

## The Crazy Horse Medicine Bundle

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

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Article Summary: Powers recounts the history of Indian involvement in Minatare, where impoverished Oglala Lakotas came annually to dig potatoes before the first frost. He had learned from Barbara Means Adams, a descendent of a witness of Crazy Horse's death, that the Lakota leader's medicine bundle had been buried under a cottonwood tree in Minatare for safekeeping during World War II.

### Cataloging Information:

Names: Scudder McKeel, Fast Thunder, Crazy Horse, Barney Wickard, Theodore Means, Theresa Means, Pete Swift Bird, Stella and George Swift Bird, Mabell Kadlecek, Black Elk, Barbara Means Adams

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Photographs / Images: ledger art depiction of the death of Crazy Horse as portrayed by Amos Bad Heart Bull, potato harvest in the North Platte Valley, a farmer tending an irrigation ditch near Minatare, Battle of the Little Big Horn portrayed by Amos Bad Heart Bull, attendees of the 2013 Fort Robinson History Conference near the spot where Crazy Horse was killed, photograph by Charles Howard of Crazy Horse's body scaffolded on a hilltop overlooking Camp Sheridan

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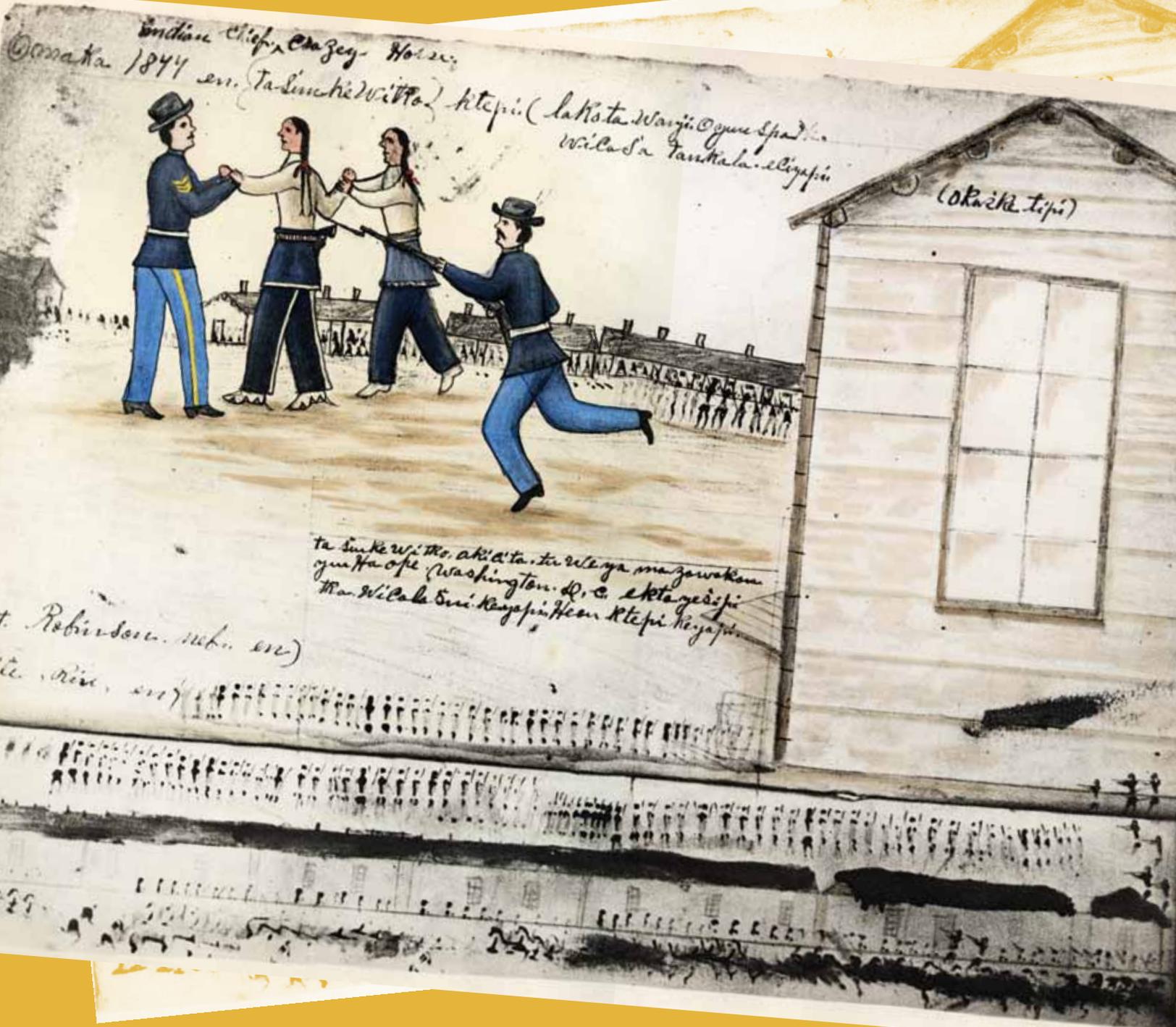
THE  
CRAZY HORSE  
MEDICINE BUNDLE

