



Memorials to the Sioux Indians [Part 1]

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

This article is copyrighted by History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society). You may download it for your personal use.

For permission to re-use materials, or for photo ordering information, see:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/re-use-nshs-materials>

Learn more about *Nebraska History* (and search articles) here:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

History Nebraska members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* annually:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/get-involved/membership>

Full Citation: Gutzon Borglum, "Memorials to the Sioux Indians," *Nebraska History* 22 (1941): 6-13

Article Summary: Borglum asserts that creating a memorial to the Indians, particularly the Sioux, could partially redress America's failure to fulfill obligations that the government had entered into with the tribes.

Note: A brief comment by Robert G Simmons, "The Value of Memorials," precedes Borglum's article.

Cataloging Information:

Nebraska Place Names: Pine Ridge

Keywords: Oglala [Sioux], Brule [Sioux]

Photographs / Images: Robert G Simmons, John Gutzon Borglum, proposed site of memorial to the Sioux Nation on Highway No. 19 near Chadron State Park



ROBERT G. SIMMONS

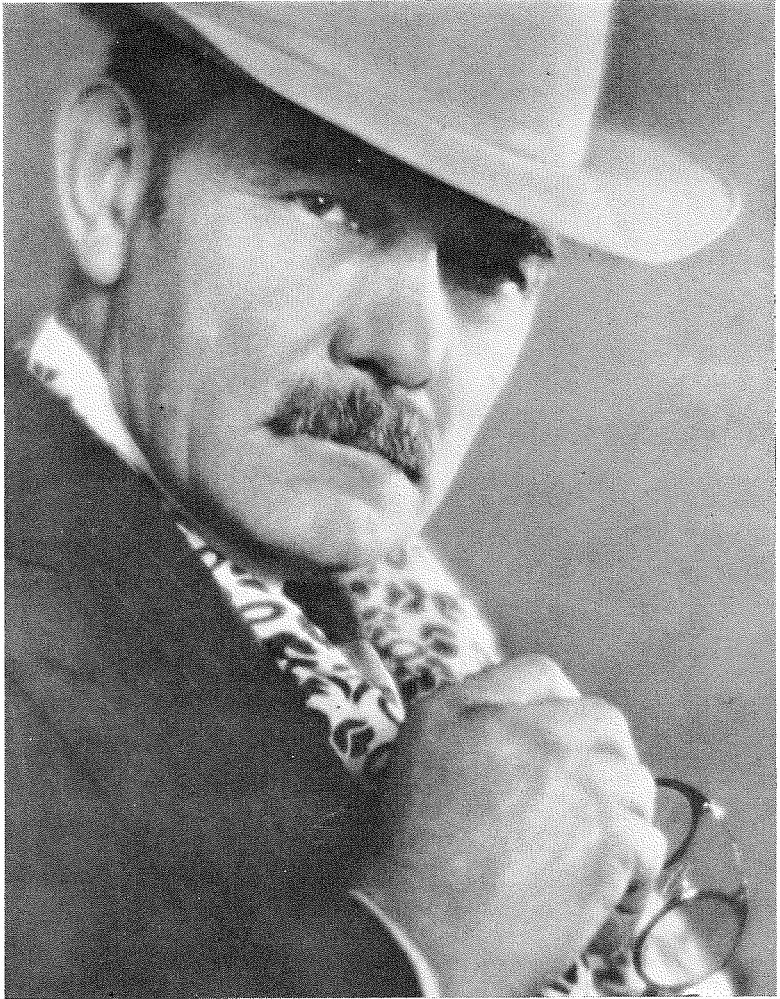
The Value of Memorials

BY ROBERT G. SIMMONS

Chief Justice Nebraska Supreme Court

Nebraska has a history of old times and old events that have been lost except as they may be found in the pages of our books. Our more recent history is known to our older citizens, or is not more than one or two generations away from people now living. The Indian history of Nebraska runs like a thread through all of these events. Much of it has been or can be preserved—either in the memoirs of those who knew it, or in visible monuments placed by those who are familiar with events that have taken place here. Both forms of preservation should be adopted.

It has cost much in lives and treasure to build our state. It will increase the devotion of our people to our state and country to perpetuate the history of these events. This can be done, and interest in the stirring stories of the settlement of Nebraska can be kept alive, by a program such as you are fostering. It is a public service well worth while.



JOHN GUTZON DE LA MOTHE BORGLUM

Master Sculptor

Creator of Mount Rushmore Memorial. Born in a prairie schooner crossing Idaho, March 25, 1871. Died March 6, 1941. Buried in a crypt at the foot of Mount Rushmore.

Memorials to the Sioux Indians

GUTZON BORGLUM

Our treatment of the native American — the Indian, as he is called thru a geographic error of the original discoverers — stands against the American civilization as our greatest injustice towards any native people.

More or less nomadic, the Plains Indians lacked many of the first principles common to civilization. However, they were human beings, intellectual, with high moral standards, and honourable in all their agreements. Their rights, secured intelligently, they fought for as is the habit of human beings. They preserved and developed their territorial boundaries as best they knew for the maintenance of their families, to secure food and dwelling places capable of protecting them against the climatic conditions where they were located.

