

'EVERYTHING GOOD IS THERE': EXPLORING THE MATERIAL
CULTURE AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPES AT CHIEF PLENTY COUPS
STATE PARK

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ABSTRACT

Alaxchiiyahush, Plenty Coups, was the final chief of the Crow people. His spiritual vision quest as a young man showed him that cooperation with the coming White settlers was the only way to survive, and he led the Crow people through the assimilation of the reservation period. He died at age 84, and requested that his land and house be dedicated as a park for all people. In 1965, it became a Montana State Park, and it tells the story of Plenty Coups and of the Crow people to thousands of visitors each year. This thesis examines how material culture and landscape analysis can enhance the existing narrative, and center Crow voices in discussions about Crow culture. It analyzes the collection of artifacts at Chief Plenty Coups State Park and shows how deliberate Plenty Coups was in his assimilation efforts; giving a little when necessary to maintain his and his people's cultural integrity.

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Fig. 1 *Tshidiapas Absaroka*, C.M. Bell (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 1880)

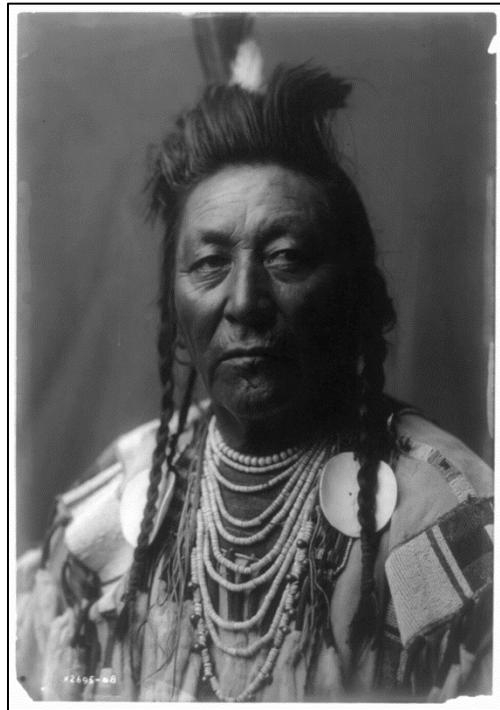


Fig. 2 *Plenty Coups [A]*, Apsaroke, Edward S. Curtis (Library of Congress, 1908)

CHAPTER ONE:
HISTORIOGRAPHY, OR: HOW PLENTY COUPS FITS INTO THE LARGER
HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF HOW TO BE A “GOOD INDIAN”

The Apsaalooke, or Crow, people arrived in southeastern Montana, after splitting with the Mandan-Hidatsa tribe near the Missouri River in present-day North Dakota.¹ The exact date of separation of the tribes is not known, but per tribal historian Joe Medicine Crow, it occurred around 1600 to 1624.² For hundreds of years, they traveled, hunted and lived on the sacred land given to them by the Great Spirit. This land stretched for 33 million acres, covering the modern-day areas of Billings, Bozeman, and Red Lodge in Montana, and stretching all the way to the Black Hills of South Dakota. In 1868, Chief Sits in the Middle of the Land described the boundaries of the land at the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 negotiations as this:

I have but one tipi. It has but four poles. It is held to the ground by big rocks. My east lodge pole touches the ground at the Black Hills; my south, the ground at the headwaters of the Wind River; my west, the snowcapped Absaroke and Beartooth Range; the north lodge pole rests on the Bearpaw Mountains.³

¹ Rodney Frey, *The World of the Crow Indians: As Driftwood Lodges* (Norman: OK, University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 11-12. Others place the date anywhere from 900 to 1500, depending on whom you ask and what sources they use, but I will use this number since it is quoted from a Crow historian.

³ Peter Nabokov, *Two Leggings: The Making of a Crow Warrior* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), xvii.

There are three divisions of the Crow tribe: River Crow, Mountain Crow and Kicked in the Belly. The River Crow lived between the Milk River near the Canadian border and the Yellowstone River near present-day Billings. Chief Plenty Coups State Park—and Plenty Coups' homestead—is in River Crow territory. The Mountain Crow lived in the Big Horn Mountains, in southern Montana and northern Wyoming. The Kicked in the Bellies spent their summers in the Big Horn Mountains and their winters near the Wind (Bighorn) River in central Wyoming.⁴ Although there are divisions and each group is proud of its individual heritage as Kicked in the Belly, River or Mountain Crow, all the Crow people stand together as one united tribe, albeit one with a varied and interesting past.

In the mid-1700s, the Crow controlled a large portion of land, but enemy tribes surrounded them: the Sioux to the east, Assiniboine and Blackfeet to the north, Salish to the west, and Arapaho and Cheyenne to the south. Despite the small size of the Crow tribe in comparison to some of the other tribes, they fought off their enemies and retained their lands. The biggest challenge to Crow land came during the mid-nineteenth century, as American settlers moved west and the American government pushed the native peoples onto smaller and smaller areas of land to

⁴ "Apsaalooke Writing Tribal Histories," Little Big Horn College Tribal Histories Project, <https://perma.cc/FX5U-EMWT> (accessed November 30, 2012, permalink created June 6, 2016).

make room for railroads, roads, and the inevitable population influxes they would bring. The United States government made numerous treaties with the various tribes of the West and Pacific Northwest; these treaties were negotiated through translators and were often broken or reconfigured later by the United States Congress.

The Crow tribe signed treaties with the United States on numerous occasions, including many land cessions in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Crow Friendship Treaty was signed in 1825 and defined the peaceful relationship between the United States and the Crow. Twenty-six years later, the Crow Reservation, and reservations for the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Assiniboine, Gros-Ventre, Mandan and Arikara tribes, was established through the 1851 Ft. Laramie Treaty. The final treaty, signed in 1868 also at Ft. Laramie, finalized the United States/Crow relationship, and the jurisdiction of the land.⁵ Throughout the decades following this final treaty, tribal leaders signed other agreements, mostly selling off portions of the reservation land back to the government.

⁵ "Tribal Government," Official Site of the Crow Nation, <https://perma.cc/9VCC-J8BY> (accessed December 1, 2012, permalink created June 6, 2016); Charles Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Crow Tribe August 4, 1825 7 Stat., 266" in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904) 244-46; Charles Kappler, ed., "Treaty of Ft. Laramie, September 17, 1851 11 Stats., 749" in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904) 594-96; Charles Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Crows, May 7, 1868 15 Stats., 649" in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904) 1008-11.

Today, the Crow reservation is 2.3 million acres, located on the southern border of Montana, south of Billings and the Yellowstone River. It covers portions of territory once traversed by Kicked in the Bellies, Mountain and River Crow, and is divided into six legislative districts, governed by the Apsaalooke Nation Tribal General Council. Located in the northeastern portion of the reservation in the Reno Legislative District, Crow Agency is the heart of the tribal government. Representatives to the Executive and Legislative branches of the tribal government are chosen every four years, through a democratic election.⁶ While this is a major component of Crow sovereignty, it does add an extra layer of bureaucracy and politics to the running of Chief Plenty Coups State Park, which also falls under scrutiny at the state and county level.⁷

Born Chiilaphuchissaaleesh, or Buffalo Bull Facing the Wind, in 1848, the man who would become Chief Plenty Coups experienced his early life at one of the most troubled times in Crow history. His spiritual journey as a young man would inform his leadership of the Crow people as an adult, and the visions he experienced showed him not only how to

⁶ “Tribal Government,” (accessed December 1, 2012).

⁷ The county level is actually a very interesting discussion, since some of Pryor sits in Big Horn County but the park resides in Yellowstone County. Also, if law enforcement is called (after of course you decide which county to contact) the Bureau of Indian (BIA) office must also be contacted to escort the officers across the reservation. Once they arrive at the property, however, neither have full jurisdiction, since the park is state property. Oh, the tangled webs we weave...

survive the arrival of White settlers, but also the location of his home. They were pushed on all sides; by enemy tribes all around and by the United States government, as the land acquired by President Thomas Jefferson in 1803 was populated and explored by settlers looking for more land and the riches it could bring. The Crows were also recovering from a recent smallpox outbreak, brought on by these new settlers, and their numbers had fallen significantly.⁸ Despite these hardships, Chiilaphuchissaaleesh had a normal childhood, playing games with his older brothers and relatives that would teach him to hunt and fight one day.⁹ His grandfather predicted that he would be a great leader of the Crow people, and changed his name to Alaxchiiaahush, or Many Achievements, before he was nine years old.

Many Achievements can also be translated as Many Coups, or Plenty Coups. For a Crow warrior, counting coups was an act of bravery. It was more honorable to escape from a battle unharmed than to be injured. Stealing an enemy's horse or getting close enough to strike your enemy with your hand would have been acts regarded as counting coups.¹⁰ Plenty Coups was a fierce warrior and counted coups many

⁸ "Apsaalooke Historical Timeline," Little Big Horn College Tribal Histories Project, <http://lib.lbhc.edu/index.php?q=node/129> (accessed December 1, 2012). The tribe's population was reduced from about 10,000 to nearly 2,000 by 1850.

⁹ Frank Linderman, *Plenty-Coups: Chief of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 3-5.

¹⁰ Linderman, *Plenty-Coups*, 10, 31.

times. Each of these achievements was marked on a coups stick by an eagle feather. When the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was dedicated after World War I in 1921, Chief Plenty Coups was an ambassador for the Native American peoples. He left his coups stick and war bonnet there in memory of those lost; a replica of these artifacts is held in the museum at Chief Plenty Coups State Park.¹¹

Soon after Plenty Coups received his new name, a grizzly bear attacked and killed his. The bear was killed, and as was customary, Plenty Coups ate part of its heart in order to say “I have the heart of a grizzly.”¹² He went on a vision quest soon after, seeking guidance in the Crazy Mountains. There, the Little People visited him and had several prophetic visions and was told he would become a chief. The Little People are a mythological group who inhabit the Pryor Mountains. They are revered in Crow culture and may bestow blessings or wisdom on individuals they deem worthy.¹³ He returned and “knew himself.”¹⁴ A few years later, Plenty Coups’ parents both died. Overcome with grief, he went on another vision quest. After many days, he cut part of his finger

¹¹ David J. Wishart, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), s.v. “Plenty Coups,” <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.na.087> (accessed November 20, 2012).

¹² Linderman, *Plenty Coups*, 13-14.

