

NEBRASKA TRAILBLAZER

Nebraska
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



No. 16

Red Cloud and the Sioux Nation

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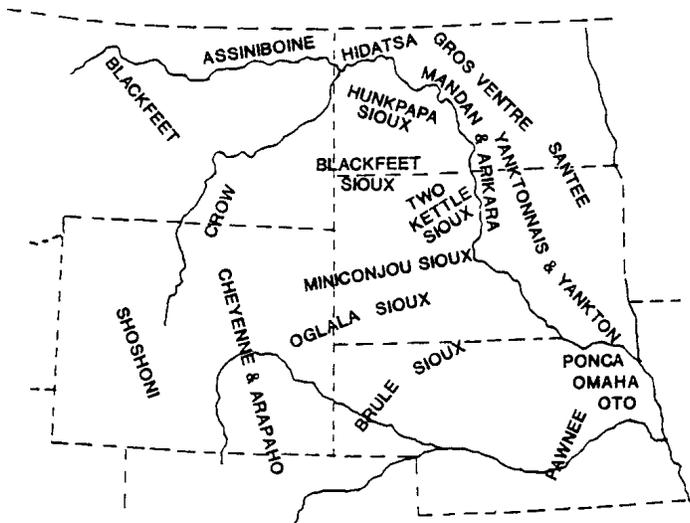
Red Cloud in 1872. No photographs of him as a young man exist.

Red Cloud was born about 1821 in present-day Garden County, Nebraska. He was a member of the Oglala band of Sioux. His early days were ones of freedom and adventure. Huge herds of buffalo roamed the Great Plains. The tipi village in which Red Cloud lived followed the herds. As he grew, Red Cloud became a skilled hunter and a feared warrior.

In the 1820s the Western Sioux were a strong people who called a wide region their home (see map). Their name for themselves was "Lakota," which means "Allies" or "Friends." The tribe was divided into several bands: Blackfeet, Brule (pronounced bru-

LAY), Hunkpapa, Miniconjou (min-nee-CON-ju), Oglala, Sans Arc, and Two Kettles. The bands shared a common language and customs.

Other Indian tribes lived near the Lakota. The Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes were often allies. The Santees, Yanktons and Yanktonnais were part of the related Eastern Sioux bands. All other tribes were usually enemies of the Lakota.



In the 1840s and 1850s Red Cloud reached manhood and became a leader. Vast changes placed the Sioux way of life in danger. Gold was discovered in California in 1848. Thousands of Americans from the eastern states moved across the plains to the Pacific Coast. The emigrants had to cross Sioux lands to reach their new homes. Wagon trains disrupted the buffalo herds and brought disease to the Indians. The Sioux blamed the newcomers for these misfortunes.

United States Army soldiers were stationed along the trail to protect travelers. In the mid-1850s conflicts between the Sioux and the soldiers arose. Fighting continued off and on through the 1860s and 1870s.



In 1865 the army built Fort Phil Kearny along the Powder River in Wyoming. Soldiers from the fort guarded a road to the new gold fields in Montana. The fort was built on Sioux hunting grounds. The Sioux went to war to fight for this land. Red Cloud, who by now was a war chief, led the Sioux warriors against the soldiers.

On December 21, 1866, Red Cloud won a great military victory. His men fought and killed over 80 soldiers under W.J. Fetterman near Fort Phil Kearny. Word of the defeat and the name of the victor spread across the country. In 1868 a treaty of peace was signed, the fort was abandoned, and the army left these Sioux lands. Red Cloud became famous as the only Indian chief to win a war with the United States!

