

THE OGLALA LAKOTA AND THE ATKINSON-O'FALLON TREATY OF 1825

BY KINGSLEY M. BRAY

In May 1825 bands of Lakota or Teton Sioux people began to aggregate after the dispersal season of winter and early spring. New grass afforded abundant pasture for pony herds and the buffalo, the Lakota staff of life. The Oglalas and Brules, the two southernmost of the Lakota tribal divisions, were aware that an agent of the United States government had based himself at the main trading post in their country, Fort Lookout. He had visited their winter camps and advised them that in summer 1825 a major expedition would ascend the Missouri River to conclude treaties with all the native peoples of the northern plains. Coming barely twenty years after the Lewis and Clark expedition laid official claim to the continental heartland, these agreements would seek to define relations between the United States and the Plains Indians.¹

In Washington officials were anxious over the ambiguous state of relations with Indians west of the Mississippi. In particular, they feared continued British influence after the War of 1812 upon the region's native inhabitants. Legislation had been passed to authorize the dispatch of a military expedition up the Missouri River, to convince the tribes of American power. Two commissioners, General Henry Atkinson and Benjamin O'Fallon, superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis, were to negotiate treaties of peace and friendship with all the tribes along the Missouri waterway, from the Omahas in Nebraska, to the Crows in Montana. Central to the strategy was to secure the friendship of the Lakota or Teton Sioux, whose tribal divisions dominated the river and many of the smaller tribes.



Above: Northern Great Plains, showing tribal regions and relevant locations at the time of the 1825 Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition. Present-day state boundaries are shown.
NSHS & Kingsley Bray

When General Atkinson penned his summary report, he stated that the Lakotas in 1825 comprised five major divisions. The Brules were the southernmost, roaming along the White River and trading into Fort Lookout, the major regional trading post near modern Chamberlain, South Dakota. North of them ranged the Oglalas, centered along the course of Bad River. On the lower Cheyenne and Moreau rivers, extending eastward to the James River valley, were the Saones, an early aggregate which soon would differentiate into the Miniconjou, Two Kettle, and Sans Arc tribal divisions. East of the Missouri ranged the so-called Saones of Fire Heart's band—the modern Sihasapa or Blackfoot Sioux—and, northernmost of all, the Hunkpapa. In 1825 the Lakota population approximated 10,000

people, a major tribal force. Any American claims at regional control had to accommodate the Lakota as allies.²

Despite their importance in setting a baseline for U.S. diplomacy, the Atkinson-O'Fallon treaties have been neglected by historians of the Lakota. George E. Hyde offered a perceptive but brief analysis in his landmark *Red Cloud's Folk*.³ Until today the only sources available have been the expedition's official journals and correspondence. However, over 2015-16 I have been privileged to enjoy access to unpublished winter count traditions kept within the Oglala tribe. These traditions, preserved by American Horse (c. 1839-1908), offer an unprecedented insight into the political history of the Oglalas. I have drawn upon them through this article. So, while my account of the Oglala treaty councils derives from a close reading of the contemporary journals, the opening sections rely on the American Horse ledger as we detail the gathering of the Oglalas, their political organization, and their response to the news of the Atkinson-O'Fallon mission.

Most of the Oglala division of Lakotas had wintered near the Black Hills in southwest South Dakota. Early in May their scattered bands began to gather along the South Cheyenne River. Messengers were dispatched far and wide—to apprise Cheyenne allies of the treaty, to sound other Lakota divisions on their attitudes, and to co-ordinate strategies and gatherings. Then, still grouped in two or three autonomous camps, the Oglalas began to trek eastward to the Missouri. They followed the course of Bad River, making buffalo hunts as they went along, to amass meat, tongues, and skins for the political and ceremonial summits scheduled for summer.

Approaching the mouth of Bad River they met an Oglala band which habitually wintered near the Missouri. Closer to Fort Lookout and the main waterway, they were able to apprise newcomers of developments. The American expedition had left its base, at Fort Atkinson on the lower Missouri, on May 16. After councils with the Omahas and Poncas in northeast Nebraska, it was expected to arrive at Fort Lookout late in June. There it would hold talks with the Brule Lakotas, whose hunting range extended westward from the fort the length of White River, and the Yankton Sioux from across the Missouri.⁴

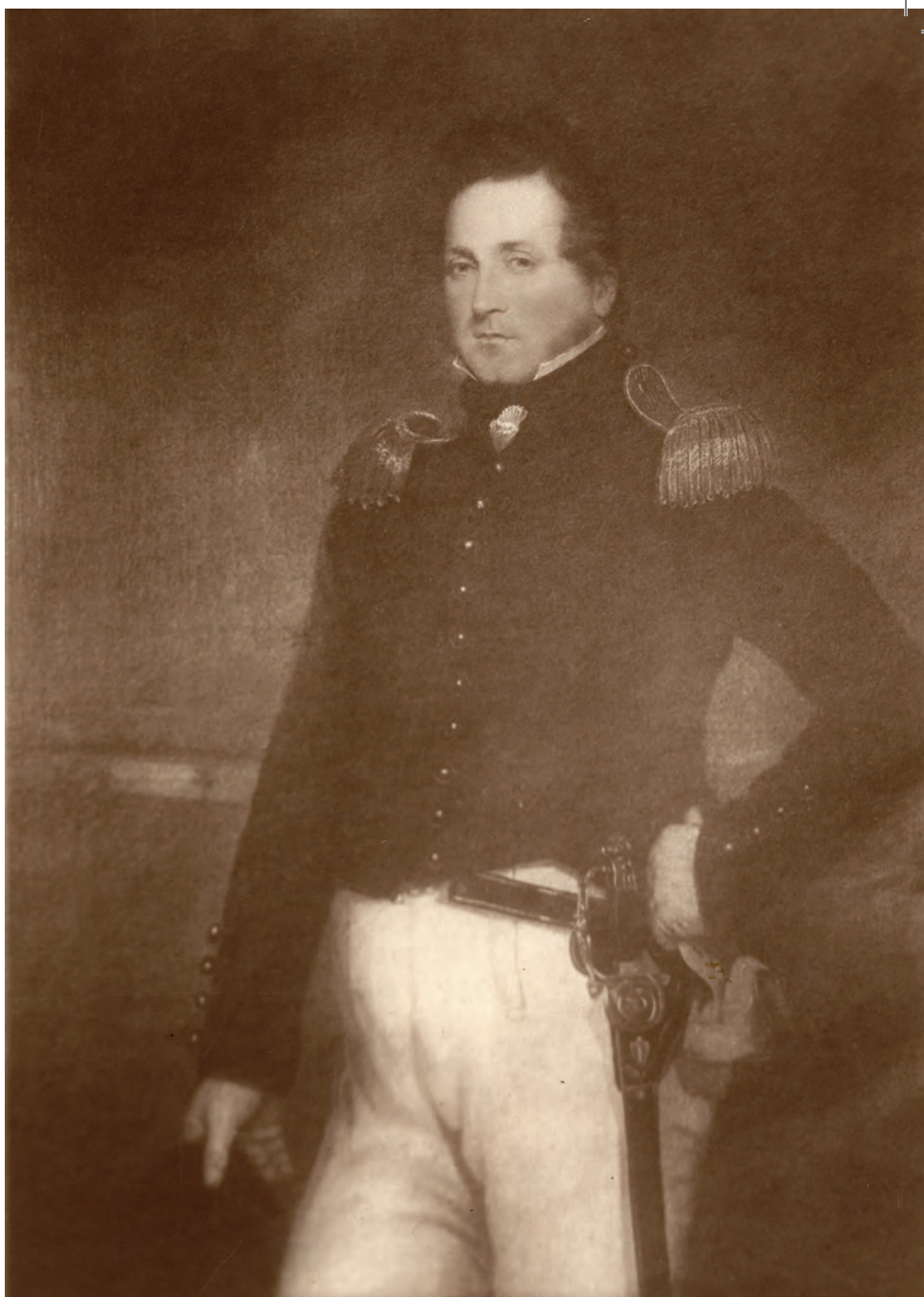
The Oglala chiefs recognized they were faced with a set of choices. Now they must unite their tribe. The Missouri-Bad River confluence marked what General Atkinson called the "general rendezvous" of the Oglala tribe. General Atkinson