¹³ Nabokov, *Two Leggings*, 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

off in hopes of attracting some spirit helpers. Soon, the visions began. First, he saw the buffalo disappear from the land, to be replaced by strange white animals (cattle). Then, he saw a windstorm strike a forest, leaving only one tree standing. In that tree lived the chickadee, a spirit helper of Plenty Coups. Finally, the Little People led Plenty Coups through a hole, and they emerged near a small spring. Looking uphill from the spring, Plenty Coups saw a house, with an old man sitting outside of it. The Little People told Plenty Coups that he was the old man.¹⁵

Upon returning to his people, Plenty Coups' visions were interpreted. These visions helped inform his decisions about dealing with westward expanding Americans in the future. The disappearance of the buffalo foretold that exact event, so Plenty Coups knew that the Crow way of life, which revolved around the buffalo, would have to change. The survival of the lone chickadee in the storm was interpreted to mean that white expansion was inevitable, and any who stood in the way would be destroyed. By working with them, Plenty Coups hoped to lead his people to survival. The Little People reminded Plenty Coups that strength was nothing without wisdom, and that brute strength would not defeat this enemy and save his people from annihilation. Finally, the vision of the old man by the house showed Plenty Coups the exact spot where he

¹⁵ Ibid., 20-25; 34-37.

would later be allotted land on the new Crow Reservation, build his house, and worship at his sacred spring. The place he saw in his vision would one day become Chief Plenty Coups State Park.

Chief Plenty Coups State Park is 195 acres of land from the original 320 acres allotted to Plenty Coups and his second wife, Strikes the Iron. The main features of the park are the house, general store, medicine spring and the grave sites of Plenty Coups, his first wife Kills Together, his second wife Strikes the Iron and his adopted daughter Mary.

It was quite a long path to becoming a state park from Plenty Coups' original allotment of land. The land was allotted in 1883 and, in 1928 Plenty Coups' and his wife Strikes the Iron gave the land in trust to Big Horn County. Upon Plenty Coups death in 1932, the Big Horn County Commission continued the upkeep of the land, until 1951, when the Billings Kiwanis Club began managing the site. Finally, in 1965, it became a state park. In 1972, the state added the museum and visitor center. Thirty years later, it renovated the interior, and in 2003, park officials expanded both exhibits and collections.



Fig. 3 Side view of Plenty Coups' house, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012)



Fig. 4 Plenty Coups' house and front porch, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012) The park walking trail is visible on the far left side of the photo.



Fig. 5 Inside the front room of Plenty Coups' home, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012)

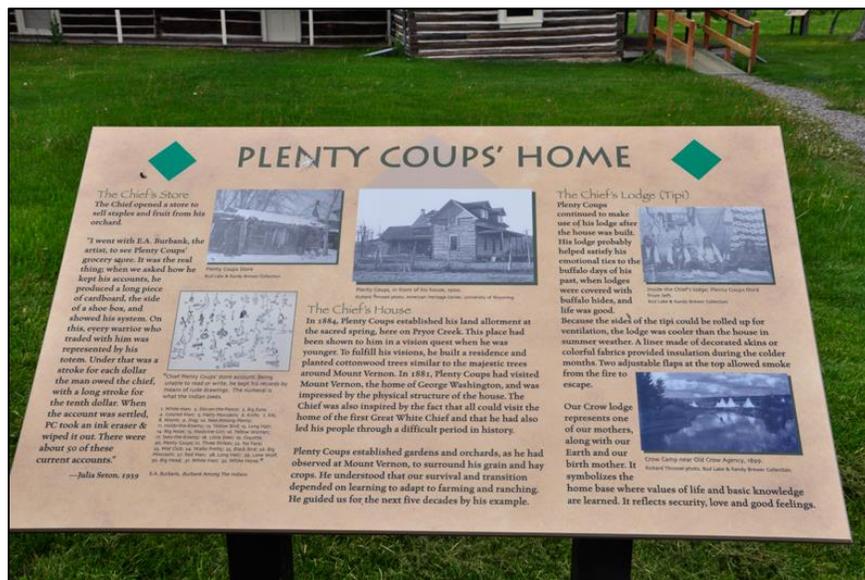


Fig. 6 Interpretive sign outside of Plenty Coups' house, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012) It provides visitors with information and history of the house, as well as the importance of Plenty Coups' store to the local community.

The house was built in stages, beginning in 1884 with the main room. It was designed in much the same way that traditional tipis were. The fireplace, which served as the source of heat and cooking, was in the middle of the house rather than on the exterior wall. The front door faced the east instead of the road, and cloth was draped over the walls, similar to tipi liners, adding insulation as well as a place to display achievements and status within the tribe.¹⁶ A one room addition was built in 1900, with a larger two-story addition dating to 1909, after Plenty Coups' visit to Mount Vernon courtesy of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Plenty Coups did with his house what he did with his life: he adapted as much as necessary, but continued to utilize his culture and incorporate it however possible. His adaptation was apparent in the continuation of the placement of a tipi outside the house that Plenty Coups slept in during the summer months, as well as the sweat lodge in front of the original entrance to the house.

Today, the house is empty but for a few display cases and artifacts, and is the highlight of a walking tour around the park. Visitors begin by walking through the original kitchen and Plenty Coups' sleeping quarters. Once it became too difficult to climb the stairs to his bedroom, he simply moved his bed to the ground floor. Visitors then make their

¹⁶ Thomas Carter, Edward Chappell, and Timothy McCleary, "In the Lodge of the Chickadee: Architecture and Cultural Resistance on the Crow Indian Reservation, 1884-1920," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 10 (2005): 97-111.

way upstairs to more bedrooms—including one painted pink by a family who lived there as caretakers—and finally, the Honor Room. This room still has decorative fabric covering the walls, though the medals, pictures and medicine bundles that used to hang on the far wall have been removed and are stored in the museum vault. Plenty Coups used the room to display his own honors, but also to honor special guests, by receiving them there. The original couch and buffalo covering are still in the room.

As Chief Plenty Coups was a well-respected leader, even in this new reservation system, many people still followed him and lived close to him, as was the old custom. Because of this, he built a general store outside his house to provide necessities to his supporters. Artifacts from the store are kept in the museum vault, including Plenty Coups' counting sticks and his handwritten ledger where he recorded accounts and payments. Today, the museum gift shop is called the Chief Plenty Coups General Store and sells books about Crow culture, Plenty Coups and other Crow leaders, and handmade beadwork and jewelry made by Crow artists.

The medicine spring, however, is probably the most significant place on Plenty Coups land. He drank from the spring daily, and the Crow people continue to follow his example to this day. Each year, Sun Dances take place at several locations across the Crow reservation. Each

of them lasts four days and put the participants through excruciating pain under the blazing summer sun. Water is gathered from Plenty Coups' sacred spring to quench the thirst of the dancers and to celebrate the end of this ceremony. No other water will suffice.¹⁷ Visitors to the park frequently stop by the spring to relax and enjoy the natural beauty around them, and will often leave a gift there to honor the spirits of Plenty Coups and the Little People.

Archaeological excavations have occurred several times throughout the park's history, each time with much success. Items such as beads, bones, and nails have been recovered from the house; Plenty Coups' wedding band was even found during one excavation. The majority of the items are kept at the local Bureau of Land Management office in Billings, while a few items, such as some of the more intact beads and the wedding band, are preserved at the museum. By working with the state archaeological department and the Crow tribal leadership, the park management can create an imagined landscape of how the area around the house used to look, which leads to more accurate interpretation.

In addition to the created landscape of the park, such as the house, there are natural landscapes that must be preserved as well. Vistas from the park grounds include the Rimrocks, the Crazy

¹⁷*Chief Plenty Coups State Park Management Plan*, (Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 2000), 14.

Mountains, and the Pryor Mountains. The town of Pryor is small and had minimal impact on the area, but any human contact will have some level of impact. Now, the Pryor/Edgar Road bisects the fields beside the house. Natural vegetation is encouraged, however, and is maintained within certain bounds. Limited acreage is also leased to farmers upon which to graze cattle, keeping the landscape in a similar condition as it was during the late nineteenth century when the reservation/allotment system became the new norm.

Each generation reinterprets the park, and it is important to note the multi-layered nature of working with cultural landscapes. First, is the natural landscape, including the vistas, native plants and grasses, and open areas of the park. Second, there is the historical layer. The period of significance listed on the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the log house is 1925-1949, though the house was built much earlier.¹⁸ The house and store must be interpreted as the “historic” aspects of the site, while the third layer, the sacred layer, is represented by Plenty Coups’ medicine spring and family gravesite. Each of these layers brings its own set of challenges for historians and preservationists alike, and the interpreter must use a cohesive interpretive plan that fully

¹⁸ U.S. National Register of Historic Places, *Chief Plenty Coups’ Home National Historic Landmark Nomination*, 70000354 NHLS (Washington, D.C., 1970).

illuminates the resources of each layer. These plans may privilege one aspect of the park over the other or one time period over another.

Other layers that must also be considered are the community aspects and the political aspects of the park. The park contains four picnic areas and two playground areas, in addition to fishing and swimming access to the creek. Community events such as the Day of Honor are hosted here annually, as well as graduation receptions, family reunions, and other summer picnics. Additionally, families without regular access to clean water come to the park to fill up containers from the spigots; in an area with scarce water resources, this is quite a community service.

The final layer that must be considered when interpreting the site is the political aspect. Issues of jurisdiction are often complicated with two counties sharing a voice with the tribal government. State government has a key role as property owner. These issues, which range from law enforcement issues to disaster and emergency planning, pale in comparison to the reservation politics, where extended families intermingle to form overlapping social bonds that connect across generations. For example, at the Chief Plenty Coups State Park visitors' center, there is a replica of Plenty Coups' flag on display. A marker used to proclaim which family donated this item and told the story of how it was passed down to them by Plenty Coups (who had no direct

descendants). The sign was recently removed, however, because it kept causing problems—there is another family who claims to have Plenty Coups' flag—the real one!—and refuses to acknowledge the other family's claim.

All public history is fraught with challenges of this nature, and so it is of the utmost importance that community support is engaged during the planning stages of new interpretative projects, to avoid squabbles and misunderstandings. At the same time, one must look at all of the layers of significance in a cultural landscape, and be careful not to privilege one over the other or one time period over another. This site, like the Crow culture, is a living entity, and as such, it is subject to change at any time. Though the most famous story happened during a particular time, time did not stop at that moment, and the events leading up to it, and after it must be given equal consideration to prevent the park from becoming stagnant.

In addition to its historical aspects, the park also represents a cultural center for the community. Just as Plenty Coups had hoped that “all people, Indian and white,” would enjoy his home, both Crow and non-Crow community members frequent the park daily. There are playgrounds and picnic areas maintained by the park staff, as well as a summer fishing program that focuses on the ecosystem of the local creek. A local medicine man also built a community sweat lodge, and

community members use it for events such as wedding blessings or cleansing ceremonies.