BY THOMAS POWERS

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**H**ard times soon came to the Oglala Lakota in the years after Crazy Horse was killed in 1877. In their early years on the Pine Ridge reservation the Oglalas raised cattle and horses with success, but during the First World War, when prices were high, they sold most of their animals on the advice of agency officials and local white ranchers. After the war they never managed to rebuild their herds. Without animals to feed they began to lease or sell their land. The great epidemic of Spanish Influenza swept the reservation in 1919 and killed hundreds of people, in many cases because they tried to treat themselves in

the traditional way, with a sweat bath. The time of greatest hardship and deepest poverty for the Oglalas came in the 1930s, when there was almost no work on the reservation and people, especially the elderly, sometimes died of starvation in their lonely cabins during the winter. By this time the days of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show were long over and the reservation Indians no longer had much to sell. Most of the old pipes, beaded shirts, and war paraphernalia had gone quickly and other things of a sacred character, carefully wrapped and hidden away, were too precious or personal to sell. Beading and quillwork were still done by Indian women



The death of Crazy Horse as portrayed by Amos Bad Heart Bull (ca. 1868-1913), an Oglala Lakota tribal historian known for his ledger art, which adapted traditional Native American pictography to the medium of paper. NSHS 11055-2241-18

but prices were low and customers few. In 1930, according to the young anthropologist from Yale, Scudder Mekeel, only one Indian received “steady monthly wages” in the White Clay district of Pine Ridge, which included the agency offices—a man paid \$50 a month to herd cows for the trader.

For some years, Mekeel reported, Indians had been going south in the fall to pick potatoes on the big farms along the North Platte River down in Nebraska. Some traveled in old cars or trucks but quite a few of the people made the hundred and twenty mile trip in horse-drawn wagons, heading south on the road out of Pine Ridge to Rushville, Nebraska, where the show Indians used to gather to take the train before Buffalo Bill died in 1917. From Rushville they proceeded south through Alliance where a dogleg headed them toward Bridgeport or Scottsbluff or the towns in between along the river. One of these was the bustling little farm town of Minatare. There hundreds of Pine Ridge Indians would gather every September in tent camps on the farms where they worked, often setting up in the same place, under the same big old cottonwood tree or in the same grassy spot along an irrigation ditch, year after year. Two grandchildren of Fast Thunder were among those who took their families south for a month or six weeks, making the trip every year right through the 1930s and into the early 1940s, until the war got in the way. Fast Thunder had called Crazy Horse “cousin” and he was present the day Crazy Horse was killed. One of his grandchildren who made the annual trip to Minatare was Theodore Means, son of Fast Thunder’s daughter Fannie (and of Bruce Means, interpreter for the agency doctor at the time, James Walker). The other was Stella Swift Bird, daughter of Fast Thunder’s oldest boy, Mark Red Star, known as Old Man Flesh by his great-grandson, Pete Swift Bird. They usually pitched their tents side by side along a windrow of cottonwoods on a place owned by a Japanese farmer just outside of Minatare. Sometimes they pitched wall tents of the kind used by the military in World War I, and sometimes they put up a classic tipi style of tent.

The work in the potato fields was hard and long, remembered Barney Wickard, who lived his entire life in Minatare except for the war years. The day began about 6 a.m. and sometimes continued until eight in the evening, with a constant trekking of horse-drawn wagons from the fields to the two potato cellars in town where the potatoes were stored until they could be sold and shipped off. The trick was to get the harvest in before the frosts came. Potatoes only two or three inches below the surface

at the top of the potato hill were especially vulnerable. Even a touch of frost would leave the potatoes dotted with greenheads and you’d have to get rid of them. Some of the Oglalas sent their younger children to the Minatare grade school but in most families everybody worked, from the old grannies down to children as young as five or six. If the men had trucks or wagons they might hire out to haul potatoes to the cellars. And it wasn’t just potatoes; there were sugar beets to be topped and piled for the wagons to haul to the refineries, as well.

The work went on all day every day until Saturday night, when there was a band concert in town and everybody drove in to buy provisions, or go to the Minatare movie theater, or fix a car, or get a horse shoed at one of the two blacksmith shops owned by men named Helmick and Jensen. The Great Depression disappeared for a few hours every Saturday night during potato picking time, when more than thirty businesses stayed open late on main street alone, including four grocery stores, three car dealerships (Ford, Dodge and Chevrolet), three clothing stores, an Ace Hardware and the Boston store owned by Maw Anderson where Barney Wickard worked on Saturday nights as a teenager. There were a hundred and thirty year-round jobs in Minatare then and the town doubled on Saturday nights when as many as three hundred Indians would come into town. You couldn’t find a parking space for a whole block on either side of Main Street.