estimated the Oglala at “1500 souls, of which 300 are warriors.” His intelligence indicated they were “friendly to the whites, and at peace with the Cheyennes, but enemies to all other tribes but those of their own nation.”⁵

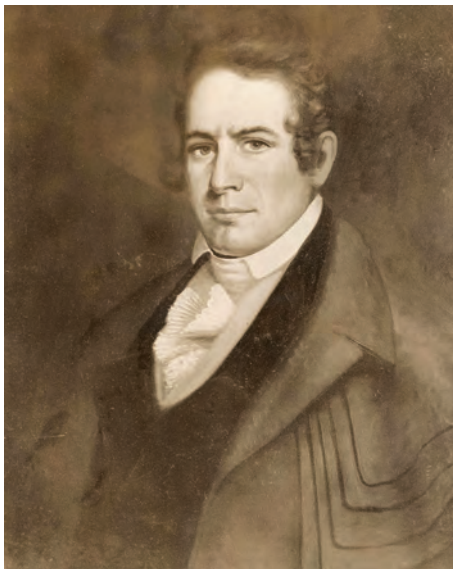
It was here that the distinct bands formed a single tribal circle of tipis. The first order of business was to raise a council lodge. Two or three respected families were called upon to donate their tipis to create the extended lodge or tipi-iyokiheya. In it convened the headmen and elders. They debated to select four men to serve for the summer as the tribal Deciders (Wakichunze). Bearing fine calumet pipes and pipe bags as their symbols of office, they would preside over tribal affairs. Typically the council named a mix of established headmen and rising warriors to this honour. After due conferral an elder called upon Standing Bull, Crazy Bear, and Ghost Boy to seat themselves at the rear of the tipi, facing the entrance. A fourth candidate, the prominent warrior Shoulder, was summoned to the council and seated with his peers.⁶

The Deciders first named a pair of youths to serve as orderlies, messengers, cooks, and general go-fers. These appointments were not recorded by American Horse, but given his long history of diplomatic engagement with the United States, continuing up until his death in 1889, it seems worthy of speculation that Man Afraid of His Horse—then a youth of seventeen—could have been one of the orderlies called upon by the Deciders.⁷

The Deciders appointed an elder to serve as herald. Besides making all public announcements, he presided over the council fire, whose embers had to be carefully preserved during camp moves, then lighted when it was relocated. Then they pondered the crucial question of naming a force of warriors to serve as police or akichita. These warriors would be empowered to organize buffalo hunts, co-ordinate camp removes, and carry out council orders regarding diplomacy, peace, and war. After deliberation the Deciders determined that one of the warrior societies should assume akichita duties. Their selection was the Kit-Fox (*Tokala*) society, one of the oldest such associations. Members had already raised a society tipi and initiated renewals of personnel and regalia, indicating the Kit-Fox were open for business. Five society headmen were summoned to the council lodge. Each of them—Last Horse, Bull Bear, Black Elk, Lone Bull, and Mad Soul—was marked with two stripes of black paint on the cheek, and lectured in their duties: “You are to help us in governing the tribe,” summed up one of the Deciders. Then, each hefting a club that



Above: General Henry Atkinson. NSHS RG2411-178



Left: Benjamin O'Fallon as an Indian agent, ca. 1821-24. NSHS RG2411-4124

Bull Bear, by Alfred
Jacob Miller, 1837.
Wikimedia Commons



symbolized their office, the 'head soldiers' left to summon their society to duty. And finally, after Deciders determined the places each band would assume, the people were summoned to create the tribal camp. Marshalled by the Kit-Fox warriors, amidst clamor and dust, 1,500 people, almost 200 tipis, wheeled into the great circle.⁸

In Lakota thought, the number seven was appropriate for expressing a powerful ideology of From Many, One. It represented the totality of all Directions. Centuries before, all the Sioux people had grouped themselves into a

confederacy called the Seven Council Fires. Now more metaphor than reality, Seven retained its significance as a number of strength and unity. Consequently the Oglala, and other tribal divisions, sought to maintain seven main bands or tiyospaye (literally a lodge-group; a cluster of families related through blood, marriage, and ceremonial adoption). From the winter count traditions preserved by American Horse, we know the layout of the camp circle in summer 1825. Let us pause to examine what Lakotas called "the Nation's Hoop."

The Oglala Camp Circle in 1825

Band no. 1.

Waluta Wapaha, Red Banner

The positions either side of the east-facing camp entrance (tiyopa) were places of honour second only to the chatku, the place at the rear of the circle facing the entrance. The place abutting the south side of the camp entrance or tiyopa was called the “home horn.” In 1825 the tiyopa was marked by the banner which gave this group its name. It refers to the sort of lance hung with a feathered banner, a symbol of group strength and solidarity. One of the larger bands in the circle, Red Banner included four extended family clusters, aggregating over 250 people.

The largest group represented within the group was the Hunkpatila, one of the very oldest bands which made up the Oglala tribe. All the bands had complex histories, many with historic ties to the woodlands of Minnesota from which they had migrated over the past four centuries. The Hunkpatila were unique in being always occupants of the grasslands, acting as hosts to the ancestors of the True Oglala, the Kiyuksa and

other bands as they elected to serially become Teton (Prairie Village) people.