Each year, thousands of visitors make the long drive down Old Highway 87 to visit the home of a legendary man. Many are Montana residents seeking cultural fulfillment in their own back yard. Some visit annually and remember the trips fondly from childhood. Others make their first appearance after living nearby for years, but never venturing out. Still others are from other states, or are international visitors, many of whom hope to gain an authentic “Western” experience on an Indian reservation. The visitors often stop at multiple parks, state and national, on their drive “out west.” Some have worked or lived with Native Americans before; others have no experience or knowledge of Native American tribes or cultures, they just feel connected to the space. No matter the circumstances, though, the words of Plenty Coups in his call for education, his leadership in saving his people from extinction during westward expansion, and his deep spirituality affect each visitor and their experience at the park.¹⁹

In addition to external visitors, the park also reaches out to the local community through summer programs such as the youth fishing initiative “Hooked On Fishing,” collection-based programming presented by summer interns, and the annual “Day of Honor” celebration, held

¹⁹ These generalities came observations made during my internship at the park in 2012.

each Labor Day weekend. Day of Honor is an especially effective way to bring community members together, as local artists are gathered together to sell their wares, the nearby St. Charles Catholic Church lends its kitchen for the cooking of fry bread and corn pudding, and tribal leaders and legends are called upon to speak, lead songs, and regale the crowds with stories of past heroes.²⁰

Plenty Coups is a favorite figure among those who write about the “Old West,” though few books have been written exclusively on him. Several others have been written on the Crow tribe, with extensive sections on Plenty Coups and his place in Crow lore. Other writings about him have been in conjunction with other great “Indian leaders,” or have been short articles about certain aspects of his life. There is much that can be learned by reading these sources; many of them are quoted in this paper in fact. However, they are still problematic. Each book is as much a representation of its time period as it is representative of Plenty Coups. Previous scholarship focuses more on the changes that Plenty Coups and the Crow made—things that were given up, places that were left behind. New scholarship—including this paper—focuses on the things retained in those changes—the cultural practices that were adapted instead of given up, the strategic sacrifices that were made so

²⁰ Susan Olp, “Chief Plenty Coups Celebrated during Annual Day of Honor,” *Billings Gazette*, August 30, 2014.

that one practice might be lost but another, larger piece could be maintained. The subtle changes and adaptations are reflected more fully across the landscape and in the material culture than they are in written sources, making it necessary to examine them all in conjunction to compose a complete picture of Plenty Coups and his life.

Dr. William A. Allen was the first to meet and write about Plenty Coups. Allen was an early settler who met Plenty Coups while Allen oversaw a wagon train moving west, on a mission to find gold. His book, *Blankets and Moccasins: Plenty Coups and His People, The Crow*, is an extensive collection of stories and journal entries, all written from Allen's point of view.²¹ Allen does not ask Plenty Coups to recount any stories about his travels or adventures; he strictly writes from his memory and his point of view. Most authors took a similar problematic stance during the early twentieth century. Allen is not just recounting stories from the past, but selling a narrative of White superiority and Indian thankfulness for such assistance. This book was part of the Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis that shaped an indelible part of our national identity during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²²

²¹ Glendolon Damon Wagner and William A. Allen, *Blankets and Moccasins: Plenty Coups and His People, the Crow* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1933).

²² Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," World Columbian Exposition, Chicago, IL, July 12, 1893.

Frank Linderman is probably the best known of Plenty Coups' biographers. Linderman interviewed Plenty Coups multiple times near the end of his life and published those recollections as his biography in 1930, called *American: The Life Story of a Great Indian*.²³ Though all of the stories are related to Linderman from Plenty Coups, the book is written from Linderman's perspective and is directed by the questions he asked Plenty Coups. This is a typical style of the era: a romanticized version of the past focused on acts of bravery and "big moment" stories instead of everyday events and more nuanced understandings of the past. Linderman, an ethnographer, approached this subject as one capturing the story of the past before it slipped away forever, forgetting that Crow life and culture was still going on in the present.

Others have written about the Crow tribe as a whole, with perhaps a chapter or section of a book dedicated to studying the life of Plenty Coups. Robert H. Lowie studied anthropology under Franz Boas at Columbia University, and was later the major professor for Crow historian Joe Medicine Crow. He specialized in the American Indians of the Great Plains, especially the interconnected Mandan, Hidatsa, and

²³ Frank Linderman, *American: The Life Story of a Great Indian* (John Day, 1930) reprinted as *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

Crow tribes.²⁴ Lowie's ethnographic approach provides significant information about the Crow people, but with little discussion on the drawbacks of such ethnographic works—namely, the perspective a writer brings to his subject and his inability to fully understand the group he is studying since he will always be an outsider. The ethnographic approach is perfect for learning the minutiae of a culture, and Lowie's *The Crow Indians* certainly does that. What it does not do, however, is offer any analysis of the information conveyed. The vibrancy of Crow culture is mired in the details of past customs, and the cycle of cultural change and adaptation is lost. Instead of seeing how Crow culture changes over time, Lowie and other ethnographers offer more of a “snapshot,” an intense understanding of a brief cultural moment. By including the dynamic landscape and material culture into our understanding of the Crow culture, we can see how the Crow adapted and kept a continuity to their culture.

Frederick Hoxie is a historian who frequently writes about Crow culture. Hoxie is a professor at the University of Illinois and wrote *Parading through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805-1935*, as well as multiple books and articles about Native

²⁴ Robert Lowie, *Societies of the Crow, Hidatsa and Mandan Indians* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1913); *Notes on the Organization and Customs of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Crow Indians* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1917); *Myths and Traditions of the Crow Indians* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1918).

Americans that contain information on the Crow.²⁵ *Parading* gives an in-depth look at Crow culture, using the analogy of Crows parading through Mandan and Hidatsa villages.²⁶ Hoxie weaves the imagery of parading throughout his narrative—more of a stretch in some sections than in others—from their first documented contact with Europeans to the heart of the reservation era. The story is a larger one that has been told, but the process of adapting to new environments, be they Plains or reservations, remains the same. What is most striking about *Parading Through History* is its overt desire to give voice to Indian people; to have “objects become subjects.”²⁷ For many years, Native Americans have been studied, talked about, looked at, and generally dissected (both literally and figuratively, thank you Dr. Samuel Morton) without having a voice in the conversation.²⁸ The same sentiment that led to the protection of the few remaining bison on wildlife preserves also resulted in saving Native Americans from American expansionism and their complete

²⁵ Frederick Hoxie, *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805-1935* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁶ Hoxie, *Parading*, 31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ Samuel Morton, *Crania Americana; or, A comparative view of the skulls of various aboriginal nations of North and South America* (Philadelphia, Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1839).

destruction.²⁹ More consideration was actually afforded the bison, though; they were placed in wildlife preserves but not asked to completely change their way of life to be accommodated.

Joseph Medicine Crow was the first Crow person to receive a Master's degree, studying under Robert Lowie at UCLA. He used his anthropological training in tandem with his knowledge of his people's oral traditions to write *From the Heart of Crow Country: The Crow Indians' Own Stories*.³⁰ Medicine Crow takes great care to corroborate his oral histories with written accounts and archaeological findings. This approach does not cast doubt on the validity of the oral stories, but rather intensifies the understanding that they were correct in the first place. This book serves two-fold purpose. First, it is an accurate and engaging telling of Crow history and culture. With fun anecdotes like "The Day Big Sheep Got the Best of Bill Lynde," a lesson in semantics if there ever was one, Medicine Crow is entertaining and informative, and always includes his conclusions on each subject at the end of the chapter. This book is also a case study in how to use written and non-written sources together when telling a story. The combination of sources—like the oral traditions passed down by his grandfather, Custer

²⁹ Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000),147.

³⁰ Joseph Medicine Crow, *In the Heart of Crow Country: The Crow Indians Own Stories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

scout White Man Runs Him, and the archaeological data about arrowheads found near buffalo jump sites—only serve to strengthen each argument, not tear down the validity of sources, or to prefer one over the other. All source materials are needed in the telling of Crow history, and Joe Medicine Crow superbly uses all of them.

A broader context of Native American history and culture is necessary to understand Crow culture and its place within the larger picture. An excellent example of this big picture thinking is Paul Carlson's *The Plains Indians*.³¹ Carlson described eleven tribes as sharing common cultural traits such as: being nomadic; hunting bison; and maintaining warrior-based societies.³² These traits, he argued, gave them a cohesive cultural narrative, though each society within the culture was often at war with at least one of its cultural partners at any given time. Though they certainly would not have seen themselves as connected, Carlson persuasively argues for their cultural continuity. For the eleven tribes of Carlson's cultural group, the introduction of the horse became their defining characteristic, a characteristic which led to one of the

³¹ Paul H. Carlson, *The Plains Indians* (Elma Dill Russell Spencer Series in the West and Southwest, no. 19, College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1998). See also the work of ethnohistorian John C. Ewers, including: *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968; *Plains Indian History and Culture*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997; and "The Emergence of the Plains Indian as the Symbol of the North American Indian, in *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964.

³² Carlson, 4.

largest and most notable adaptations to their cultures: the horse.³³, Because of the horse, these individual tribes were able to leave their original homelands and their sedentary horticultural ways in favor of nomadic bison hunting. Bison were previously hunted on foot, with more success than one might think.³⁴ The introduction of the horse, however, led to more bison being killed, with more efficiency and in larger numbers. While this gave tribes political and socio-economic power in dealing with other tribes and with Europeans moving into the West, it also jeopardized the precarious economic and ecological system they were using.³⁵ In addition to aiding in the killing of bison, horses also brought about cultural changes. Raiding and the leading of war parties became a way for young men to count coups and to raise their own stature within their band, while religious ceremonies and folklore were shared when disparate bands came together during a summer

³³ Ibid., 36.

³⁴ Various “Buffalo Jump” state parks across the West will attest to the success of the “scaring this gigantic animal off a cliff with nothing between him and me and he is definitely much faster” method of bison killing. Seriously, if you think the elephant graveyard in *Lion King* was scary, you should check out First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park. Eighteen feet of compacted buffalo remains at the bottom of a sandstone cliff. That’s hardcore. <http://stateparks.mt.gov/first-peoples-buffalo-jump/> (accessed August 1, 2016). Joseph Medicine Crow also touches on this phenomenon in Medicine Crow, *From the Heart*, 86-88.

³⁵ Carlson, 125.

encampment, solidifying tribal identity.³⁶ This practice survives today as the modern pow-wow.