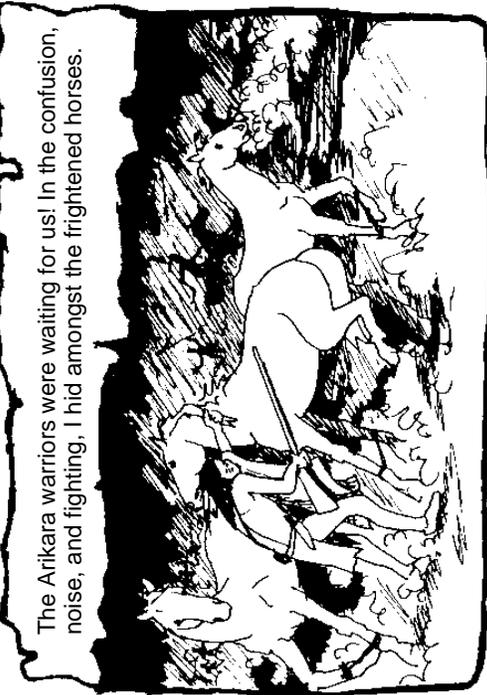


Red Cloud Agency was established in northwest Nebraska in 1873 near the present-day town of Crawford. Here the government gave the Sioux Tribe the food and goods promised by the Treaty of 1868. Everyone recognized Red Cloud as the leader of the Oglala Sioux. He and the Lakota were at the peak of their power.

Red Cloud had achieved fame among his people long before his war with the United States. He won great honors for his amazing exploits against the Indian tribes who were enemies of the Oglalas. Here is one story from his life (the year is 1857):



suddenly..."



The Arikara warriors were waiting for us! In the confusion, noise, and fighting, I hid amongst the frightened horses.



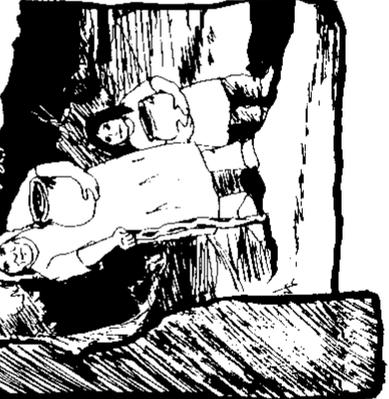
AMBUSH!!!



I escaped unnoticed in the darkness. With a blanket covering me, I walked towards the village!

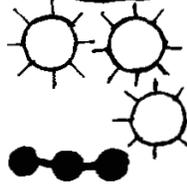


An old woman and a young girl coming from the river met me. They did not recognize me as an enemy.
At the river's edge, I found an Arikara canoe.





Though unaccustomed to using a canoe, I paddled away downstream. I travelled only at night, hiding during the day.

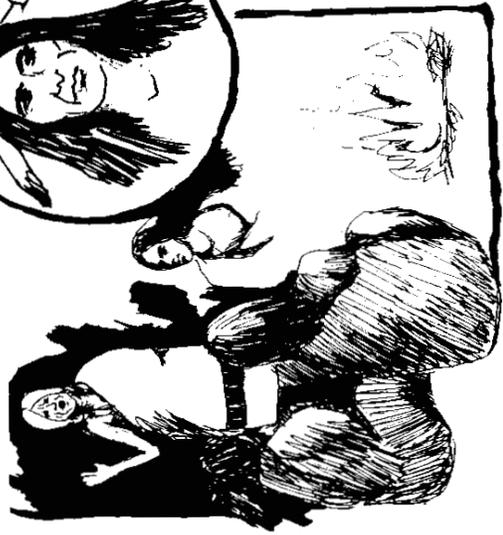


My journey lasted many days. Food was scarce. Unknown dangers abounded. Finally I reached another Indian village. Was it friend or foe?

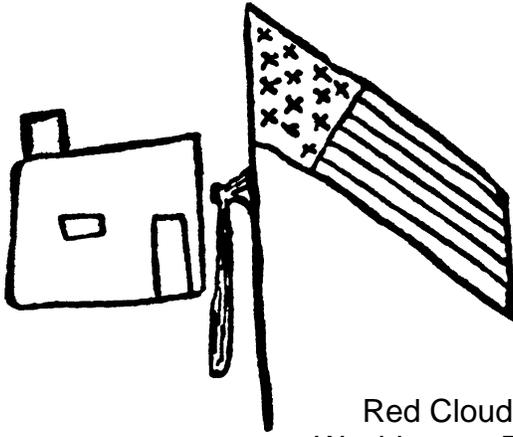
I heard my language spoken! It was a Yankton village.