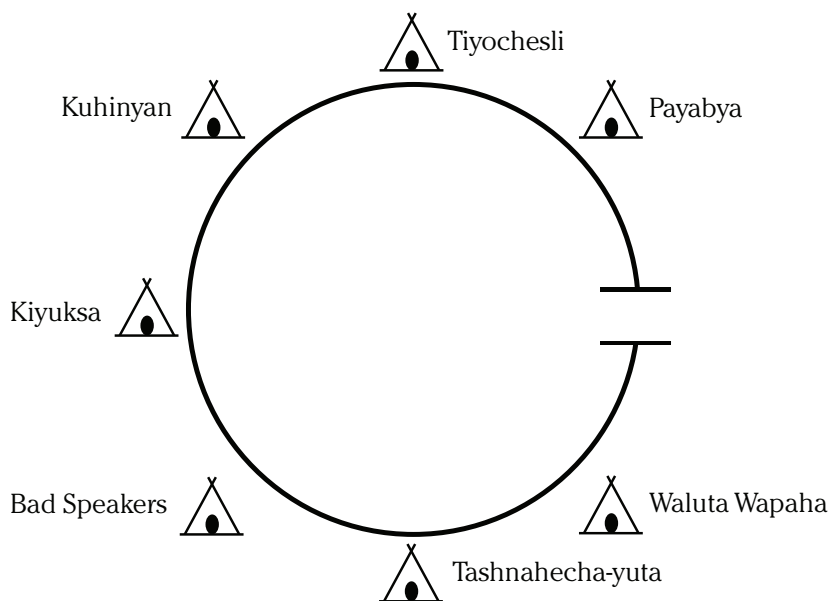
In the generation 1825-1850 the Hunkpatila band was cored around three sub-bands or wicoti. The senior family group was that of Yellow Eagle. Men bearing that name had led the band for several generations. The father of the first Yellow Eagle was Buffalo Shield, who was active as a civil leader in the early 1700s. Throughout this long period the Yellow Eagle wicoti had a distinct identity within the larger Hunkpatila band. They were the Red Rattle (Wagmuha Luta) sub-band, named after a sacred object fashioned from buffalo hooves.

The second wicoti was at least as old, and traced back its ancestral families within the Hunkpatila for many generations. It cored round the influential Black Elk family. The first Black Elk, if he was still alive, was about seventy years old in 1825. He was a prominent ritualist with a cohort of important sons. One was Black Elk II, a Kit-Fox society headman and the band's head-akichita. This sub-band carried an old name, Lightning Lance (Wahukeza Wakangli).

The third wicoti was led by Ghost Boy. It was named Owl Wing (Hupahu Hinhan) after a sacred object or medicine bundle kept within the group. Ghost Boy had married into the Hunkpatila a

Oglala Tribal Circle, 1825

According to the American Horse ledger book



Kingsley Bray and Richard Two Dogs

generation or so earlier, having been born into the Ground Squirrel Eaters sub-band of the True Oglala. He was one of the headmen chosen as Deciders when the tribe gathered in 1825, and so was one of the signatories to the treaty on July 6. Mad Soul (Nagi Gnaskinyan), a prominent warrior probably related to Ghost Boy, signed as the Hunkpatila head akichita.

A fourth sub-band had by the 1820s become closely associated with the Hunkpatila. This was a wicoti of the True Oglala (see Band no. 2), identified with the dynastic Standing Bull (Tatanka Nazhin) family. The contemporary bearer of the name was born early in the 1770s, and by 1825 was considered by Americans as the principal chief of the whole Oglala tribe. After the tribe reorganized its political structure in 1817-18, Standing Bull increasingly aligned his extended family cluster to the Hunkpatila. His Hunkpatila connections had been tightened through the marriages of his children. About 1815, a daughter married Lightning Stone, one of the brothers of Black Elk II. About 1835 Standing Bull's son, later to inherit the family name, married into the Lightning Lance sub-band. Consequently a new name was coined to identify the expanded band. Families and sub-bands were constantly shifting, and after 1840 the Standing Bull wicoti would realign itself to other bands, dissolving the ephemeral Red Banner identity.

The Standing Bull sub-band was of respectable age, and had borne a sequence of distinctive names. Since 1790 it had been known as the Cowrie Shell Earrings (Wakmuha Owin). In 1825 Standing Bull was selected by the council to serve as one of the Deciders. During the treaty councils he acted as the public face and voice of the Oglala tribe, welcoming the commissioners, hosting feasts and councils, and leading the Oglala signatories.

Four of the eight Oglala signatories to the treaty came from the Red Banner grouping. Grouped next to their distinctive banner lance, driven into the earth at the entrance to the camp circle, the Red Banner band proudly held the home horn of the Oglala hoop.

Band no. 2.

***Tashnahecha-yuta* (Ground Squirrel Eaters)**

Extending round the southern arc of the circle were two sister bands that had formerly, along with Standing Bull's wicoti, comprised the True Oglala band, the first to bear the tribal name. The Ground Squirrel Eaters comprised three family

clusters, approximately 200 people. Their ranking headman was Paints His Chin Red, cousin to the recently deceased Bad Wound. Early traders on the Missouri, like Pierre Dorion, Hugh Heney, and Regis Loisel, considered Bad Wound the most influential Oglala leader across the period 1800-15. Bad Wound fathered a sizeable family, including two sons who serially bore the family name Black Rock, but were killed by the Crows in 1806 and 1809. A third to bear the name was one of the Shirt Wearers, younger leaders pledged to defend the tribe.

A second family cluster focused on another prominent younger leader, Smoke. His followers comprised an expanding wicoti known as the Bad Face (Ite Shicha), whose senior elder was Yellow Leggings. Later famous as the band of Red Cloud, the Bad Faces were just beginning to forge a distinctive identity in 1825. Selective marriage strategies were linking them with the Kuhinyan (Band no. 5) and headmen were formulating an alternate political strategy, more skeptical of the United States than the consensus position of 1825.

Band no. 3.

***Iya-shicha* (Bad Speakers)**

Occupying the southwest arc of the circle was another offshoot of the True Oglala. It focused on the following of Sitting Bear, bearer of an ancient dynastic name. The family is ancestral to the modern American Horse people in the Medicine Root District of the Pine Ridge Reservation. In his mid-forties in 1825, Sitting Bear was a rising ritualist. He came from a long line of Bear Dreamers, men who received power for doctoring from the spirit Bear. He had served as the chief priest of the Sun Dance and would go on to a distinguished life as a ceremonialist.

Another True Oglala wicoti, the Earth Eaters (Maka-yuta), led by Fast Whirlwind, camped with the Bad Speakers in 1825.

Band no. 4.

***Kiyuksa* (Break One's Own)**

The most prestigious position in any camp circle was the honour place or chatku, facing the entrance. It was analogous to the father's seat in a domestic tipi. Occupying the chatku in 1825 was the Kiyuksa band. It had a long and complex history, migrating from the Minnesota woodlands in the 1600s and joining the ancestral True Oglala and Hunkpatila bands which preceded it on the grasslands. Its seniority in

tribal history was reflected in social, political, and ceremonial eminence.

In 1825 the Kiyuksa comprised four extended family clusters. It already had its own distinct council and organization, which had merged its membership with the tribal council after the bands gathered to form the camp circle. From its complement of prominent men, Crazy Bear was selected to serve as one of the Deciders. He had marriage ties to the Bad Speakers (his sister was married to Sitting Bear) reflected in the camp layout. Strongest personality in the Oglala tribe was the band's head-akichita Bull Bear (1783-1841). He was one of the bow-lance owners in the Kit-Fox warrior society, and a vocal proponent of the treaty. His father White Swan was one of the oldest and most respected figures in the chiefs' council. Crazy Bear and Bull Bear represented the band in touching the pen to the treaty.