For historian Andrew Isenberg, this move to nomadism started an evolutionary cycle that propelled these tribes to great fortune and power, but also drove them to their demise. Nomadic tribes were far less affected by European diseases than their horticultural counterparts, if only because their population centers were less concentrated.³⁷ Isenberg focused on the environmental component, with rich detail of the ecological history of the Great Plains.³⁸ At the same time, though, he allowed for a very human element to show through, as Man and Nature forced each other to make concessions for the other. Native Americans overhunted bison, after being forced into a nomadic lifestyle when European-borne diseases ravaged their horticultural predecessors. The cyclical nature of this union is quite compelling, and Isenberg handled its intricacies very well, as he showed the obstacles that had to be overcome for Native Americans on the Great Plains to thrive and survive after the collapse of their main food source, and the desolation of the cultural independence, almost in one fell swoop.

³⁶ Ibid., 45, 67.

³⁷ Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 59.

³⁸ Ibid., 13-30.

Preston Holder's ethnographic study *The Hoe and the Horse on the Plains* looks closely at the emerging nomadic cultures of the early 18th century and contrasts them with the sedentary horticulturalists they were leaving behind.³⁹ Though Holder looks at these cultures from more of an insider's point of view, giving great detail to social structures and customs, he still lacked the incorporation of Native American voices. This oversight keeps this work from reaching its full potential, though it is still full of wonderful information about the cultural practices that were adapted when tribes took up a nomadic lifestyle.⁴⁰ Holder paid particular interest to the nomadic tribes' customs for men to become band or clan leaders and the socio-economic implications of this new system; a much more strict social hierarchy was in place for the horticulturalists.⁴¹ This ethnographic approach would be perfect at Chief Plenty Coups State Park, as it shows the culture growing and changing, while explaining why and how those changes took place.

Similarly, Howard Harrod's *Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains* looks at the basis of many cultural practices: religion. By adapting their religious ceremonies,

³⁹ Preston Holder, *The Hoe and the Horse on the Plains: A Study of Cultural Development among North American Indians* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1970).

⁴⁰ Although, let's be honest, this was written in 1970 so the exclusion of Native voices was less of an oversight and more of "just the way it is done."

⁴¹ Holder, 37, 49, 53.

myths and folklore, Native American groups like the Mandan and the Hidatsa—the focus of Harrod’s study and culturally affiliated with the Crow—were able to maintain their cultural identity while simultaneously adapting to new social and environmental necessities.⁴² Religious symbolism is a complex matter, as Harrod demonstrated when he showed that while the Mandan and Hidatsa used religion to maintain their identities, the Crow and Cheyenne used them to strengthen their newly formed identities.⁴³ Religion is also an important component to the story of Plenty Coups, and many of the artifacts with the park’s collection pertain to his religion or religious practices.

Warfare was another integral part of life for nomadic Plains tribes. Anthony McGinnis explored the warrior society dynamics in *Counting Coups, Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889*.⁴⁴ This book was not a glorification of wanton bloodshed and war; it is a balanced look at the social implications of a warrior-based society, and the cultural by-products of such a society. Resources on the Plains were limited, be they buffalo, horses, or sufficient land to sustain both animals; as such, the power struggle between tribes for these resources was a principle source

⁴² Howard Harrod, *Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).

⁴³ Harrod, 20, 61, 99.

⁴⁴ Anthony R. McGinnis, *Counting Coups and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

of warfare and raiding.⁴⁵ Ceremonies of varying religious and cultural significance accompanied these practices, including the practice of hardened warriors sharing a peace pipe and songs with those they may have fought only weeks earlier.⁴⁶ McGinnis used the traditional language of an oft-discussed topic—Indians at war with one another—and added a layer of complexity not usually found in this subject. The cultural impetus to war and raid is quite complex, but McGinnis manages to strike a balance between explaining practices and attempting to explain why they are necessary. This balance is especially important to understand when looking forward to the reservation period, a time when tribal movement is restricted, and the cyclical nature of war and peace is disrupted, forcing yet another series of substantial cultural adaptations.

Allison Fuss Mellis addressed some of the new adaptations required of the reservation period in her book, *Riding Buffaloes and Broncos: Rodeo and Native Traditions in the Northern Great Plains*.⁴⁷ With travel off the reservation severely restricted, not only was the warrior culture interrupted, but so too was the culture of celebration that accompanied it. Intertribal allegiances were celebrated and strengthened

⁴⁵ McGinnis, *Counting Coups and Cutting Horses*, 12-13. Trade and the protection of one's own trade routes were some of the other reasons for going to war.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁷ Allison Fuss Mellis, *Riding Buffaloes and Broncos: Rodeo and Native Traditions in the Northern Great Plains* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

through annual gatherings, even if bands might war against each other in the ensuing months.⁴⁸ Though the official Pan-Indian movement would not come for decades, many tribes sought to recreate their alliances and the spirit of competition that they fostered through what is now an iconic symbol of the American West: the rodeo. Competition, generosity, and community spirit have been important parts of tribal life for centuries. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these were expressed through raiding and warfare. Beginning in the twentieth century, they were adapted for the reservation life and expressed through rodeo competitions.⁴⁹ Mellis looked at rodeos as an extension of the warrior society, where young men and women might count rodeo trophies instead of counting coups on their enemies.

The Crow people—and Indians in general—have been adapting their culture and creating history for centuries. Many historians have addressed this varied and complex history with varying degrees of success. This study seeks to add more of new voices, through the use of material culture and landscape analysis, to ask questions about the past narratives that have been told at Chief Plenty Coups State Park, to find ways to encourage new voices to be brought into conversations about future narratives, and to find new ways to interpret information about a

⁴⁸ Mellis, *Riding Buffaloes and Broncos*, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 195-96.

fascinating culture through the material culture it has shaped over the centuries. Although my voice cannot be removed from my analysis, the point is to focus on the material culture and to allow the voices of Plenty Coups and his people to tell their stories, through the things they left behind.

CHAPTER TWO:
MATERIAL CULTURE, OR: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM
NON-WRITTEN SOURCES?

Material culture is a useful primary source to address the life of Chief Plenty Coups. Material culture is precisely what it sounds like: physical objects that can be used to interpret a culture. These objects can be as everyday as teapots and gravestones, or as rare as valuable art and ornate furniture. Art historian Jules David Prown points out that historical objects, “reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these people belonged.”¹ The objects that people make, sell, and buy hold interpretive meaning to both the individual and society, and historians may use these meanings to tell us about the past.

Material culture can be useful when used in conjunction with written sources but is also very helpful when few or no written sources are available. Just as written documents can be read, so too can material culture. Understanding the materials and techniques used, the process of making the object, and its purpose within the culture can be just as informative as reading a diary entry or store ledger. Reading objects, of

¹ Jules David Prown, “The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?” in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, edited by Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993) 1.

course, has its drawbacks and biases to consider. At Chief Plenty Coups State Park, there are an abundance of non-written sources ready to be used for analysis. The collection is large and varied, and can offer insight to a variety of areas of Crow culture, from religion to foodways, commerce to fashion. Reading these artifacts will offer the park insight into Crow culture that can be passed on to visitors and community members alike. Likewise, the park landscape can be read and offer insights to the history of the Crow people who lived there, and continue to live there today.

In *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, the editors set the tone for this book of essays by explaining how personal biases in reading source materials, the social construction of facts, and the production of truth through suppression are at work in every aspect of historical research.² The editors and authors encourage readers to look beyond these things and to “decolonize” their thinking about native history by embracing avenues that will enrich narratives and give cultural contexts to events through native eyes.³ Neither type of source is superior to the other; they both have shortcomings and biases, but by embracing material sources, a more complete history can be told, one

² Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds., *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003).

³ Brown and Vibert, *Reading*, xiii.

that does not continue to silence the voices of those who have remained voiceless in the written word for so long.⁴

In shaping their argument for the use of non-written sources, Brown and Vibert chose to focus on biases and shortcomings in written sources, to demonstrate the need for a wider range of source material. Paul DePasquale demonstrates this need by focusing on representations of Indians in European writings, especially things that European writers found “worth the noting,” and what that said about preconceived attitudes towards Indian people.⁵ For example, by “noting” the sexual abstinence of two Inuits held in captivity by the English, the author is silently suggesting that they are not the norm, i.e. that a male and female Inuit (or any Indian or “other” for that matter) would be expected not to practice such restraint.⁶ We learn then, not just from the recorded words, but also from the ideas that shape those words. Similarly, material culture is imbued with the ideas of the culture that creates it. By reading that subtext in its object analysis, the park will be able to convey not only what was said at the time, but also the underlying thought processes that informed them.

⁴ See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997) for an excellent example of how historians can keep certain groups voiceless through the selection of writing histories.

⁵ Paul W. DePasquale, “Worth the Noting’: European Ambivalence and Aboriginal Agency in Meta Incognita, 1576-1578,” in *Reading Beyond Words*, 5-38.

⁶ DePasquale, “Worth the Noting,” in *reading Beyond Words*, 25-29.

Oral histories can also be helpful in showing the biases of written sources. Oral histories are usually given less credence in historical research than written ones are, though the issues of the malleability of memory and self-editing are the same for both types of sources.⁷ In her essay, Julie Cruikshank addresses a common problem when one uses multiple types of sources: they often differ and sometimes even give contradictory accounts of the past.⁸ Instead of seeing this as one being “right” and the other “wrong,” Cruikshank argues that these differences can enhance our understanding of the past and that they reflect the different worldviews of their creators.⁹ Likewise, Frieda Esau Klippenstein urges historians to remember that both written and oral accounts (and the argument could easily be extended to material culture as well) reflect the world view and social setting of the creator, and that these factors should be taken into account when evaluating sources and the validity of their stories.¹⁰ Though this book does not deal strictly with material culture, its lessons in assessing sources and using non-written

⁷ Julie Cruikshank, “Discovery of Gold on the Klondike: Perspectives from Oral Tradition,” in *Reading Beyond Words*, 436; Naohisa Mori, “Styles of Remembering and Types of Experience: An Experimental Investigation of Reconstructive Memory,” *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 42 (Sept., 2008): 291-314.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 435-458.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 454.

¹⁰ Frieda Esau Klippenstein, “The Challenge of James Douglas and Carrier Chief Kwah,” in *Reading Beyond Words*, 188.

sources when telling Native American stories are nonetheless valid and useful.

Using historical archeology, which relies on both written and material sources, the contributors to *Interpretations of Native North American Life* examine how material culture shapes, and subsequently is shaped by, its culture and the various methods for interpreting its cultural meaning.¹¹ A multi-faceted nature characterizes material culture: it is temporal/spatial, tangible, communicative, and ever changing. However, it also has biases just like documents do, and it can sometimes tell more about the maker than his/her culture at large.

