 1863



*Objects stolen from the camp before it was burned and destroyed. Col. Robert Furnas donated these items to the Smithsonian Institution in 1886, including from left: a quiver (NMNH E76836-0), a rattle, or wa-mnu-ha (NMNH E76830-0), a pipe stem (NMNH E76823-0), a flute (NMNH E76825-0), a stone pipe bowl (NMNH E76822-0), and a wood spoon with turtle effigy (NMNH E76832-0)*

# Burials at This Site

Whitestone Hill (Ínyansánj Pahá) State Historic Site



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*Gen. Alfred Sully's troops buried at least five soldiers on this knoll. Although almost all remains had been lost by the time of this photo in 1890, some visitors made makeshift memorials of stones before the soldiers' monument was constructed in 1909.  
SHSND 0200-5x7-0976*

This knoll marks one of few known places where any of the dead from either side were laid to rest after the massacre. Gen. Alfred Sully's troops buried most of the 20 soldiers close to where they fell and hid the graves. They buried at least five men on this knoll, but graves of the other 15 soldiers were scattered up to a few miles from here.

In the days after the massacre, Dakota and Lakota survivors returned here to recover an unknown number of their loved ones bodies. Most remains of both Native Americans and soldiers have been lost, exhumed, or were mishandled.

Over the next 17 years, Whitestone's exact location was lost to non-Native people. When new settlers started moving into Dickey County around 1880, most did not know about the massacre. Incoming residents who collected bison bones to sell for fertilizer found horse, mule, and human bones in this area. J.C. Luce, a veteran of Whitestone who settled in nearby Groton, South Dakota, visited and confirmed the location in 1880 or 1881.



*When new settlers poured into the northern Plains in the 1880s, they found so many bison bones across the landscape that bone collecting became a popular source of income. Collectors like these brought bones to regional railheads to be sold and shipped east.  
SHSND 00739-v0001-p52b*

# Remembering Whitestone Then and Now

Whitestone Hill (Ínyansán Pahá) State Historic Site



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In 1905, U.S. Rep. Thomas Marshall of Oakes and three Civil War veterans spearheaded a campaign to protect this parcel of land from settlement, rebury soldiers' remains, and erect a soldiers' monument.

*We also find that there is not the least respect or notice paid to the graves. ... We are doing everything we can to get the graves properly marked and protected.*

—Sons of Veterans Committee



Dedication of the soldiers' monument on Oct. 16, 1909. SHSND E/-0035#00001

Congress voted to set aside 640 acres, of which 600 were to be sold to pay for the monument. Built in 1909, this monument commemorates the 20 U.S. soldiers who died here. Descendants of these soldiers continue to visit this site today.

This land was federally preserved from development because of Rep. Marshall's actions. His campaign, however, also revealed his racism toward Native Americans. At the dedication ceremony on Oct. 16, 1909, Marshall stated that U.S. soldiers at this site

had been "ready to take the arduous task of supplanting the Red Man, thus working out the law of the Survival of the Fittest, in order that the White Man, the highest type of civilization, should have full sway."

Yanktonais and other Dakotas and Lakotas believe a great wrong happened here. They still consider the massacre a national tragedy. This memorial has added to their suffering.

Local residents were among the first to understand and spread awareness that most victims at Whitestone had been friends of the United States. In 1942, a group of Ellendale residents built the smaller monument at the base of this hill to honor American Indians who died here. Two Bears family members recognized their efforts by attending its dedication.

Long before 1863 and still today, Whitestone remains a sacred place for Dakota and Lakota people. We invite you to reflect on the transformative potential of remembrance and work toward healing in our communities.



In 1914, Rev. Aaron Beede, Ph.D., an Episcopal missionary who lived on the Standing Rock Reservation, proclaimed that the attack had been a mistake in front of 5,000 visitors, including several survivors and North Dakota Gov. Louis B. Hanna. He later published a play, "Heart-in-the-Lodge: All a Mistake," to help shift public perception about the attack. SHSND 2013-P-043/-0000.000#00001