Band no. 5.

***Kuhinyan* (Sacred Stone Returning)**

The Kuhinyan band was an offshoot of the Kiyuksa which had spent a generation "camping away from the circle" until 1819, when it returned to reclaim a place in the Oglala hoop. In 1825 it was assigned the place next to the parent band. It comprised three wicoti, about 200 people. Wears Yellow Earring was the son of the band founder, and his sons Big Head and Spotted Horse would lead their own family cluster into the mid-nineteenth century. Other family heads were Red Bear (brother to Sitting Bear of the Bad Speakers), Lone Man (father of Red Cloud), and Black Spotted Calf or Man Afraid of His Horse. There were especially close links to the Ground Squirrel Eaters. Lone Man and Smoke, for example, were married to each other's sisters, and forging a closer political identity around the embryonic Bad Face grouping. Bad Wound's son Black Lance married in to the Kuhinyan about 1825. Many followers of Black Lance shifted to Kuhinyan over the next decade, generating another new sub-band, the Badger Eaters. Such was the dynamic evolving nature of Lakota social organization.

Band no. 6.

***Tiyochesli* (Defecates in Lodge)**

The smallest band in 1825 was the Tiyochesli, focused round the single extended family cluster led by His Dirty Star (Ta Wicahpi Shapa). It may have numbered as few as fifteen lodges, 120 people. The band was derived from Sicangu

people who had joined the Oglala tribe sixty years earlier, and it continued to float between the two tribal divisions. It was, or became aligned with the larger Wazhazha band, which settled both on Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. The 1825 Oglala Sun Dance was sponsored by Wazhazha principals, and the ceremonial camp had featured many Wazhazha guests. Possibly they camped with Tiyochesli hosts.

Band no. 7.

***Payabya* (Pushed to Head)**

The north side of the camp entrance was known as the "tail horn." Occupying that sector of the circle was the Payabya band. It comprised up to 300 people, five wicoti. The band had a long history entwined with the Brule Lakotas. In later years it would renew an old association with the Man Afraid of His Horse family. This was the band which wintered on the Missouri, 1824-25. The constituent family clusters included the Black Calf sub-band (associated with the leading men Hard to Understand and his son Shell Man), the Southern People (led by Tobacco, a sub-band with strong ties to the Miniconjou and Oyuhpe groups), the Never Misses (led by Crooked Lance), and the Skokpa (core line of the later Spleen band, led by Calfskin Robe).

In 1825 the ranking band headman was Black Thunder. He led the fifth wicoti, the Shiyo (Sharptail Grouse). Forgotten in tribal tradition, the Shiyo had been an important Lakota grouping in the eighteenth century. Shoulder, a headman of Oyuhpe extraction, was selected as one of the tribal Deciders and signed the treaty. Lone Bull, another in-married Oyuhpe and a prominent Kit-Fox member, signed as the band's head-akichita.

On the campground all was bustle.

Ceremonial leaders and pledgers prepared for the annual Sun Dance. Scouts were dispatched to locate buffalo. In the council lodge, the Deciders presided over days of debate regarding the treaty the Americans had proposed. Messengers and envoys from across the Lakota world arrived, departed. Much needed to be decided. First of all, should the Lakotas approve the treaty?

Over two decades, official contact between the Lakotas and the United States remained limited. As the tribal superpower of the region, the Lakota had critically weighed each of the colonial powers that serially had claimed sovereignty over their continent. Two distinct reactions to white people

characterise the Lakota experience. Some favored self-determination, freedom from entangling alliances. Others welcomed the newcomers as vital trade partners. A consensus usually formed around managing the alliance—first with New France, then Great Britain—in Lakota interests. All these forces found new expression in June 1825.

South of the Oglala camp, the Brule division was gathering for its Sun Dance on lower White River. The southernmost of the Lakota tribes, the Brules had first forged contact with the trading community based in St. Louis. Their council had supported the Americans in the War of 1812, and led the nation in agreeing its first treaty with the Americans. In 1815 Lakotas had signed an agreement promising peace, friendship, and trade. Not spelled out in the treaty clauses, but understood by Lakotas as fundamental to the agreement, was a commitment to open the Missouri River to traders' boats. Lakota strategies of preventing traders passing upriver to enemy tribes were laid aside. A new era of alliance, grounded in the buffalo robe trade, had opened. In 1825, their envoys advised the Oglalas, the Brule chiefs intended to continue engaging with the American presence. They would attend talks at Fort Lookout.⁹

Quite different were messages from further north on the Missouri. The Hunkpapa division was the northernmost Lakota group. Their position meant that St. Louis ties were weakest. Exposed to Canadian traders, they had retained British sympathies after the War of 1812. Throughout the nineteenth century the Hunkpapa were the main articulators of the Lakota ideology of self-sufficiency, of distancing from white intruders. Events over the last two years had focused these themes. In 1823 several hundred Lakota warriors had been recruited by the Americans to assist in punishing the Arikara tribe for its attack on a party of fur trappers bound for the Rocky Mountains. The U.S. troops, led by Colonel Henry Leavenworth, had put on a poor showing, and Lakotas had pondered the lesson. Many among the northern divisions concluded that the Americans were weak—they believed that like France and Britain before, the American presence would eventually dissolve, to leave the Lakota in undisputed control of the plains. Hunkpapa messengers declared their opposition to the treaty and indicated they would not attend Fort Lookout.¹⁰

These were the issues in play as the Deciders presided over talks in mid-June. The chiefs' council was augmented by all men with a war record. Immediately, skeptical voices were sounded. Most vocal were two warriors from the Hunkpatila

band, Runs Against and Respects Nothing. They argued powerfully for the Hunkpapa position. They received support from several men in the embryonic sub-band called Bad Face, which in turn garnered assent from in-laws in Lone Man's sub-band of the Kuhinyan. As tribal historian Thomas American Horse observed to his grandson in the early 1960s, family attitudes to the white presence—attitudes which shaped the Sioux Wars era—were forged in 1825. Descendants of the skeptical of 1825 formed the core of Oglala armed resistance to the Americans a generation later.¹¹

Counter arguments were deployed by headmen who favored deepening the alliance with the United States. The council of chiefs and elders formed a society called the Bull Headdress Wearers, a lodge which had favored trade relations with the colonial powers. Now its members moved to attend peace talks, to continue engagement with American officials. The selection of Deciders and akichita included men and interests which inclined toward attending talks. Shoulder had been a key war leader who supported the Leavenworth campaign against the Arikaras. He had lost a brother in the campaign, but was not inclined to abandon the American alliance.¹² Standing Bull was considered by most traders as the principal Oglala chief, able and dependable. As the Hunkpatila leader, Ghost Boy was perhaps the most intrinsically skeptical of the Deciders, but he remained careful not to express any view at variance with the collective voice of the tribe.