Editors Michael Nassaney and Eric Johnson underline the value of using material culture when doing historical research on Native American groups: “tangible objects can be analyzed in conjunction with other sources of historical data to expand our understanding of native culture and history in various parts of North America from the pre-Columbian era into the contemporary world.”¹² Nassaney and Johnson emphasize the necessity for history (with its emphasis on specific events) and anthropology (with its emphasis on general patterns) to work

¹¹ Michael S. Nassaney and Eric S. Johnson, *Interpretations of Native North American Life: Material Contributions to Ethnohistory* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida in cooperation with The Society for Historical Archaeology, 2000).

¹² Michael S. Nassaney and Eric S. Johnson, “The Contributions of Material Objects to Ethnohistory in Native North America,” in *Interpretations of Native North American Life: Material Contributions to Ethnohistory*, edited by Michael S. Nassaney and Eric S. Johnson, 2.

together to use the patterns that emerge from the study of material culture to interpret specific events and behaviors. This post-processual approach to archaeology embraces the subjectivity of material culture, as opposed to the processual movement, which applied the scientific method to claim objective results.¹³

An excellent example of this post-processual approach is Mark S. Parker Miller's essay, "Obtaining Information via Defective Documents: A Search for the Mandan in George Catlin's Paintings," which examines the staged paintings of Mandan people for glimpses into their actual culture, not the perceived culture that Catlin was portraying for his Euro-American audience.¹⁴ Catlin held several ideas about Indians that filter into his paintings: that Indians were lazy and unindustrious, they were living in a simpler, timeless world and that they were vanishing.¹⁵ These

¹³ For more information on the processual movement (also called New Archeology), see: Gordon Willey and Phillip Phillips, *Method and Theory in American Archeology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Lewis Binford, "Archaeology as Anthropology," *American Antiquity* 28, no.2 (Oct. 1962): 217-225; Sally R. Binford and Lewis R. Binford, eds., *New Perspectives in Archaeology* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1968); Colin Renfrew and Kenneth L. Cooke, eds., *Transformations: Mathematical Approaches to Culture Change* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1979). For information on post-processualism, see: Ian Hodder, ed., *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Timothy K. Earle and Robert Preucel, "Processual Archaeology and the Radical Critique," *Current Anthropology* 28 (Winter 1987): 501-538; Christopher Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999).

¹⁴ Mark S. Parker Miller, "Obtaining Information via Defective Documents: A Search for the Mandan in George Catlin's Paintings," in *Interpretations of Native North American Life: Material Contributions to Ethnohistory*, 296-320.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 301-302.

beliefs were depicted in paintings such as *Bird's-eye view of the Mandan village, 1800 miles above St. Louis* and *Four Bears, second chief, in full dress*.¹⁶ Though Catlin's Euro-centric viewpoint was evident in his depictions of the Mandan—the poses and activities he chose to portray are similar to those of European paintings from the same time period—there are still traces of truth in them.¹⁷ By evaluating the paintings both individually and in conjunction with other documents and artifacts, we see that paintings and photographs, such as those in the Plenty Coups' collection taken by Edward Curtis, show a truth in them that the artist perhaps did not mean to convey.

In *What This Aul Means*, Janet Spector applied feminist theory (another member of the post-processualist family) to archeological methods to ask questions about people who are underrepresented in the historical record.¹⁸ She also sought to address biases in both written records and object analyses; race, gender, and class all played into how objects were being interpreted, to the detriment of Native American women. Spector argued against the public domain/ private domain dichotomy that her predecessors used when looking at men's roles

¹⁶ Ibid., 303-308.

¹⁷ Ibid., 304, 314-15.

¹⁸ Janet D. Spector, *What This Aul Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1993).

versus women's roles. This dichotomy is a modern construct that was being unfairly applied to the past; the result was a male-centered bias in the interpretation of objects. She also engaged with the descendant community at the Wahpeton Dakota site to more fully understand the cultural context of the objects she found, since few documentary sources were available.

Spector used historical archeology in her inquiry into a Wahpeton Dakota site in southern Minnesota. She focused all of her attention on a single artifact: a decorated awl handle. This approach is almost like a microhistory, showing how a single object analysis can translate into a bigger picture. Spector used the awl to instigate a larger discussion about women's roles in village life, cultural traditions, and how much can be learned from one small object found in the trash.

There are two essential lessons in Spector's work that can be applied to any historical research involving Native Americans. The first lesson is communication. While, as a woman, Spector felt confident with her ability to write about other women in the past, she did worry about her ability as a non-Indian person to write about an Indian past.¹⁹ Instead of deciding this for herself, Spector asked for help. She went to the local Dakota community and involved them in the researching and telling of the story. This involvement helped to establish a connection

¹⁹ Ibid., 13.

from the past to the present and prevented Spector from being just another historian trying to tell people about their own history. The same kinds of connections should be made between the staff at Chief Plenty Coups State Park and the Crow community. An excellent relationship already exists through the Friends of Chief Plenty Coups State Park, and growing that relationship will only allow for more communication and more agency for the Crow people in the park they hold so dear.

The second lesson deals with the way that artifacts are talked about and written about, leading to the way that they—and the people who made and used them—are thought about. Using a solely traditional material culture model where objects are cataloged and described by their physical properties degrades the human quality of the use of the objects, argues Spector.²⁰ By divorcing the object from the role it played in its user's life, historians and archeologists lose sight of the fact that real people are involved in the stories that they are telling. Spector warns against this, probably because she engaged the Dakota community and saw how deeply they connected with the objects, and how personal the objects were to them. Following Spector's model of communication and humanization at Chief Plenty Coups State Park will bring a deeper understanding of the man and his life, drawing visitors in with a visceral

²⁰ Ibid., 31-32.

connection to a human being to whom they can relate, instead of someone who seems unknowable and unrelatable.

Plains Indian Museum curator Emma Hansen uses photographs and material culture to articulate Plains culture with a focus on women's roles and their connection to the land in her beautiful book *Memory and Vision: Arts, Culture and Lives of Plains Indian People*.²¹ This book is told from an Indian point of view, and gives an overview of the different cultural groups within this overarching group of "Plains Indians." Her focus is on how the cultures adapted over time and she uses the material culture to show the vibrancy and steadfastness of cultural traditions like beadwork.

The strength of Hansen's work is her reliance on Indian people to discuss their own culture and history. In addition to numerous quotes interspersed in her narrative, each chapter ends with a personal narrative or remembrance that exemplifies the preceding chapter. This approach, according to Hansen, "follows the interpretive approach of the museum's exhibitions to present the historical and cultural contexts during which the works were created."²² This approach for dealing with Indian histories and artifacts is valuable. The artifacts become the

²¹ Emma I. Hansen, *Memory and Vision: Arts, Culture, and the Lives of Plains Indian People* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

²² *Ibid.*, 10.

showpiece of the book, and presumably the museum. Hansen's narratives enhance the understanding of each artifact; giving context as to why they were—and are—important. The personal narratives at the end of each chapter bring the focus back from the big picture to the personal level. Whether Gerard Baker is explaining the importance of buffalo to the Mandan-Hidatsa, or Beatrice Medicine is describing women's roles in Northern Plains society, each is deeply personal and connects the reader to both the written and material culture of the Indian groups within its pages.

Though it is divided into chapters with titles like, "Land of Many Gifts," and "Adversity and Renewal," *Memory and Vision* is mostly in chronological order, with the most dominant aspect of the time period focused on as the theme. Thus, the last chapter, aptly titled "Our People Today," examines current Native American culture on the Great Plains, and showcases material culture made within the last decade using traditional techniques. Not only are material culture aspects of Indian culture touched on, but so are the intangible aspects, such as religious ceremonies and social gatherings like parades and pow-wows, or Days of Hope like at Chief Plenty Coups State Park. This final chapter ends on a delightful and hilarious note, with an essay by Northern Cheyenne artist Bentley Spang. With wit, humor, and honesty, Spang addresses the multitude of racist remarks, hurtful stereotypes and general

misinformation available about his—and other Indian—people. This exemplifies the necessity for Indian stories to be told by Indians and using Indian culture, instead of relying on old information that is tinged with our colonial past.²³

In addition to shaping materials into objects that are imbued with cultural meaning, human interactions also shape landscapes, which can take on similar cultural meanings. Whether a meticulously planned urban area or an isolated wilderness area, or anything in between, landscapes do not spontaneously materialize out of nothing. People create and manipulate them; they change over time as cultures change. Because of their significant cultural meanings, landscapes are often studied as a part of material culture studies and take into account both natural and human-made features.

Following the lead of the forerunner to the cultural landscapes study, John Brinkerhoff Jackson, the scholars in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* examine vernacular urban landscapes and their connection to issues of class, race, ethnicity, and power.²⁴ Vernacular landscapes—everyday, ordinary places not giant mansions or spectacular gardens—are crucibles of cultural meaning. Because of their ubiquity,

²³ Ibid., 288.

²⁴ Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

they are often overlooked, very much to the detriment of those exploring the past. Though the landscape at Chief Plenty Coups State Park is rural, not urban, many of the essays in *Understand Ordinary Landscapes* touch on principles that can be applied broadly to all vernacular landscapes.

Landscapes are a way for people to “establish their identity, articulate their social relations, and derive cultural meaning.”²⁵ Deryck Holdsworth is quick to point out, though, that no record gives a complete story, and that one must pair landscape analysis with additional historical research.²⁶ He also addresses an aspect of landscape analysis that is particularly fitting at CPCSP—individuality expressed through housing.²⁷ Plenty Coups, as touched on in chapter one, still maintained several traditional Crow aspects in his home, despite its outward appearance of conforming to Euro-American standards. The cloth linings on the walls, the Honor Room and even the orientation of the house demonstrate an intentional use of space that helped Plenty Coups control his acceptance of American culture and retain his agency in how he would live his life on the reservation.

²⁵ Ibid., 1.

²⁶ Deryck Holdsworth, “Landscape and Archives as Texts,” in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, 44. Basically, when it comes to sources, it’s “the more, the merrier,” not “too many cooks spoil the broth.”

²⁷ Ibid., 46.