I am among friends!



I returned overland to my village. My people welcomed me home. They had given me up for dead.



A Sioux man drew this to represent an event at Red Cloud Agency in 1873. Angry Sioux men objected to the raising of a flagpole with the United States flag. They chopped up the pole to show their opposition to the government. The 1870s were marked by many violent acts between the red and white people.

Red Cloud made many trips to Washington, D.C., and spoke to different presidents. On one trip in 1875 he was photographed in white man's clothes (although he still wore his moccasins for comfort).

Red cloud saw the great cities that swarmed with people. He realized that he could not win another war with the white men and must make peace.



Agent Valentine McGillicuddy (seated in the middle) tried to reduce Red Cloud's influence among his people. The 1880s, the beginning of reservation life for the Sioux, were years of struggle between the Indian leaders and the government agents. The two men on the left are Oglala policemen, who worked for the agent.



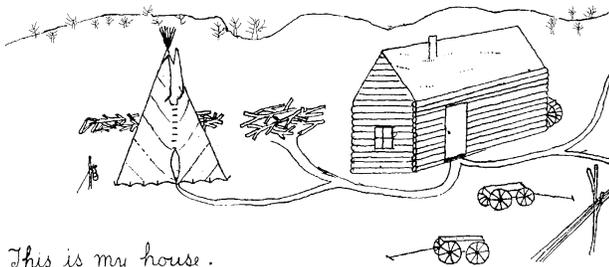
The Sioux way of life changed greatly over the years. Traditionally they lived in tipis and moved their camps when necessary. When this photograph was taken in the 1880s, permanent houses – here a log cabin – were replacing the tipi.

By the 1890s Red Cloud had become an old, blind man. He would tell visitors about the glories of the Lakota and of his youth. Like his defeated people, Red Cloud had to face a new century and its unknown challenges.



As Red Cloud's power declined, other leaders arose. One was Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapa band (here with Seen by the Nation, one of his wives). In 1890 Sitting Bull led many followers of the Ghost Dance. This new religion tried to "dance back the buffalo." Believers wanted the world to return to the days before the whites came, the time when the Sioux nation was strongest.

The government school at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, taught Oglala children the ways of the whites. Tribal customs and speaking the Lakota language were discouraged. Only in recent years have Sioux schoolchildren been encouraged to learn about their past.