The Kit-Fox society, maintaining order in the village, took a measured view of all contending views. Throughout its history among the Oglalas, beginning in Minnesota in 1701, it had struck a distinctive attitude toward the white presence. It embodied an attitude, equally balanced, of critical engagement. Other warrior societies, notably the Strong Hearts, would develop ideologies of resistance. The Kit-Fox remained wedded to an attitude that the Americans were a fact of life that had to be engaged with. That did not mean subservience. Alliance could be withheld, withdrawn for cause—as would happen in the Powder River Wars of the 1860s. But as a source of trade items—metal tools, textile goods, above all the geopolitical arbiters of firearms and ammunition—Americans must be bound close to Lakota interests. This attitude shaped how Kit-Fox spokesmen addressed councils, feasts, and warrior gatherings in the days leading to the Sun Dance gathering. Bull Bear, the Kiyuksa head soldier and



**Sun Dance at Pine Ridge,
1883. NSHS RG1910-08**

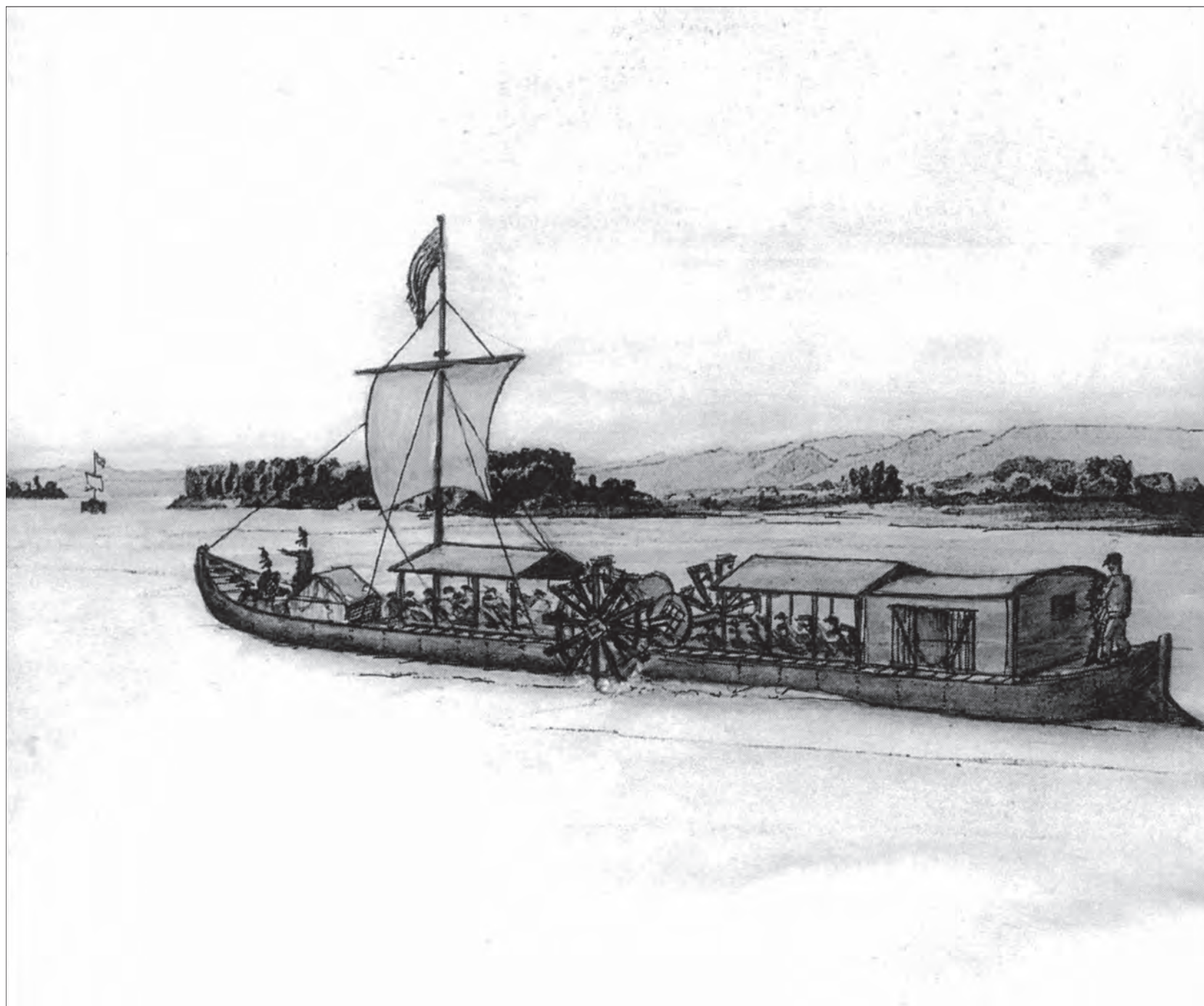
keeper of one of the society's bow-lances—six foot bows hung with feather streamers and tipped with a spear head—made for a forceful proponent of the treaty. Such was his personality that many listeners acceded to Bull Bear's words.¹³

The next stage in the summer schedule was the Sun Dance. The decision, reached by ceremonial leaders sitting with a body of elders, was to hold it just six miles up Bad River. Voiced by Black Crow, the holy man acclaimed as Intercessor (Kuwa-kiyapi, Gives Praise), this had important repercussions. It committed the Oglalas to not attending the Fort Lookout talks. This may have played into several interlocking interests. It deferred controversial decisions. It meant that Oglala councils could not be dominated by Brule chiefs, rivals for supremacy in the Lakota nation. Significantly, both Black Crow and the leading dancer, Walks Along, belonged to the Wazhazha band. The Wazhazhas were a distinct and fiercely independent band, but their prime affiliations were to the Brules. That Wazhazha visitors figured so strongly in the 1825 Oglala ceremony indicates something of the play of interest between the divisions.

Word was sent to Fort Lookout to advise that the Oglalas would meet the Americans, at their own rendezvous at the junction of Bad River. That consensus was shaping is shown by the fact that the Saone division of Lakotas—bands which differentiated into the Sans Arc, Miniconjou, and Two Kettle tribes—also sent word that they would join the Oglalas in council. Even then they were moving south from their home ranges along Cheyenne River.

As the village prepared for the Sun Dance, messengers from Fort Lookout announced that the Brules, the Yanktons, and some Yanktonais had met with the expedition over June 21-22, and their headmen and warriors had touched the pen. The officials had recognized certain men as chiefs, presenting them medals and certificates. Presents of guns, powder and ball, blankets and cloth had been issued. The Lakotas responded with gifts of regalia—"a few dresses of dressed leather," according to the official journal, "2 eagle feather caps & some ½ doz. Pipes."¹⁴

So it was, in the last week of June, that the Oglala tribe made its remove to the Sun Dance site.¹⁵ Walks Along marched far ahead of the column, wrapped



Wheel Boat used by the Atkinson-O'Fallon Expedition
in 1825. Illustration by Curt Peacock, NSHS

in a buffalo robe with the hair side out. Behind him strode the four Deciders in a row, pipes cradled in their left arms, closely attended by heralds. Other headmen rode slowly behind the Deciders, and then the column of people, marshalled by the Kit-Fox warriors, many distinguished by their yellow paint and their roach hairstyles. They made three ritual pauses, unlimbering travois and unloading packs, before locating the new camp on a flat next to Bad River. Leadership was transferred to the ritual authorities, Black Crow and assistant holy men, their hands and faces painted red, stuffed birdskins tied in their hair. For four days the tribe gave itself to the fulfillment of pledges and the celebration of renewal.