The most obvious component of a landscape is, well, land. The essays in *A Cultural Geography of North American Indians* examine land use and its cultural implications.²⁸ Before the use of treaties to split land into reservations, many different tribes often used the same land peacefully, without the fixed boundaries imposed by the American government. The passage of the Dawes Act in 1887 allowed reservation lands to be surveyed and split into allotments for individual Indians. The allotment period saw a push for assimilation by forcing individuals onto their own plots of land. This desire from Whites for Native Americans to embrace individual land ownership demonstrated an emerging American self-identity. Reservations, then, initially created to serve as temporary places of assimilation, have become ethnic homelands with a deep connection felt between the people and their land. The Crow were fortunate to already have a connection to the Yellowstone Valley where their reservation land was located. Because of this, Plenty Coups felt a deep spiritual connection to the land he was allotted; land where he foresaw himself living in a vision as a young man. Understanding that landscape allows visitors to more fully understand Plenty Coups, and the Crow people.

²⁸ Thomas E. Ross and Tyrel G. Moore, eds., *A Cultural Geography of North American Indians* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

Ronald Janke addresses the issues of land ownership that occurred after the land was divided into reservations in his essay, “Loss of Indian Lands in Montana, Wisconsin, and Arizona.”²⁹ To understand Indian connections to land and landscapes, one must first consider how Native Americans treated that land over the past century and a half. Lands that were not—could not be—owned by any single person or group were separated by the United States government into fixed reservations by their proximity to forts or transportation routes, not by the ancestral connection of the Indians to the land. Then, once the United States set the reservations, the government soon chopped and whittled down the original boundaries by treaties and payments until only a small remnant remained. The final indignity was the allotting and selling off of “excess lands” to White settlers through the 1906 Burke Act, fragmenting land ownership across the reservation, and leaving little land under tribal control.³⁰ On the Crow Reservation at the time of this essay’s publication, either the tribe or individual tribal members owned less than half of all land. When evaluating the cultural landscapes of Chief Plenty

²⁹ Ronald Janke, “Loss of Indian Lands in Montana, Wisconsin, and Arizona,” in *A Cultural Geography of North American Indians*, edited by Thomas E. Ross and Tyrel G. Moore.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 127-130; Charles Kappler, ed., “Burke Act, May 8, 1906 34 Stat. 182” in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. III* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1913), 181-82.

Coups State Park, the history of the land and how it came to “belong” to Plenty Coups is an important aspect to consider.

In *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice*, Richard Longstreth united twelve diverse essays by focusing on the multi-faceted importance of, the need for, and the management practices of cultural landscapes across a broad spectrum of venues—each essay is essentially a case study in one or more of these areas.³¹ The overarching theme uniting all these cases is the necessity for the inclusion of landscapes in preservation and how this inclusion can “open a whole new chapter on our understanding of, and respect for, the world around us.”³² Other themes that tie these disparate entities together is the need for community support; an interdisciplinary, inclusive approach to preservation; and, the need for cultural landscape managers and historic preservationists to collaborate to interpret all impacts humans have had on a landscape.

Susan Buggey and Nora Mitchell—representing Parks Canada and the National Park Service respectively—focus on the need for community collaboration and interdisciplinary cooperation when dealing with

³¹ Richard Longstreth ed., *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

³² *Ibid.*, 15.

questions of preservation and interpretation.³³ Historical archaeology, anthropology, geography, and landscape architecture are but a few of the disciplines—apart from history—that can be involved in interpreting landscapes. Each discipline brings a new perspective and helps to show a fuller picture of life on that landscape, how it has changed over time and how it is still being affected today by the cultural groups occupying (or even associated with) it.³⁴ Similarly, working with various community groups, or descendant communities in the parlance of historical archaeologists, can give a wider perspective on a site and the best way to interpret it. This cooperation allows multiple groups to cooperate in both “identifying and retaining the values and essential character of places by planning for the future and managing change,” and is the ideal format for community collaboration at Chief Plenty Coups State Park.³⁵

Arnold Alanen and Robert Melnick examine what makes a cultural landscape and issues that arise when preserving them in their edited volume, *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*.³⁶ The theme that

³³ Susan Buggey and Nora Mitchell, “Cultural Landscapes: Venues for Community-based Conservation,” in *Cultural Landscapes* edited by Richard Longstreth, 164-179.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁵ Stephen W. Sillman and T.J. Ferguson, “Consultation and Collaboration with Descendant Communities,” in *Voices in American Archaeology* edited by Wendy Ashmore, Dorothy T. Lippert, and Barbara J. Mills (Washington, D.C.: Society for American Archaeology Press, 2010), 48-72.

³⁶ Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, eds., *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

arises at the forefront of their argument is *change over time*; landscapes are always changing and evolving, and one of the challenges is to learn how to embrace those changes while also honoring the past iterations. Landscape is both “product and process;” it is a place where activities happen and a reflection of the cultural meanings behind those activities.³⁷ The authors argue for a holistic approach to resource management, acknowledging the integrated and dynamic nature of the system. They also recognize that, just like written and material culture sources, preservation strategies are inherently biased, and those biases must be acknowledged and addressed to tell the most truthful story possible.

Though historians and preservationists may often feel that precious historical resources are constantly under attack from developers and those seeking forward progress and larger buildings, the fact is that the majority of Americans support preservation efforts, as a way to both retain and to experience the past.³⁸ This past, of course, is a selective and often idealized one. The plurality of a landscape is difficult to represent, and the dynamic quality of a place is lost when preservation efforts intervene to reflect a certain time period. As the landscape

³⁷ Ibid., 16.

³⁸ Richard Francaviglia, “Selling Heritage Landscapes,” in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes* edited by Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, 45.

becomes more homogenized, vernacular landscapes can offer a glimpse of a past that is no longer present in many places.³⁹

In addition to being a vernacular landscape, Chief Plenty Coups State Park can also be classified as an ethnic landscape, which Hardesty defines as “a landscape that a particular cultural group assigns cultural or spiritual value to where others do not.”⁴⁰ Because of its connection to Plenty Coups and Crow culture, the Crow assign additional meaning to the landscape that non-Crow people do not. For this reason, the sacred spring behind Plenty Coups’ house was included in the National Historic Landmark nomination.⁴¹ The spring was part of one of Plenty Coups’ vision quest, from whence he emerged as a young man and saw himself as an old man. This transformation exemplifies the dynamic nature of landscapes: the natural elements of the open vistas are balanced with the sacred elements like the spring, while also competing with the modern manmade elements like Plenty Coups’ home and even the modern museum structure.

³⁹ Arnold R. Alanen, “Considering the Ordinary: Vernacular Landscapes in Small Towns and Rural Areas,” in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes*, 140-41.

⁴⁰ Donald L. Hardesty, “Ethnographic Landscapes: Transforming Nature into Culture,” in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes* edited by Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, 169. Susan Buggey and Nora Mitchell in *Cultural Landscapes* referred to this type of landscape as “associative.” These landscapes have strong religious or cultural ties that leave little physical evidence on the landscape (such as the sacredness of Plenty Coups’ spring.)

⁴¹ U.S. National Register of Historic Places, *Chief Plenty Coups’ Home National Historic Landmark Nomination*, 70000354 NHLS (Washington, D.C., 1970).

Former MTSU Public History program director Andrew Gulliford focuses on the particular preservation needs of Indian landscapes and material culture in his book *Sacred Objects and Sacred Places: Preserving Tribal Traditions*.⁴² He affirms that the living tribal heritage is paramount and that there is no one size fits all preservation plan. The tribe must discuss individual issues of interpretation. *Sacred Objects* is both a handbook and a how-to guide; topics included range from repatriation of human remains and cultural artifacts to the types of sacred landscapes used by different Indian groups and federal mandates for protection.

Gulliford first focuses on cultural artifacts in a museum setting, especially the curation and repatriation of sacred objects, such as medicine bundles and other religious artifacts. These artifacts can sometimes be displayed in exhibits (a few are at CPCSP, with permission from tribal elders), but Gulliford recommends using a consultant from the concerned tribe to determine the best practices for displaying and caring for the object.⁴³ This recommendation applies in particular to medicine bundles, which are believed to have their own life force and must have extra precautions taken when being handled.⁴⁴

⁴² Andrew Gulliford, *Sacred Objects and Sacred Places: Preserving Tribal Traditions* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000).

⁴³ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 42, 51.

Gulliford devotes two more chapters to sacred landscapes and dealing with traditional cultural properties. According to *National Register Bulletin #38*, a traditional cultural property is “eligible for inclusion in the National Register because of its association with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that (a) are rooted in that community’s history, and (b) are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community.”⁴⁵ These properties are often hard to find, since they may have no structures or other inherent cultural or aesthetic value, i.e. it is not apparent that a special place just by looking at it. The value of these places is known to the tribes who use them, and thus they must be consulted to help preserve them.

Finally, Gulliford ends with a chapter on Indian culture in the modern world. Since his focus was mainly on the landscapes that represent Indian culture, the final chapter looks at how those places, and the cultural attributes they represent, are being protected today. A fine line often is walked between allowing public land to be used, unfettered, by the public and respecting the wishes of those whose ancestors lived and died on the land. It is difficult to reconcile modern American life with

⁴⁵ Patricia Parker and Thomas King, *National Register Bulletin 38: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division, 1990).

the cultural traditions of those who have been here for thousands of years, but it is possible, and it must be pursued.

Material culture and cultural landscapes are eminently necessary for historians who wish to tell the stories of those who have little written history. Each comes with its own biases and interpretive drawbacks, but taken together with written records, they help to piece together the lives of those who would otherwise be silent in our understanding of the past. Studying these sources brings to life aspects of culture that would otherwise not be known; who would write down every mundane object they used throughout the day—including for what it was used and why? However, by recovering those objects, and studying the places where they were used, new ideas about the past, and how it is reflected in both the present and the future, are open to us. At Chief Plenty Coups State Park, the abundance of material culture left by Plenty Coups is a treasure trove of cultural wealth just waiting to be explored. By understanding how objects can be read and understood for their inherent cultural value, they can be included in the site interpretation as more than just pretty things to look at. Likewise, the landscape of the park contributes to its story and history. Understanding the changes that have taken place there, and why those changes have happened, can impact visitors in not only how they view the park, but also how they look at the land around them.

CHAPTER THREE:
THEORY IN PRACTICE, OR: INTERPRETTING THE LIFE OF
PLENTY COUPS AT A STATE PARK

This chapter will put to practical use the theoretical framework established in the previous two chapters. Plenty Coups' was a great man, a leader, and an advocate for his people. He knew that for the Crow to survive they must adapt. It was his life's mission to help them do that and to model that adaptive spirit in his own life. Many items retained at the museum show this adaptability and Plenty Coups' conscious effort to retain his Crow heritage while also embracing Euro-American culture. For the most part, white historians discussing how Plenty Coups saved his people from destruction by leading them onto the reservation dominates the historical narrative. However, by looking at the objects at the museum, as well as park proper, you can see that while he did "lead" them to the reservation era, he was making calculated decisions to save not only his people but also their culture, and these decisions are reflected in modern Crow culture even today.