As Barney Wickard remembered it, everybody got along. On the western edge of town there was a swimming hole in the Minatare irrigation ditch and on hot fall days Barney Wickard and Marvin Kishiyama and Indian boys like their friend James Red Fern would all go down to a certain place beneath a big old cottonwood tree and swim, generally skinny dipping. “There’s more mud in that hole than water,” people used to say. It was the cottonwood tree that identified the place; the swimming hole itself was no different than any other stretch of the ditch, which was perhaps a dozen feet wide and straight as an arrow for miles. Cottonwood trees grow big but this particular tree was truly of mammoth size. It is still there, seventy years after Barney Wickard and his friends used to jump or dive into the water from the big tree’s branches. The trunk of this tree is fifteen feet or more around. A silvery log limb on the bank of the ditch, broken off from the main stem, is shoulder high and as hard as rock. It has probably been lying there for a half century. Earth-moving equipment would be required to dispose of this log, not to mention the tree. One



imagines it will be a kind of landmark for the next hundred years.

Inevitably the Second World War changed things. People began going off to join the army. Barney Wickard's Uncle Dan was one of the first. Barney, too young to join up, stayed at home through the war and watched the changes come. The Great Western Sugar Company closed its sugar beet refinery in 1942. That same year the number of Indians coming down for the potato harvest began to fall. Gas was rationed during the war years, there was less work, and Indians were joining the military, too. The fall of 1942 was the last in Minatare for quite awhile for Theodore Means, according to his granddaughter, Barbara Means Adams. Theodore was planning to join the army. His family stayed the season in 1942, living in a wall tent pitched in their regular spot along a windrow of cottonwood trees, but the next year Theodore Means went to war. Barbara did not remember this last harvest season in Minatare herself; she was not born until 1944. It was her grandmother Theresa

who told her about it when Barbara was in her mid-twenties. On the day I met her, when Barbara was in her fifties, she told me a remarkable story about that last trip her grandparents made down to Minatare before the war changed everything.

**Barbara's cousin, Pete Swift** Bird, remembers Theresa well. She was a daughter of Edward Two Two, an Oglala who often toured with wild west shows in the years before the First World War. When Theresa was eleven or twelve her father died during a season with the Circus Sarsani, a German Wild West show, and was buried in Dresden in 1914, just as the war was beginning. Theodore Means died in the mid-1960s, when Pete Swift Bird was still a toddler, but Theresa remained in their house on the Manderson road. Despite a difference of ten years in age, Pete's mother, Dolores, and Barbara Adams were as close as sisters, and they often visited together in the house on the Manderson road. The old log house built by Fast Thunder had been replaced by a newer, one story,

**Potato harvest in the North Platte Valley. Workers dig, pick, and haul potatoes at the C. Lane farm on the Dutch Flats northeast of Morrill. NSHS RG1431-8-2**



**A farmer tends an irrigation ditch near Minatare, Nebraska.**  
NSHS RG 2073-1-15

stucco structure but the house still had the old-time feel. There was no running water, only a pump out back. There was an outhouse. Theresa was a round, grandmotherly type who loved to feed people and she “did magic with that old ledge-back, wood-burning kitchen stove,” according to Pete.

The two families were warm and close in the intimate Indian way. Outsiders sometimes find it hard to get everybody straight. Language is part of the problem. Lakota terms for family relationships tend to lack the sharp edges of English. Everybody of a certain age can be called grandfather or grandmother; or mother or father; or brother or sister, or cousin, or son or daughter. Theresa was called sister by Stella Swift Bird although in fact they were sisters-in-law, just as Theresa was called mother by her daughter-in-law, Margaret Yellow Thunder, wife of Bruce Means (son of Theresa and Theodore, named after his grandfather), and mother of

Barbara. Stella and her husband, George Swift Bird, had several sons, including one named Pete, the father of the Pete I know. During the depression years Stella and George Swift Bird harvested potatoes in Minatare during the fall and the rest of the year, according to his grandson, Pete Swift Bird Jr., George provided for his family by hunting and fishing, while Stella did bead and quill-work. In 1944 they divorced. The next year Pete senior then about twenty years old, joined the military and served in the Pacific theater. Rough years followed. When he came back to Pine Ridge from Chicago in the mid-1950s the first thing he did was to join the local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous, which had been founded by Stella’s first cousin, Theodore Means, a man whom Pete senior might have called father, or uncle. These were ties that bound. In the 1960s, when Pete junior was a child and his parents were working, he lived with his grandmother, Stella,

out in the country in a house with no electricity. The family often visited Theresa Means on the Manderson road, and there Pete junior would see his cousin Barb, who was in her twenties and starting a family of her own.