As the Oglalas celebrated, the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition embarked upstream. Some 476 soldiers of the Sixth Infantry formed the party. They sailed in eight wheel boats, specifically designed for the mission. Keelboats had been fitted with paddle-wheel machinery to facilitate upstream travel. A unit of mounted men followed the boats, ranging along the west side of the Missouri. Leading the expedition were General Henry Atkinson and Benjamin O'Fallon, Indian Agent for the Upper Missouri, and appointed joint Commissioner for purposes of concluding treaties with the tribes. Colonel Leavenworth accompanied the expedition. On June 30 the expedition assembled a mile or two above the mouth of Bad River. It formed an encampment, named Camp Teton, with intention "to remain several days to council with the Indians."¹⁶

Learning of the presence of Indian camps nearby, Captains William Armstrong and George H. Kennerly, with eight mounted men, were sent to summon them to council. An interpreter, probably Colin Campbell, a mixed blood Santee Sioux engaged at Fort Lookout, accompanied the unit. Departing the morning of the thirtieth, Armstrong's party must have arrived at the Oglala camp during the afternoon. Armstrong's orders were to contact the Oglalas, the Saones—reported in camp thirty miles up Bad River—and the Cheyennes. News of the expedition had diverted the Cheyennes from their plan to trade horses at the Arikara villages. They were in camp eighty miles up Bad River.¹⁷

What Armstrong did at the Oglala village went unrecorded, but in Campbell he had a fine interpreter, a member of the Little Crow family—an elite Santee dynasty commanding wide respect and influence. The outcome indicates that Armstrong and Campbell's visit, spanning June 30 through July 1, was important in cementing the consensus

in favor of the agreement. The Oglalas understood that the purpose of the treaty was to confirm friendship and trade. Moreover, according to a speech made by Red Leaf fifty years later they agreed "to let the white people take their pack-trains through their country."¹⁸ No such clause is in the written treaty, and the Oglalas necessarily derived this understanding from the interpreter. Campbell's hand is detectable, probably, at this earliest phase of negotiation.

It was a dramatic juncture. Armstrong arrived on what was likely the last day of the Sun Dance, when the dancers, led by Walks Along, underwent their ordeals, swinging from the pole, hanging in air, or dragging buffalo skulls suspended from their backs. After the drama, activity shifted to the council lodge, and Campbell's presentation of Armstrong's proposals.

Possibly this was the point when the chiefs council decided to appeal to key elders to pronounce a final decision on signing the treaty. The Silent Eaters were a select body of revered men, most in their seventies. They feasted in silence, spoke in aphorisms. Unlike the Bull Headdress Wearers, they were not identified with the alliance builders or pro-trade factions. If anything, they leaned to the skeptical strain of Lakota thought. The Deciders yielded their seats to four Silent Eaters—High Pine, Long Road, War Lance, and Eats From the Horn.¹⁹

After a feast, the four meditated on the issues. Leaning against canes, faces and hands vivid red, resplendent in shell earrings, they had much to contemplate. At length, after whispered conferrals, they declared that the treaty was good. They directed the four Deciders to sign it on behalf of the Oglala people. Through their herald the Deciders announced the decision around the campground. Kit-Fox spokesmen, instructed by the Deciders, issued their own orders to prepare to move to the Missouri. If there were dissenters—Lone Man of the Kuhinyan, possibly one of the messengers to Fort Lookout, is a real candidate—they met with stern reproval from Bull Bear and his comrades.

On July 1 the village was struck. Some straggled away to visit elsewhere, or dawdled slowly down Bad River. The main village, 110 lodges, moved off. On the second it rose early. The Deciders met and deputed Standing Bull and five other headmen and warriors to ride ahead to Camp Teton. Upon their departure the herald strode out and ordered camp struck. At 9:00 a.m. sentinels at Camp Teton alerted their commander, and Standing Bull's party was escorted to headquarters. Campbell

Sioux Dog Feast, by
George Catlin, 1832.
Smithsonian American
Art Museum, 1985.66.494



introduced Standing Bull as “the principle chief of the Ogelallas [*sic*].” The chief declared that he “came to make himself known & to ask where he should pitch the lodges of his nation. He is a dignified & well behaved man,” observed General Atkinson, “& has great influence among his people.” At 9:30 Atkinson and O’Fallon, with three officers, mounted and in full uniform rode out with Standing Bull’s party to meet the Oglalas. Preliminaries were again handled skillfully by all concerned, and the Oglalas pitched camp about a mile from the rows of soldier tents.²⁰

On the morning of the third the village moved closer to a point “1/2 mile below our camp.” An Oto Indian travelling with the soldiers prepared a detailed map of the expedition. He depicted an arc of tipis anchored along the north side of Bad River, facing Camp Teton. The camp entrance fronted onto the Missouri. A party of chiefs rode over to the camp, and were ushered to the headquarters tent. They “invited the commissioners & officers to a feast tomorrow at 3 o.c P.M.” The commissioners

were concerned about the arrival of the Saones and Cheyennes. A party of Cheyenne headmen was approaching, the Oglalas confirmed, and the Saone village was “expected to morrow evening or next day.” Tobacco, one of the visiting chiefs, with marriage ties to the Saones, agreed to ride out and “bring in the Sione [*sic*] Band as early as possible.”²¹

Sun rose on July 4. Colin Campbell had surely explained to the Oglalas the significance of the day, the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the United States. Like the Lakota it was an expanding power, now counting twenty-four council fires (states). Camp Teton marked the occasion at noon by issuing a gill of whisky to each man—“to drink to the anniversary of the Independence of his Country.” At 1:00 Oglala spectators watched the artillery contingent bring forward a cannon and a howitzer to fire their “national salute.”

Meanwhile preparations went on for the feast. Delegations of Saone and Cheyenne leaders had arrived. The council lodge was extended and repitched. “Seats consisting of Buffalo robes



Tchán-dee, Tobacco, an Oglala Chief, by George Catlin, 1832. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1985.66.71



Né-hee-ó-ee-wóo-tis, Wolf on the Hill, Chief of the Tribe, 1832, by George Catlin, 1832. This Cheyenne leader's name is also translated as "High-Back Wolf." Wikimedia Commons

Kingsley Bray is the author of Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008) and of numerous articles about Lakota history and culture. He lives in Manchester, England. He is currently at work on a biography of Old Man Afraid of His Horse.