Fig. 7 Object 001-002b, Medicine Bundle, unknown creator (Chief Plenty Coups State Park collection, unknown date)



Fig. 8 Object 001-002c, Medicine Bundle, unknown creator (Chief Plenty Coups State Park collection, unknown date)

These Sacred Tobacco Society medicine bundles belonged to or were given to Plenty Coups before he donated them to the state. Spirit guides instructed men and women during a vision quest which items to include as symbols of their medicine. These items represented the help that the spirit guide would provide the person.¹

Object 001-002b is made of ermine, or winter weasel, with a dark green ribbon around the middle and beaded string of alternating dark blue, white, and one red bead attached to the nose. The end of this string is tassel of red, yellow and purple yarn. It originally belonged to one of Plenty Coups' wives, as part of the Weasel Society chapter of the Tobacco Society. Ermine were fierce fighters and thought to be good war medicine.²

Object 001-002c is a stuffed black-footed ferret that that was a personal talisman of Plenty Coups. It has two red wool bands with black borders and a blue seed bead border around its middle. Seven small, brass buttons, four red wool streamers, and a red and white bead streamer with eagle breath feather and red fluff are attached to its nose. The medicine bundle was used in the Sacred Tobacco Ceremony and also provided luck in securing buckskins and albino horses.

¹ Linderman, *Plenty -Coups*, 25.

² Hansen, *Memory and Vision*, 142.

These two bundles are part of the Sacred Tobacco Society, an integral part of Crow culture. Sacred tobacco seeds were given to the Crow “from the stars,” and the Crow split with the Hidatsa and traveled west toward Montana to plant these seeds in their new homeland.³ During the Tobacco Society ritual, Crow men plant and harvest ceremonial seeds to represent the spiritual gifts given to the Crow. The migration story is also re-enacted, and ceremonial adoptions take place. During Plenty Coups’ life, the Tobacco Society was the central ritual of Crow culture, and his role in it signifies his importance in the community.⁴

The museum holds numerous medicine bundles, many of which cannot be displayed and are kept in a secure facility on-site. Medicine bundles are individualized to their owner: after a vision quest, a person gathers items that hold power for them, and that will help or protect them in some way. Some medicine bundles—like those for sacred societies—hold very strong medicine. Touching these bundles without first being cleansed and without authorization from the owner of the bundle can cause harm. Many of the medicine bundles in the museum collection belonged to various Crow people and were given to Plenty

³ Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 272.

⁴ Hansen, *Memory and Vision*, 39-42; Joseph Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of the Crow Country: The Crow Indians’ Own Stories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 7.

Coups after the death of a relative, because he was their chief and would know how to handle the bundles. Thus, only certain medicine bundles can be displayed. Despite their association with the Tobacco Society, Object 001-002b and 001-002c can be displayed, as directed by the tribal elders and medicine man Jonathan Pretty On Top.

This protocol for tribal guidance when dealing with sacred objects stems from the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), passed in 1990.⁵ Museums with Indian artifacts in their collections were to take an inventory of those items, and report those items to affected tribal leadership. In addition to these steps, the staff at Chief Plenty Coups State Park also consulted Crow and Blackfoot leaders about the care and maintenance necessary for these items, and established a policy by which individual cases should be handled.⁶

The Crow origin story and the story of the tobacco seeds are wonderful places to begin the museum exhibit, giving guests a good starting point for Crow culture. The origin story sets the stage for all other aspects of the museum exhibits: it connects the Crow to their land, is the foundation of their religious beliefs, and sets the stage for the tenacity Plenty Coups would later come to display. The ones that are able to be should be displayed, as they show a part of Crow culture that has

⁵ 25 USC Ch. 32: Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation (1990).

⁶ *Chief Plenty Coups State Park Management Plan*, (Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 2000), 15 and 44.

thrived for hundreds of years. As their leader, Plenty Coups' decisions to keep his medicine bundles, and to collect those passed on to him, shows his dedication to his people and their culture. Assimilation was a strategy for the survival of the Crow people, but Plenty Coups knew it could not come at the expense of their religion and culture. These bundles are a physical reminder of what Plenty Coups valued, and what he saved.



Fig. 9 Object 001-079, Rosary Beads, unknown creator (Chief Plenty Coups State Park collection, unknown date)

These rosary beads belonged to Plenty Coups, who was baptized into the Catholic Church in 1917. The single strand of black beads is threaded on a silver chain, culminating with a silver cross at the end. The rosary was inside of a suitcase donated by Plenty Coups to the Billings' Kiwanis, who held the collection of artifacts before the state Park Service created the Chief Plenty Coups State Park, and secured the

collection there. Although Catholic missions had been ongoing for many centuries, they did not reach Crow country until the late 1800s, when Father Peter Barcelo, a Jesuit, visited Chief Iron Bull near Stillwater Agency.⁷ Soon more missionaries came to the Crow reservation—the area had originally been declared for the Methodists—and both missions and boarding schools were soon established across the reservation. In 1891, Plenty Coups requested that a mission school be built in Pryor so that the children there might attend school near home instead of at Crow Agency. In 1897, St. Charles Mission and Boarding School was opened.⁸ Plenty Coups was baptized at this church, and his funeral took place there in 1932.

This rosary could be misconstrued as proof of Plenty Coups' acquiescence to Euro-American culture, that he was demonstrating a desire to become more like White society and leave his Indian-ness. Instead, it should be interpreted as simply another way that Plenty Coups used his position in the Crow community to get what he needed for himself and his people (i.e. a school nearby instead of miles away). He still participated in sweat lodges and advocated for communal gatherings like the Beaver Dance.⁹ This rosary represents a strategic move on his

⁷ Hoxie, *Parading*, 198-99.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 216-17.

part, not a shirking of his Crow heritage, and also demonstrates the Crow belief that being Crow and being Catholic were not mutually exclusive ideas.



Fig. 10 Object 001-075, Dance Bells, also called Ankle Bells, unknown creator (Chief Plenty Coups State Park collection, unknown date)

These dance bells—also called ankle bells—measure about 16 inches long and feature nine bells on each leather strap, with soft leather or hide strings on the top to secure the bells to the dancer’s legs. Male dancers during traditional Crow parading wore similar dance bells. Before moving onto reservations, parading was a typical part of Crow life, a way of moving from point A to point B in a grand fashion or celebrating the success of a returning war or hunting party.¹⁰ After moving to

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

reservations, and thereby no longer participating in war raids or buffalo hunts, parading was incorporated into other ceremonial rituals, eventually leading to the modern-day pow-wows and yearly celebrations of Crow culture such as Crow Fair. The Parade Dance, Ashéeleetaalissua, is performed any time the Crow break camp.¹¹ This dance symbolizes the spirit of the young eagle, as the dancers proudly parade past the thousands who gather at Crow Fair each year.

Crow Fair started in 1904 as an agricultural showcase spearheaded by Crow superintendent S.G. Reynolds.¹² Similar to county fairs, which were created to reward agricultural prowess and introduce new industrial techniques, the first Crow Fair gave awards for “Indian woman making nicest kept teepee” and “Best display of farm products.”¹³ In 1914, Indian Affairs commissioner Cato Sells attempted to quell displays of “Indian-ness” in future fairs. This directive did not work for the Crow Fairs, which were quite large and very profitable. By displaying the desired industrial talents, they were able to keep their mock battles, their horse races, and their parading. By 1917 fifty-eight reservations were hosting these industrial fairs. Crow Fair—also called the Tipi

¹¹ Dale Old Horn and Timothy P. McCleary, *Apsáalooke Social and Family Structure* (Crow Agency, Little Big Horn College, 1995)

¹² Mellis, *Riding Buffaloes and Broncos*, 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 45-6.

Capital of the World—still occurs every year at Crow Agency.¹⁴ Men, women, and children come from across the state, and across the country, to participate in horse races, rodeos, dances, parades, cooking competitions, and merriment with kin.¹⁵ Gone are the government-mandated shows of industry and assimilation. The spirit of the fair, however, remains the same: a celebration of Crow culture and Crow life, with plenty of dancing.

¹⁴ David J. Wishart, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* s.v. “Crow Fair,” <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.sr.012.xml> (accessed August 1, 2016).

¹⁵ Dale Old Horn and Timothy P. McCleary, *Crow Fair* (Crow Agency, Little Big Horn College, 1995)



Fig. 11 Object 001-055, Stetson Hat, unknown creator (Chief Plenty Coups State Park collection, unknown date)



Fig. 12 Object 001-056, Stetson Hat, unknown creator (Chief Plenty Coups State Park collection, unknown date)

In 1865, John B. Stetson started making a felt, water-repellent hat called “Boss of the Prairie.” This hat is still made today, and was the most popular style from its inception through the early 1900s, worn by Western celebrities such as Buffalo Bill and Calamity Jane.¹⁶ Plenty Coups can also be seen wearing this style hat on several occasions, and he owned these two hats.

Object 001-055 bear the marks “Clear Nutria” and “The Fray” on the inside sweatband label. Nutria—also known as coypu or river rat—is a large semi-aquatic rodent native to subtropical South America. The nutria was valued for its tough fur and was used in millinery for hats that were more durable than other furs. Because of the durability of the materials, this hat is in better condition than Object 001-056. Also a Boss of the Plains style, 056 is made of a lower quality felt, and is marked “Block 7” as the size under the sweatband. Plenty Coups wore these hats for both fashionable and functional reasons. They were stylish at the time—most men wore hats every day—and also protected the wearer from the hot sun while working outdoors in the field. As with most things in Plenty Coups’ life, they were a mix of old and new, Crow and Euro-American.

¹⁶ “Stetson Life-Timeline,” www.stetson.com/stetson-life/timeline, accessed January 21, 2016.

Most of the photos of Plenty Coups are highly staged or at formal events, not in casual settings. In these formal photographs, he is meant to revel in his Indian-ness, to represent viscerally the “other.” In his day to day life and the less staged photographs, Plenty Coups wears a mix of traditional dress and European dress. It is a statement, a living embodiment of his belief that adapting makes one stronger not weaker. Just as Mark S. Parker Miller examined George Catlin paintings for traces of truth, so too can we examine photographs of Plenty Coups—both staged and informal—to learn about his ideas about himself and how he was presented.¹⁷ Plenty Coups always maintained his agency, his control over himself and his image, and this was no different. It might be easy to think that Plenty Coups was manipulated into dressing as the image of an Indian that white Americans expected (as in Fig. 14), but it was all part of his calculated agenda to assimilate just enough to be able to maintain the majority of his culture. Photographs—all photographs, from staged portraits to “spontaneous” selfies posted on Instagram—have an agenda, a story the photographer (and in the case of the selfie, the subject) is trying to tell. This was true even for Plenty Coups, who foresaw the changes coming to his people, and who worked—as cunning as any present-day politician—to position himself and his people in the most advantageous light possible.