“My Grandma was a slim, frail figure,” remembered Pete Swift Bird. “Living with her was like being in a mother’s womb.” She was in her late sixties, born in 1897, old enough to start a family in 1914, the year Fast Thunder died. She loved to tell stories of the old days and she told them in Lakota. Pete junior’s teacher in third grade was Mabell Kadlecek, the wife of a Nebraska rancher with a place on Beaver Creek a few miles south of the old Spotted Tail Agency. Mabell and her husband, Edward, were friendly with a number of elderly Pine Ridge Indians, including Pete’s grandmother, Stella Swift Bird. The Kadleceks had come to believe that a big old cottonwood tree down along the creek on their place had been the first burial site of Crazy Horse. From what the old Indians told them the Kadleceks had concluded that when the body of Crazy Horse was moved and hidden, the final resting place was in a crevice between some big rocks on a pine-covered hillside overlooking their ranch. Every year, Mabell Kadlecek would take her third grade class in a bus down to the ranch and show them the grassy flat along Beaver Creek where Fast Thunder had conducted a sundance in 1877, so the old Indians said. And she pointed out to her students the big old cottonwood tree where the body of Crazy Horse was first buried. The tree is gone now but as a kid Pete junior saw the tree like all the others, and he believed what his teacher told him. But when he was in the sixth grade his grandmother, Stella Swift Bird, told him it wasn’t so, the Kadleceks were wrong. She said the body of Crazy Horse had been hidden in the white sandstone buttes along the Manderson road. She said her father, Mark Red Star, the one they called Old Man Flesh, had been only twelve or thirteen years old when Crazy Horse died. “He told Flesh never to trust those people, the wasicus,” Stella Swift Bird told her grandson. She said Crazy Horse left everybody and went out into the country alone. She said Old Man Flesh kept Crazy Horse’s medicine bundle after he died; she meant the small bag called a chekpa by Lakota. “It was a black, beaded ball with his belly button in it and Old Man Flesh had it buried with him,” Pete Swift Bird remembered. “That’s the story I heard from Stella and from my Dad. It was in the sweat lodge when you heard that kind of thing.”

### **Barney Wickard joined the**

Navy after he graduated from Minatare High School in 1947. The first thing he noticed when he got back about 1950 was “a whole different attitude.” People were freer. They had thrown off the burden of the Great Depression and the war. The Saturday night dances in Minatare had started up again. Cars were a rarity when Barney Wickard was in high school but after the war everybody got a car and then they got two. Two new businesses had started up during the war—a dry-cleaner and a repair shop for washing machines. You might say those new businesses marked the high-water mark of retail business in the town of Minatare. Both stores closed within a couple of years and gradually over the following years every other business went bust as well. It had a lot to do with cars and highways. Scottsbluff was only eight miles up the river and the business all went there. Soon you could hardly recognize Minatare. Barney Wickard when I met him in 2004 was eighty years old, and was the mayor of a town of empty buildings and only one surviving business, a grocery store which would be called a convenience store just about anywhere else.

A lot of other things changed in Minatare as well. Roads were, of course, a big one. The old route into Minatare from the east—the one taken by the Indians in their wagons and old cars—was a county road. Starting in 1948 it was expanded, improved, and renamed as Route 26. For awhile the new 26 halted at County Road 14, then it was pushed on straight through along the northern edge of Minatare to the tracks of the Burlington Northern Railroad, where it made an eighth turn to the north and followed the tracks into Scottsbluff. The old way in and out of Minatare was in the east; the new way came down Main Street from Route 26, and in any event the businesses were all gone on both streets, many of the buildings had been altered or demolished, fences were up, sheds were down, signs had changed.

When Barney Wickard’s grandfather arrived in Minatare in about 1860 he found practically no trees down along the river; they had been cut for firewood by Indians and by travelers bound for Oregon and California on what was called The Great Platte River Road. The early settlers started to plant cottonwood trees along the river and creek banks and in their dooryards, and they planted windrows of Chinese elms and Russian olives, fast-growing trees that would protect the fields from the scouring winds that created the Dust Bowl. In the twenties and early thirties the farmers in Minatare

all used horses and the speed of a horse established the size of the fields. A horse could plow about an acre a day, so the fields were small and the landscape was defined by the windrows that protected the field. Every house had its big dooryard cottonwood, every field had its windrow. You always knew where you were.

But in the early 1950s, when the farmers mostly gave up potatoes for other crops, and the Oglalas stopped coming down in the fall for the harvest, the changes picked up in earnest. Beginning in the mid-1930s farmers had started switching from horses to tractors, and soon after the war the horses were gone. Tractors could handle a lot more land in a day, and soon the tractors got bigger, pulled huge gang plows and harrows, needed a much wider turning radius at the end of the field, and as a result required much bigger fields. As it happened, the desire for bigger fields came as the old windrows of Chinese elms and Russian olives were dying; a web-worm was killing them off and they were short-lived trees anyway. Soon the old windrows were all gone. When they were replanted, it was in a new place.