Beaver skins & some pieces of domestic cloth were prepared in the center of the outer circle of the lodge for the commissioners." Immediately before the seats was placed a line of "5 entire Buffalo dungs." These dried "chips" invested the space with the presence of the Buffalo spirit. The Oglala ceremonial pipe was carefully placed, leaning against a rack, the bowl resting on the centre chip.

Seven fires, perhaps representing the bands present, were lighted with brass kettles suspended over the flames. The Deciders' orderlies, and senior Kit-Fox members, bustled over these preparations. At 3.00 p.m. the Commissioners, accompanied by most of the officers, rode over and were ushered onto the campground. Escorted by herald and painted akichita, they were led to the lodge and shown their seats, which extended round the north side of the arc. Atkinson and O'Fallon were seated in the Deciders' places, immediately to the left of Standing Bull. The Oglala, Saone, and Cheyenne chiefs were ranged to his right. Standing Bull rose, "took up the pipe & presented the stem to Genl. A." From a coal burning sweetgrass incense he lighted the pipe. Atkinson "took a few whiffs & passed it on to Maj. O Fallon. The Chief then took the pipe emptied it of its ashes on the centre dung & presented the pipe to Genl. A."

Orderlies and attendants oversaw the boiling of thirteen dogs, "much done," in the kettles. They ran down to the Missouri to bring back fresh water in buffalo paunch skins, "which gave it a disagreeable taste" to the fastidious general. Nevertheless the feast was a success. Standing Bull indicated that all would go into council the following day to sign the treaty. About 4:30 the officials rose, to be presented with the "Robes & skins on which we were seated," and returned to Camp Teton, to drink "some wine in commemoration of the day."²² Clerks readied copies of the treaty for the morrow, dated July 5.

The following day temperatures hit 106 degrees. By 9:00 a.m. a great crowd of Indians packed the space between the two camps. The brigade was reviewed. Lakotas had never seen so many U.S. soldiers before, a colorful sight in full parade dress. Then the artillery was displayed a second time. "The two field pieces mounted & served with Horses, mattresses mounted, the pieces passed over the plain at full speed. The Indians were struck with great awe at the display." The commissioners proposed that the chiefs move into council. However the Saone chiefs, probably speaking through Sans Arc headman Charger,

"wished it deferred till tomorrow 'till the whole of the band should have come in." In the evening the commissioners visited the Oglala camp and invited all the chiefs to Camp Teton to witness yet more pyrotechnics—"the throwing up of some twenty rockets by Lt. Holmes, which he done with good effect." Before the display Standing Bull and several other chiefs held a talk with the commissioners, "preparatory to the Council to be held tomorrow."²³

The morning of July 6 began with the arrival, about 7:00, of "upwards of 200 Lodges of the Saones." Charger and the Saone deputation oversaw the pitching of their camp immediately to the north of the Oglala circle, "within half a mile" of Camp Teton. Then a body of leaders, representing all three tribes, marched over to the soldier tents. A huge crowd spread out around them. The representatives were admitted by pickets and led to the council grounds. An awning had been raised over a table behind which sat the assembled officers—twenty or more in full regimentals. Colin Campbell sat at the end of the line to extend mutual greetings. Flags and regimental banners declared Camp Teton to be American space. As the headmen took seats on the ground facing the officers, Kit-Fox men—probably instructed by Last Horse—kept back the throngs of spectators, matching the duties of Atkinson's guard detail. The three men recognized as principal chiefs—Standing Bull, Charger, and the Cheyenne High-Back Wolf—assumed places at the center of their arc. Peers flanked them, and a coterie of warriors hunched down behind the chiefs. A core of head soldiers assumed seats at the end of the arc, lighting pipes, eyeing the proceedings. Matching U.S. colors and arms, banners, spears, and bow lances surely marked the area as native space.

Talks began at 9:00 a.m.²⁴ In turns the commissioners addressed the council, explaining the treaty terms. Six separate articles regulated trade, forbade signatory tribes from trading with foreign powers, and assured peace and friendship with the United States. Chiefs undertook to restore stolen property and stock (an issue after Leavenworth's Arikara campaign), and to respect the safety of American citizenry. Reflecting Oglala involvement with Cheyenne allies who ranged far southward, they promised not to molest American travelers on the Santa Fe Trail. Never would they trade arms and ammunition to tribes hostile to the United States. No clauses addressed land sales, beyond the statement that signatory tribes

“reside within the territorial limits of the United States, acknowledge their supremacy, and claim their protection.” This assertion of sovereignty was surely couched in terms Campbell explained in native idioms. Since 1815 the Lakotas and Americans had enjoyed a relationship of alliance, expressed in terms of ritual adoption. As visitors, the Americans assumed the stylized role of “fathers” to their native “children”—a relationship with an emphasis more on generosity than authority. The U.S. president was accorded a status as Grandfather—typically glossed by Americans as the Great White Father. Such metaphors surely framed Campbell’s translations of the vaguer passages of the treaty.

The commission failed to record the speeches made by native leaders. At length, with afternoon drawing on, the chiefs indicated their agreement to the treaty. The Saone representatives, as honoured guests of the Oglalas, led off the signing, each man walking to the table and holding the end of the quill while a clerk made an X-mark, then added their names in phonetic Lakota pronounced by Campbell, with English translation. The four Oglala Deciders, each attended by a Kit-Fox headman, then added their marks to the document. Finally, the Cheyenne leaders, their names rendered in Lakota via a bilingual tribesman, attached their signature marks.²⁵


Now the drama moved onto the prairie between the camps. Over three tons of Indian presents were under guard. A proportion of those goods was hauled out. Kit-Fox warriors again handled the distribution, clearing a circle of spectators and overseeing the opening of bales and cases. Three equal sized piles were assembled. Muskets and ammunition were distributed, powder and ball. Blankets were handed out. Lengths of cloth were presented to matrons, along with women’s utensils like scissors, needles, and awls. Colored beads, vermilion paint, nested kettles, all were stacked for distribution. “Three Horses with Holsters, pistols & swords were presented by Genl. A. to the three principal chiefs.” By 3:00 p.m. the crowds began to drift homeward, Standing Bull and his peers riding their large “American” horses and bearing their sabres as they had observed officers doing through the previous five days.²⁶

All relaxed. Lieutenant W. S. Harney accompanied a Lakota party to the Cheyenne camp, where they feted High-Back Wolf and were honored with a chiefly gift of many horses. In the evening crowds gathered for a final evening’s

entertainment. “Lt. Holmes threw 6 shells from the Howitzer in presence of the Indians. They exploded handsomely,” concluded Atkinson, permitting himself a moment of racial condescension, “& made a deep impression upon these savages.”²⁷

On the morning of July 7, Camp Teton was struck. The troops embarked at 8:45 and within fifteen minutes the expedition was under sail. Each boat moved off in regular succession, paddle wheels in motion, into midstream then pointed up the Missouri. For over a mile the shore and hills were lined with more than 3,000 Indians.²⁸