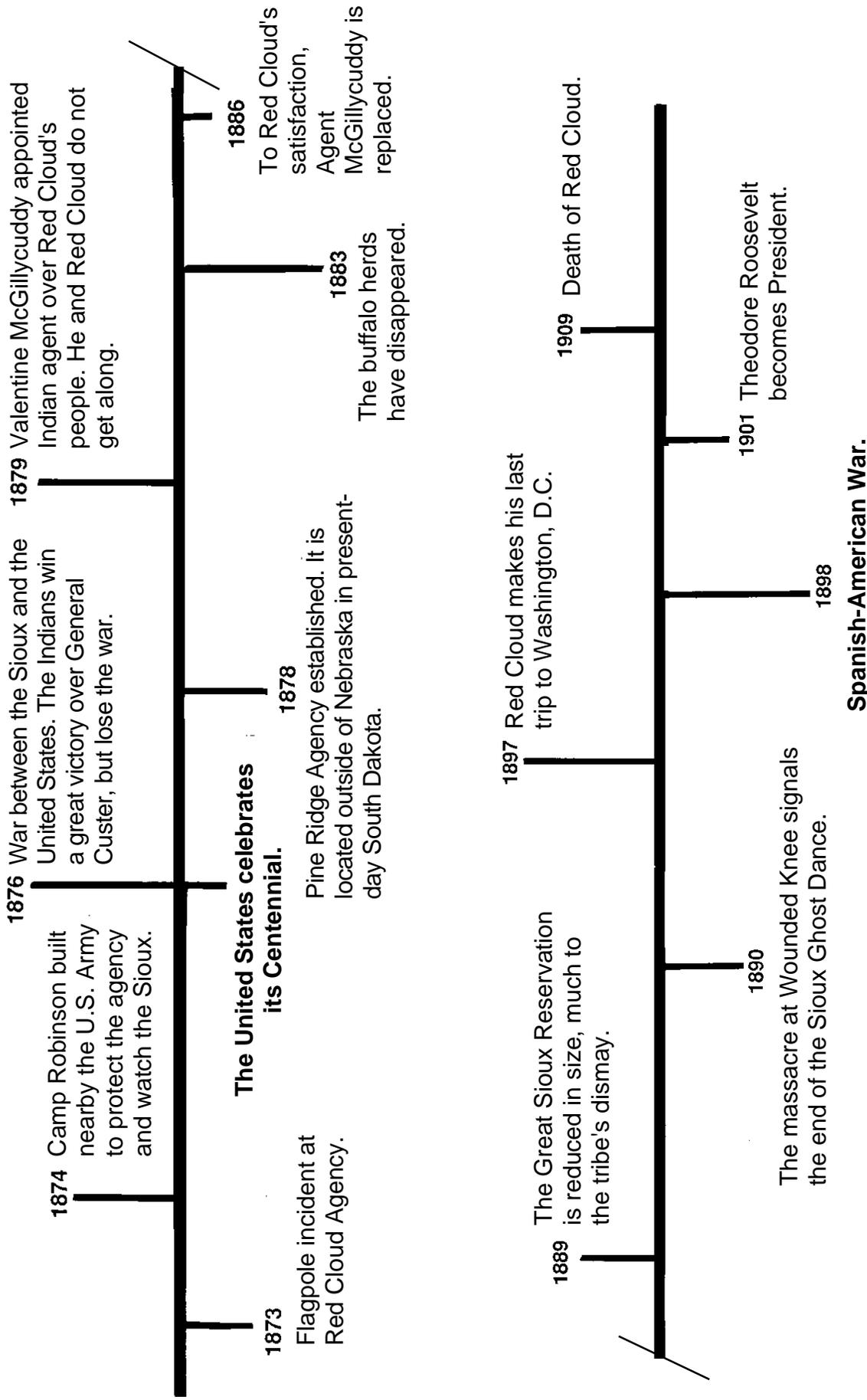


This is my house.

*Margie Red Cedar.
Age 12 years.*

This was drawn by a Sioux girl who attended school in the early 1900s. Can you think of ways her life was different than that of the young Red Cloud?

Difficult Years Timeline:



Timeline Quiz

Using the timeline on the previous page, number these events in order. Place a number in the blank before the letter and add the date of happening in the blank after the event.

- _____ a. Buffalo herds have disappeared. _____
- _____ b. Massacre at Wounded Knee and end of the
Sioux Ghost Dance. _____
- _____ c. War with Spain. _____
- _____ d. Death of Red Cloud. _____
- _____ e. Agent McGillicuddy is replaced. _____
- _____ f. Camp Robinson is built by the U.S. Army. _____
- _____ g. Great Sioux Reservation's size is reduced. _____
- _____ h. Theodore Roosevelt becomes president. _____
- _____ i. Flagpole incident at Red Cloud Agency. _____
- _____ j. McGillicuddy appointed Indian Agent. _____
- _____ k. Pine Ridge Agency established. _____
- _____ l. Red Cloud makes last trip to Washington, D.C. _____
- _____ m. War between Sioux and the United States. _____

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