Something similar happened with the cottonwoods. They're a big, handsome tree but they have one irritating characteristic. In the spring of the year female cottonwoods generate a kind of sticky, seedy fluff that carries easily on the wind and fixes itself where it lands with tenacity. "If you lived on the windward side of a big cottonwood tree," Barney Wickard remembered, "at certain times of the year your house would be just covered with that sticky stuff." And so would every piece of machinery, your car, your barn, your laundry and your kid's bicycle. The result was probably inevitable. People started to cut down the dooryard cottonwoods. "After you've driven by a place for ten or fifteen years," said Barney Wickard, "there's something different there when one of those big old trees is gone." He could remember only two of the big cottonwoods of his youth as still standing—the one down by the swimming hole in the Minatare irrigation ditch, and the one that stood up next to the house of his childhood friend, Marvin Kishiyama, out on County Road 14. The rest were pretty much gone. By the end of the 1950s, as Barney Wickard told it, the Minatare where Theresa and Theodore Means picked potatoes in 1942 was unrecognizable.

**A few years after I first met**  
her I went to see Barbara Adams in her mother's house on the Manderson Road. It was a sunny day

in April. Things were just beginning to green up. The house is on a hill overlooking the wide grassy bottomland that stretches away from the road to Wounded Knee Creek. Beyond the creek the far bank rises quickly up through brown hills into the wall of white sandstone buttes where Stella Swift Bird and others believed Crazy Horse had been buried. I had been out across that field a year or two earlier, drawn by the sight of a few white headstones marking a graveyard in a grove of trees. That was in the fall of the year. The short, curly buffalo grass was so dry it broke into dust under my feet. Rattlesnakes were on my mind all the way out and back. The graveyard when I reached it was heavily overgrown, perfect rattlesnake territory. But it was quiet, hot, empty. The gravestones all marked the last resting place of people with a two-word last name, like Fast Horse or Red Shirt. Pete Swift Bird remarked that when he was growing up "it wasn't cool to have a two-word last name or to speak Lakota or to look Indian." Pete, of course, had and did all three. I was looking particularly for the round-topped, white marble stones which the United States Government had supplied for scouts who had served in the Indian wars. I came around the front of one and read the name of Thomas Woman Dress. Died 9 January 1921. Woman Dress had been deeply involved in the killing of Crazy Horse in 1877. Coming upon his stone marker was more startling in its way than finding a rattlesnake. I mentioned it to Barbara Adams who said I had been out to the St. Paul's Cemetery. People used to go out there every year to cut the grass and straighten the stones, she said, but now they didn't.

Barbara and I moved into the living room where a big, stand-up television set was noisily following the progress of a talk show. Barbara didn't turn it down or off but settled herself into a reclining chair and directed me to a couch in front of a coffee table on which I spread out some papers and prepared to take notes. Barbara was friendly, remembered our previous conversation, and wanted to know how I was getting on. But when we got to the nub, which was her account of a trip down to Minatare with her grandmother Theresa in the late 1960s, she began to talk so quietly I had to lean forward and still couldn't quite hear. Barbara was a big round woman. She had given up her job at Oglala Lakota college in Kyle and was living with her mother. A secretary at the college said she was sick but she looked okay to me. I would have guessed her age as early fifties. She understood exactly what I wanted to know—everything about that trip down to Minatare. But as her voice fell



lower and lower, I leaned ever farther out over the coffee table, and all but quit breathing entirely in order to hear.

While we talked Barbara's mother was sitting at the kitchen table, playing solitaire. A young man was working out in the yard, building a chicken house. We could hear the hammering as he pounded in nails. The man and Barbara's mother, whose last name was now Black Weasel, were thin as drinking straws. There wasn't an extra ounce on either of them, probably not even as many ounces as they needed. Through the open doorway Margaret Black Weasel examined me closely. She was eighty years old and was smoking long cigarettes that hung from her lips as she sorted and slapped the cards. She looked straight down at the cards on the kitchen table in front of her with the smoke curling slowly up around her eyes and she listened as ferociously as I did, trying to pick up Barbara's every word, but with that talk show it wasn't easy. After about twenty minutes she got up and came into the living room and turned off the television. "Now," she said, "you'll be able to hear better." Then she returned to her solitaire.

At about that point I realized that Margaret Black Weasel was furiously angry, with Barbara and with me alike. She did not want this conversation to continue. How this got through to me I cannot say exactly. Perhaps it was the slapping of the cards, or the intensity of her gaze at the cards, or Barbara's hesitations and barely audible voice. A few weeks later I had a long conversation on the phone with Margaret Black Weasel, during which she swung from anger to sweet reminiscence about long nights sitting around a fire with Granny while the elders talked about the old days. She thought I was stealing a story that belonged to her. That was her Granny, that was her story. I didn't argue but I didn't give in, either. The way I looked at it that was Barbara's story, and she gave it to me. During my conversation with Barbara in the living room Margaret Black Weasel smoldered but did not protest or interrupt and bit by bit Barbara deepened the story she had told me the first time I met her.