In our western progress we entered into treaty relations with them, accepted them as sovereigns of their territory, and secured to them by solemn agreement their lands and their hunting grounds, including their rivers for transportation and their forests for timber — but only to our own advantage. There lies against the American people, perhaps, no more flagrant crime than their failure to fulfil the obligations entered into with a majority of the native tribes that occupied what is now known as the United States.

These brief notes, however, are chiefly concerned with the great Sioux tribes, a race of people who entered upon their domain over four hundred years ago and, through their warlike methods, prevailed over the vast territory between Canada to the north, Kansas to the south, and between Wyoming and Lake Michigan to the west and east. Commonly they were known as the Great Plains Indians for the reason that they seemed to dominate the plains, but this was a misnomer. The Sioux were broken up into many smaller tribes and bands under different names. The Oglala seem to have been the strongest, and among them we will

find some of the most illustrious leaders in all the Sioux history. It was with them that all treaty arrangements were passed and affirmed with the United States for easements, sale or transfer of the tribe's territorial rights.

The Oglala tribe used ligaments torn from the back of the buffalo for thread in their sewing; for such ropes as they found necessary in handling their horses and sewing up their tents they used strips of rawhide just as cut from the raw skin. They made their arrows as all Indians made them, and they were broken and painted by the same method as used through all America. They had no knowledge of beads, nor did they trade with the white man to secure them.* Instead they used porcupine quills, and quills and feathers from birds, to ornament their dress.

In spite of all this, in spite of the fact that they knew nothing of the value of agriculture, as it was known by the Indians of Arizona and New Mexico long before the Spaniard invaded their lands, I doubt that there is a more intelligent Indian in America (not excepting the Aztec) in mental astuteness, nicety of mental distinctions, rich imagery, and the beautiful use of language as the great Sioux leaders preserved and developed it. It has been my good fortune to have met and known some of them, to have stood on their rocks for a platform, addressed their people and been addressed by their chiefs; and, knowing the absence of all crafty arts, to find in them a subtleness in judgment and integrity in their relations with one another and with the white man.

It was such considerations as these that made me hail with enthusiasm Dr. Wilson's proposal to erect monuments commemorating this strong people. Usually memorials are builded by individuals or a nation to honour their own family or national heroes; it is a peculiarly gracious act for us, as the victorious nation, to put up memorials to those who preceded us here — not merely as a historical record, but to honour them as a brave and valiant race.

* I believe that statement is quite wrong. I think they certainly did acquire beads and use them. We have in our Museum a great deal of fully authenticated bead work by the Brule, Oglala and Dakota Indians from the Zimmerman and Bristol collections, including a very elaborate "shirt" said to have been worn by Crazy Horse, and decorated with beads, feathers, bone and shell. — A. E. S.

Some years ago, while discussing with Andrew Mellon (then Secretary of the Treasury) the design for a fifty-cent piece which the United States Government was issuing "to honour the valour of the soldier of the South"—a people with whom our government had been at war only sixty years before, Mr. Mellon said: "How do you explain the words 'In God we trust' over the heads of Lee and Jackson, technically traitors to our government?" I answered, "Mr. Secretary, if we did not believe that Lee and Jackson trusted in God we would not be honouring them with a coin."

In the same way, if we did not believe in the integrity and high moral principles of these Indians, we would not now be wanting to honour them with memorials. They too believed in God—the Great Spirit manifested in all around them. We owe them a memorial this day.

Editor's Note: The untimely death of Gutzon Borglum prevented his own revision of this statement prepared by him. It is therefore printed just as his hurried dictation prepared it, even tho not entirely accurate in its historical references.

Gutzon Borglum had within him the soul of a great artist and poet. Nebraska will always count him among her noble sons, even tho not born on her soil. He was ardently committed to the project of a great Indian memorial in the Pine Ridge region.





PROPOSED SITE OF MEMORIAL TO THE SIOUX NATION

During the middle seventies the Oglala and Brule Sioux were established here in the Pine Ridge country of northwestern Nebraska. In addition, large numbers of Northern Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and various other bands of Teton Sioux from time to time called that region home.

Life during this period was always tense, often dramatic, and occasionally tragic to the highest degree. To the Indians it was a period of transition. Its few survivors look back to it as a time of anguish for their people.

Nearly all of the great chiefs of the Teton Sioux of the period had led their people to this land. Crook and Miles and Mackenzie and other officers of distinction



HIGHWAY NO. 19 NEAR CHADRON STATE PARK

in the Indian wars were here at some time in their careers.

Before the middle seventies the Pine Ridge country was a paradise for trappers and fur traders. As soon as the Oglala and Brule were located here, great herds of long-horn cattle were driven in from the South for their sustenance. Following the removal of the Indians in the fall of 1877 the area was filled with Texas cattle.

In 1884 and 1885 the homesteaders came and the great herds were moved to Wyoming and Montana.

The places of especial interest belonging to this period are marked, as well as military roads and other roads and trails. The names of a few towns are included to establish geographical connection between past and present.