One of the set piece dramas of Lakota-U.S. relations had ended. The commission ascended the Missouri. That their southern tribesmen had already signed the treaty must have helped convince the more skeptical Sihasapa and Hunkpapa divisions to approve the agreement with the commissioners, which they signed respectively at the Little Cheyenne River on July 12, and at the Arikara villages on July 16. When the expedition disbanded at Fort Atkinson on September 20, it had successfully “treated with the Poncars—with the Teton [Brule], Yancton, Yanctonies, Augallallas [Oglala], Saones and Hunkpapa tribes of the Sioux—with the Chayennes—the Ricaras—the Mandans-Minetarees, and Crow nation of Indians.”²⁹

Moving away after buffalo, the Oglalas could consider the agreement and the future. Off record, one of the American undertakings that had secured Lakota approval was to regularly disburse presents as was done at the councils. Treaty goods were limited, just a few hundred dollars worth of knives, blankets, and other presents handed out most years to the Lakota. Such was the centrality of the buffalo robe trade to the Plains Indian economy, however, that these goodwill gifts were accepted as adequate recompense for American use of the Missouri River and the traders’ pack-train routes overland. The vaguer claims of the United States to sovereignty over the native communities were for the moment irrelevant to most Indians. The agreements would only come under more searching review as the American presence on the plains changed, across the succeeding twenty years, when a relentless flow of white emigration set in across the continent—and when the United States increasingly sought to control the native peoples enclaved within its expanding borders. Then a new generation of Lakota leaders, youths or children in 1825, would seek to redefine interethnic relations with the white man. 

NOTES

¹ For background on this era of U.S.-Lakota relations, see Harry H. Anderson, "The Letters of Peter Wilson, First Resident Agent Among the Teton Sioux," *Nebraska History* 42:4 (1961): 237-64; idem, "The Diplomacy of Lewis and Clark Among the Teton Sioux," *South Dakota History*, 35:1 (2005): 40-70; Kingsley M. Bray, "'Singing the Big Belly Song': The Making of the Robe Trade Alliance with the Lakota," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*, 43:3/4 (Fall/Winter 2007): 88-99.

² Kingsley M. Bray, "Teton Sioux Population History, 1655-1881," *Nebraska History*, 75:2 (1994): 171, 174.

³ George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 39-40.

⁴ Richard E. Jensen and James S. Hutchins, eds., *Wheel Boats On the Missouri: The Journals and Documents of the Atkinson-O'Fallon Expedition, 1824-26* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, and Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society Press, 2001).

⁵ Roger L. Nichols, "General Henry Atkinson's Report of the Yellowstone Expedition of 1825," *Nebraska History*, 44:2 (1963): 75.

⁶ These four men signed the Oglala treaty as "Chiefs." The American Horse ledger confirms their appointment in spring 1825 as the season's Deciders or camp chiefs. The following section, including my account of the tribal camp circle, is sourced exclusively from American Horse.

⁷ Old Man Afraid of His Horse (c. 1808-1889) was the principal Oglala statesman of the nineteenth century. His central role in the Treaty of 1851 is detailed in Kingsley M. Bray, "Lakota Statesmen and the Horse Creek Treaty of 1851," this issue.

⁸ With the exception of Last Horse, all these men (named by American Horse as head *akichita*) signed the Oglala treaty as "Warriors."

⁹ Bray, "'Singing the Big Belly Song'."

¹⁰ For background on the Hunkpapa in this era, see Kingsley M. Bray, "Before Sitting Bull: Interpreting Hunkpapa Political History, 1750-1867," *South Dakota History*, 40:2 (2010).

¹¹ American Horse ledger. Glosses were given by American Horse's son Thomas (1866-1963), who had helped compile the written record ledger, to his grandson, my friend Richard Two Dogs.

¹² Poor Bull (aka Red Warbonnet) interview, July 18, 1907, Field Notes, Edmond S. Meany Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington Library, Seattle. Poor Bull was the son of Shoulder, and recalled his father's involvement in the Arikara campaign. Shoulder was presented with a saber during the campaign.

¹³ Bull Bear kept the Kit-Fox bow-lance from 1815 until 1835, when he was made a Shirt Wearer and retired the lance. American Horse ledger. For background on the Kit-Fox, see especially Clark Wissler, "Societies and Ceremonial Associations in the Oglala Division of the Teton-Dakota," *American Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Papers*, Vol. XI, Part I (1912): 14-23. For a depiction of regalia,

see Amos Bad Heart Bull and Helen Blish, *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 114-15.

¹⁴ The expedition's diplomacy at Fort Lookout is documented in Jensen and Hutchins, eds., *Wheel Boats on the Missouri*, 99-106 (quotation at 106).

¹⁵ Details on the 1825 Sun Dance, including identities of Intercessor and Chief Dancer, are from the American Horse ledger. For background on the ceremony, see James R. Walker, "The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota," *American Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Papers*, Vol. XVI, Part II (1917).

¹⁶ Jensen and Hutchins, eds., *Wheel Boats on the Missouri*, 112-13.

¹⁷ Ibid., 113. Colin Campbell was hired as "Interpreter for the various tribes of Sioux" at Fort Lookout on June 18. Ibid., 244. His father, Archibald John Campbell, was one of many British traders working among the Eastern or Santee Sioux after the War of Independence. His mother was a sister of Hawk Hunts Walking, a Mdewakanton chief (c. 1764-1834) and the grandfather of the Little Crow killed in the Minnesota war of 1862. Colin moved to the Missouri in the early 1820s, employed by the Missouri Fur Co. and later by the Chouteau Co. as an interpreter and trader with the Lakotas. He also acted as interpreter in the 1851 Horse Creek treaty.

¹⁸ Red Leaf speech, June 26, 1873, in *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1873*, 168.

¹⁹ American Horse ledger. The Silent Eaters were the oldest Lakota society for headmen. Little is known about them. They had no distinctive regalia or songs, but "only have ideas with which to act, it is said," according to Oglala Thomas Tyon: James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 267.

²⁰ Jensen and Hutchins, eds., *Wheel Boats on the Missouri*, 115.

²¹ Ibid., 116.

²² Ibid., 118-19, details events of July 4.

²³ Ibid., 119. The Oglala and Saone treaty as proclaimed and printed preserves the date July 5, but was in fact signed on July 6, at the same time as the Cheyenne treaty.

²⁴ Ibid., 119-20.

²⁵ The treaties, with signatures by commissioners, Indian "Chiefs" and "Warriors," and witnesses, are printed in Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Vol. 2, *Treaties* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 230-32.

²⁶ Jensen and Hutchins, eds., *Wheel Boats on the Missouri*, 119-20 (includes quotation). A list of presents bought for the Indians is printed in *ibid.*, 223-25.

²⁷ Ibid., 120. Harney recalled this visit to George Bent at the Medicine Lodge Treaty in 1867: see George Bent to George E. Hyde, April 12, 1916, Yale University Library.

²⁸ Jensen and Hutchins, eds., *Wheel Boats on the Missouri*, 121.

²⁹ Ibid., 124-25, 128, 177 (includes quotation).