And then the conversation was over. A car pulled up outside and Barbara told me a visiting nurse, a descendant of American Horse, was coming for some kind of medical procedure.

**The Battle of the Little Bighorn as portrayed by Amos Bad Heart Bull.**  
NSHS 11055-2241-7



**Standing near the doorway of the reconstructed guardhouse, the spot where Crazy Horse was killed, Tom Powers describes the events of that day to attendees of the Fort Robinson History Conference, April 27, 2013.**  
Photo by Jeff Barnes

When the nurse entered the kitchen I noticed the resemblance immediately; it was uncanny. She looked unmistakably like American Horse, except the chief had long hair and her's was short. There was a moment of hubbub in the kitchen while Margaret Black Weasel greeted the nurse and during this interval Barbara leaned forward, one eye on her mother in the kitchen. "I've got hepatitis B," she said in a whisper. "They tell me . . . *it's terminal.*"

Of course I was shocked and confused but managed a word or two. Then Margaret Black Weasel had a firm grip on me—not physically, just by the force of her will—and got me to the door and out the door. There was no invitation to come back again soon. "I'm still waiting to see what kind of summer it will be," she said, pointing to the ground in the dooryard where I stood. "First one I see, right there, bullsnake or rattlesnake—that's the kind of summer it will be."

I never saw Barbara again.

#### **When Theodore Means got**

back from the war he had changed. He had been under fire a good deal, he told Joe Brown, a young white man living with Black Elk in Manderson so he could study Lakota religion. Brown first met

Black Elk in a wall tent in Nebraska, where he and his family were digging potatoes in the fall of 1947. Black Elk was an active Catholic but he had decided he wanted to preserve the sacred ceremonies of the Lakota. He had fixed on Joe Brown to help him do it by writing a book. During his first year living in Manderson, Brown got to know Theodore Means through Black Elk's son, Ben. Means said he had made a vow during the war—if he lived he would turn away from the falsity of white civilization and go back to the old ways. Twice since the war he had gone out alone with his pipe and "lamented," prayed and cried for a vision. Brown developed a strong feeling for Means and his eighty-year-old mother, Fannie, who gave Brown a bow which had belonged to her father, Fast Thunder. "No man is held in more veneration here than Crazy Horse," Brown wrote in a letter home. "He is always being talked about when any group gathers. His place of burial is still a mystery, and probably always shall be, which is good; but it is believed that he is not over a mile from here."

When Theodore Means turned his back on the falsity of white civilization he quit drinking, too. He started a chapter of AA in Pine Ridge and with Ben Black Elk built an Inipi and took up the old

practice of sweat baths. In those days building an Inipi was still prohibited, Pete Swift Bird told me; a man could be cited by the tribal police and dragged before the Court of Indian Offenses. The sweat lodges were all hidden along the creek bottoms. The revival of old practices begun by Black Elk was continued by Black Elk's son Ben, Theodore Means, and others. Crying for the right way, joining AA, doing sweats, and performing the pipe ceremonies all came together and helped people get their lives under control. It helped to change the life of Pete Swift Bird's father in the 1950s and it came to the aid of the younger Pete in the early 1980s when he found himself on what he called the dark road. "We became the drug runners," he said. Drinking and violence went together. A Mexican gang tried to take over the drug business on the reservation until the fullbloods fought back. "Bandidos out of Colorado," Pete called them.

"I was on the soldiering end," he said, using the old word for keeping discipline in the camp. "We said, 'Hey, we're a sovereign nation here.' We took them out of town. We put broken glass in their mouth and then backhanded them. Who they gonna tell?"

Pete was a candidate for an early death. A man trying to help him said, "You're the kind of guy should be kept under glass—break only in case of war." There was a big drug bust on the reservation in 1984. Somehow Pete slipped through the net and his father and some friends—Bill Horn Cloud, Oliver Red Cloud, Pete Catches, John Around Him—took him on a journey north, from Bordeaux Creek up past the Belle Fourche and Crazy Woman to the Big Horn valley, doing sweats all along the way. It changed Pete's life. "Whirlwinds would come into the fire and out of the fire," he said. "I told people I felt like I was home." Pete embraced the traditional life. He earns his living as a plumber but he has a pipe, he does sweats, and he is a sundancer. He bears scars on his chest and his back. When he describes traditional life he describes the smell. When his father was alive he helped him with the ceremonies around the preparation of dog for soup. He held and talked to a young pup to calm him before killing him. "This pup signifies the new year," Pete said. The pup was the right age if Pete could smell the milk on its breath. In the sundance, which is held in June, bringing the religious season to an end, Pete waited for the blood smell. I was astonished; it seemed impossible with all that crowd. "You can smell the blood?" I asked.

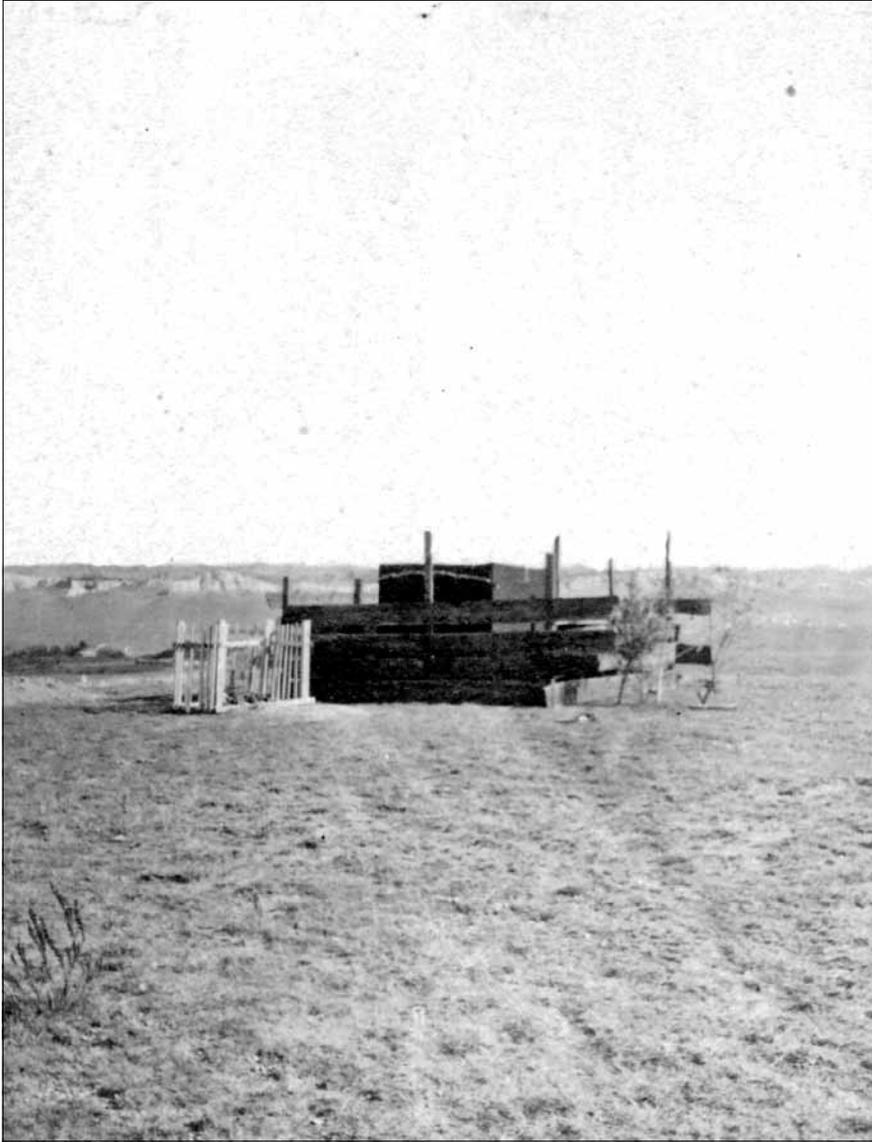
"Everybody can smell it," Pete said. "It's sweet. It's high-pitched. That's what causes the fear."

**The fall trips to Nebraska to dig potatoes** came to an end in the early 1950s. Theodore Means died ten years later. No one in the family went down to Minatare for many years until a day came in 1968 or 1969 when Barbara Adams's grandmother, Theresa, suddenly announced that she wanted to go. Theresa didn't drive and Barbara had a car but she also had four boys, the youngest still babies or toddlers. There was no one to leave the kids with; she told Theresa she couldn't possibly drive all the way to Minatare and back.

But Theresa insisted so Barbara piled all four boys into the car and headed down the Manderson road to Wounded Knee and Denby and Pine Ridge and Hay Springs, following the old route to Minatare. They were in a big old wide car, Barbara and Theresa in front, kids in back. Barbara wanted to know what this was all about but Theresa would only half explain. She said there was something she had to get. She had waited too long already. Barbara pried, but Theresa would not say. She would explain when they got to Minatare. She knew exactly where she was going. It was the place where they used to camp. They set up the tent every year in the same place, on the farm owned by the Japanese man, under a great big old cottonwood tree. All Barbara had to do was follow the old familiar route through Alliance, south on the road to Bridgeport till they came to the weird little jog onto Route 182 which ran right into 26 which ran right into Minatare. Not long after the weird little jog was a small white church on the north side of the road. When Theresa saw the little church she knew Barbara was headed right.

Bit by bit Theresa filled in the details during the three hour journey. The last time they camped under the cottonwood tree was in the first year of the war, 1942. Her husband Theodore was going off to join the army and nobody knew when he would be back. People were being forced off their land on the reservation to make way for a bombing range. Everything was confused. People were going where the jobs were, or moving in with relatives, or taking care of grannies. Theresa said that her husband had something important he did not want to lose and they had decided to bury it in Minatare until the war was over.

The small white church was the last thing Theresa really recognized. After that everything seemed strange and misplaced. Theresa grew agitated. She couldn't understand what had happened. Barbara drove her four boys and her mother all around Minatare for an hour, turning up every road, looking for that cottonwood tree. When Barbara Adams



**Crazy Horse's parents returned their son's body to Beaver Creek where it was scaffolded on a hilltop overlooking Camp Sheridan. For two months it was seen by all, and was photographed by Charles Howard in October 1877.**  
Courtesy of the United States Military Academy

told me this story she said her grandmother Theresa mentioned that tree a dozen times. When she found the tree she would know where she was. But they never found the tree, and nothing in the town itself looked familiar, and the houses had mostly changed, and the windrows of trees that used to separate the fields were gone or moved. In an hour's back-and-forth through the town and the surrounding country Theresa Means confronted all the changes small and large that Barney Wickard had watched take place over decades. It took Theresa

a long time to admit she could no longer find the spot where they had pitched their tent in 1942.

They did not get back home till after dark. They came back empty-handed and hurting for gas money. But on the long drive home Theresa told Barbara, and Barbara forty years later told me, what her family had buried in 1942. It would be a very interesting thing to have. Late on the night of September 4, 1877, Theresa said, or early the next morning on his last day Crazy Horse, gave Fast Thunder his medicine bundle for safe-keeping. This act would be strong evidence that he had a deep premonition of what was to come. After Crazy Horse was killed, Fast Thunder took this medicine bundle to the new Pine Ridge reservation and kept it in his log house on the Manderson road. After Fast Thunder died in 1914 his wife, Jennie Wounded Horse, preserved the medicine bundle, telling no one about it outside the family. Before Jennie died in 1934 she entrusted the medicine bundle to a relative who lived on the Manderson road, Nellie Ghost Dog, who passed it on in turn to Theodore Means, the grandson of Fast Thunder. In 1942, Barbara's grandparents, Theodore and Theresa, decided to bury the medicine bundle in Minatare, to keep it safe until the war was over and they could come back for it. They pitched their tent right beside the big cottonwood tree so they would always be able to find the place again. It wasn't just the two of them. Barbara said the "family" was there, and thought that probably meant Stella and George Swift Bird and their kids were there, too. Inside the tent at night the family dug a hole six feet deep.

But before they buried the medicine bundle, Theresa told Barbara, and Barbara told me, they decided to open the bundle. When I asked Barbara how big it was, she said her grandmother described it as about the size of a baby. This wasn't a chekpa but something quite different—Crazy Horse's sicun. On the outside of the bundle was a blanket. Inside the blanket were several layers of cloth. Inside the cloth was a bag made of tanned deerskin. It was this bag which would hold a man's sacred things—special stones that had power, or certain herbs and sweet-smelling grasses, or the parts of animals that had visited the owner in visions and dreams. What Crazy Horse had placed in his sicun nobody knows. When the family started to open the

deerskin bag, Theresa told Barbara, they suddenly heard a great roar of flapping wings against the walls of the tent; scores of owls were beating their wings outside, loud as thunder. Traditional Lakotas believe that owls warn of death. The sound frightened all of them; they wrapped up Crazy Horse's bundle and buried it right away.

From the way she told the story, it seemed that Theresa felt the family had failed somehow. This was not Barbara's conclusion. She thought a powerful message could be read in the beating of the owls' wings. My own view shifts back and forth. In one mood it seems to me that Crazy Horse did not want the wasicus to get his medicine bundle and they didn't. Thus he died in victory, as his father said. But at other moments it seems that Theresa's story is plainer in meaning, and marks a divide between the things that have been lost and the things that survive. 🍷

*Barbara Means Adams first told me this story in 2001 at Oglala Lakota College where she was working at the time. Over the following years we talked occasionally over the phone and had another long conversation in the home of her mother, Margaret Black Weasel, on the Manderson Road in 2004. A couple of days later I ran into Barney Wickard entirely by chance in the Minatare town offices, which doubled as the town library. We talked then and again at even greater length five years later. Barbara and her mother both died in 2005. Wickard died in 2011. Barbara's cousin, Pete Swift Bird, Jr., remains active on the Pine Ridge reservation. I learned much else about the Fast Thunder family during ten years of research for my book, The Killing of Crazy Horse, in which a shorter version of this story appears as the last chapter.*

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