¹⁷ Miller, *George Catlin*, 300.



Fig. 13 “Plenty Coups and Grandmother’s Knife,” Fred E. Miller (Smithsonian Institution, ca. 1899)



Fig. 14 “Rodman Wanamaker and Indian Chiefs,” G.G. Bain (Smithsonian Institution, 1913) Plenty Coups is third from the right, at the groundbreaking ceremony for the never-completed National American Indian Memorial on Staten Island, New York.

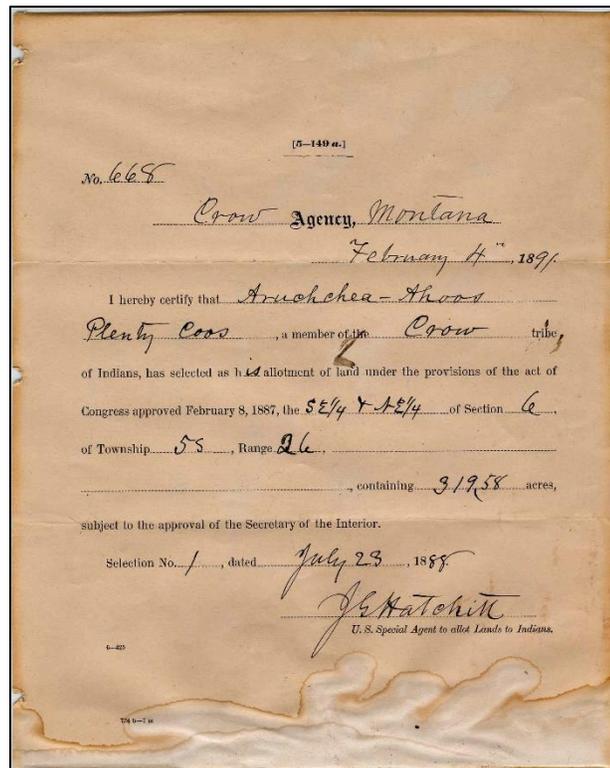


Fig. 15 Object 2004-01, Allotment Certificate, U.S. Bureau of Land Management (Chief Plenty Coups State Park collection, 1891)

In 1887, the Dawes Act—also known as the Allotment Act—divided Indian reservations into tracts of land that would be owned by individuals or families. This certificate legally gave Plenty Coups the land on which he was already living. It is important to display this object because it is a tangible reminder of the allotment process and how that shaped reservations, both then and now. Plenty Coups was already living on this land in Pryor, having selected it years ago instead of something closer to the agency because of his history with the land. Despite receiving a certificate for land that he essentially already owned, Plenty Coups did not change his attitude about land or community just by the receiving of this certificate. His community members still lived near him,

and his land was still the center of community life, just as it had been prior to 1887.

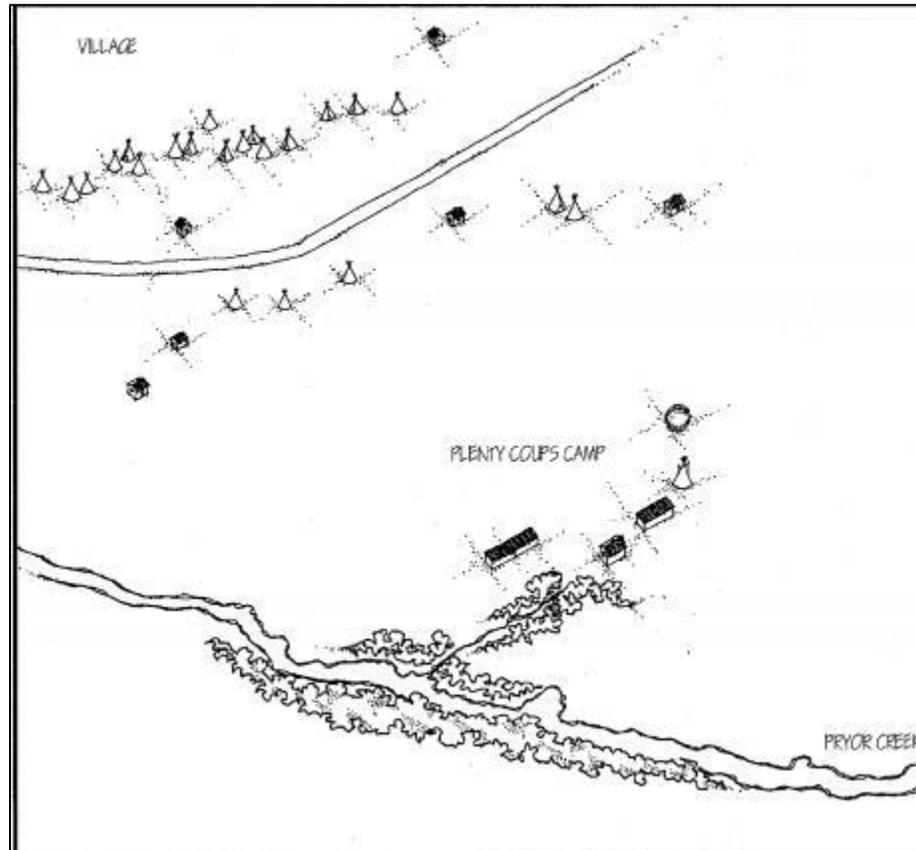


Fig. 16 Illustration from “In the Lodge of the Chickadee: Architecture and Cultural Resistance on the Crow Indian Reservation, 1884-1920,” by Thomas Carter, Edward Chappell, and Timothy McCleary.

Plenty Coups was still the chief to his people in Pryor, and they followed him as such. The drawing above shows an encampment near Plenty Coups’ home. Indian Affairs agents tried to make people encampments like these leave, but they simply moved the camp a little and generally stayed in the same area.¹⁸ This pattern was especially the

¹⁸ Hoxie, *Parading Through History*, 216.

case once the St. Charles school was built, as families wanted to stay close to their children, no doubt having heard of the horrors of Indian boarding schools across the country¹⁹.



Fig. 17 Object 001-126, Seed Packet, unknown creator (Chief Plenty Coups State Park collection, unknown date)

This packet of watermelon seeds was found during an excavation of the store area behind Plenty Coups' house and may have been an item sold in the store. Once the Crow were allotted land on the reservation, they were encouraged to start farming. Plenty Coups encouraged this endeavor and sold farming supplies in his store. Farming was seen as a way of "civilizing" the Indians and was a better option than the

¹⁹ Ibid., 203

community-oriented ranching, which took multiple people to execute successfully. Farming could be done by a family, with only occasional help needed from neighbors. Self-sufficiency was the end goal here, and Plenty Coups helped achieve that goal, while still maintaining his community ties through this store. By opening a store by his home, Plenty Coups maintained his position as the leader of the community, as someone who provided for them and was available to them when needed.



Fig. 18 Present day view of the house and general store, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012)



Fig. 19 View of the front porch of the Chief's house, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012) The nature trail and interpretive signs can be seen on the left side, and a tipi is visible in the background of the right side.

Plenty Coups' house is often the focal point for visitors at the park. It may not look like what they are expecting, but it looks familiar, like a historic house "should" in many people's minds. The house was built in stages—the central core, then the second story, another wing a little later. It looks like other historic houses because Plenty Coups was inspired by George Washington's Mount Vernon, which he toured during an east coast diplomatic trip. The landscape of the house and surrounding area—including the spring and sweat lodge—are essentially still the same as when Plenty Coups lived there. Maintaining the integrity of the view from the front door, looking down the sloping yard to a small

sweat lodge and a bubbling spring beyond that, is one of the most transportive experiences at the park. Plenty Coups' mission to incorporate his Crow traditions with new Euro-American traditions continues in his home, and nowhere is that more evident than in the Honor Room.



Fig. 20 Honor Room, upstairs in Chief Plenty Coups' house, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012) The podium by the railing is a place for visitors to leave gifts for the chief.

The Honor Room, located upstairs, has fabric draped across the walls like a tipi liner. While now empty, they once contained numerous commendations and mementos of Plenty Coups and his many achievements. The small stand near the room's entrance is now a place where visitors may leave mementos for the Chief. This room functioned

essentially the same way the tipi did in this way, as a communal room for visiting with guests, and also displaying achievements.



Fig. 21 Sacred spring at Chief Plenty Coups State Park, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012)

This small spring is just a short walk from the front porch of Plenty Coups' house. It was here that Plenty Coups emerged with his spirit guides during his vision quest, where he saw his future home and himself as an old man. The water is still thought to be sacred by many Crow, and it is gathered and taken to Sun Dance participants each year, the first sip of water they take in almost a week.²⁰ Visitors and locals both leave tokens here for the Little People, in hopes of receiving their blessing and protection.

²⁰ *Chief Plenty Coups State Park Management Plan*, (Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 2000), 14.



Fig. 22 Replica sweat lodge in front of Plenty Coups' house (southeastmontana.com, accessed August 1, 2016) The poles are left exposed to show visitors how the sweat lodge is made.

Between the house and the spring is a replica of Plenty Coups' sweat lodge, built annually and maintained by the park management (yes I got to help build it during my summer there). As discussed previously, though Plenty Coups was a member of the Catholic church, he still participated in regular sweat lodges until the time of his death. The proximity to the spring was both spiritual—because of its connection to his vision quest—and practical— a cold drink of water after hours in a sweat lodge is immensely refreshing. The view from the porch is virtually unchanged from when Plenty Coups lived here. Park visitors are seeing the same sights and walking the same paths that he did, giving a sense of immediacy to the past.

Plenty Coups' home is still a vital part of the community almost a century after his death. Visitors from all over the world may come to see

the museum and his home, but community members bring their children to play on the playground; they celebrate birthdays and graduations at the picnic area; they go fishing in Pryor Creek, and participate in sweat lodges to ask for blessings before weddings. The park was always meant to be for the Crow also. It celebrates the best of both worlds, encompassing Plenty Coups' passion for combining Crow and Euro-American worldviews into one.

Ahó.



Fig. 23 Playground equipment at the park, Jessica Reeves (personal collection, 2012)



Fig. 24 Parading during the Day of Honor (Billings Gazette, August 20, 2014) This day of feasting and friendship is held at Chief Plenty Coups State Park every year in August.

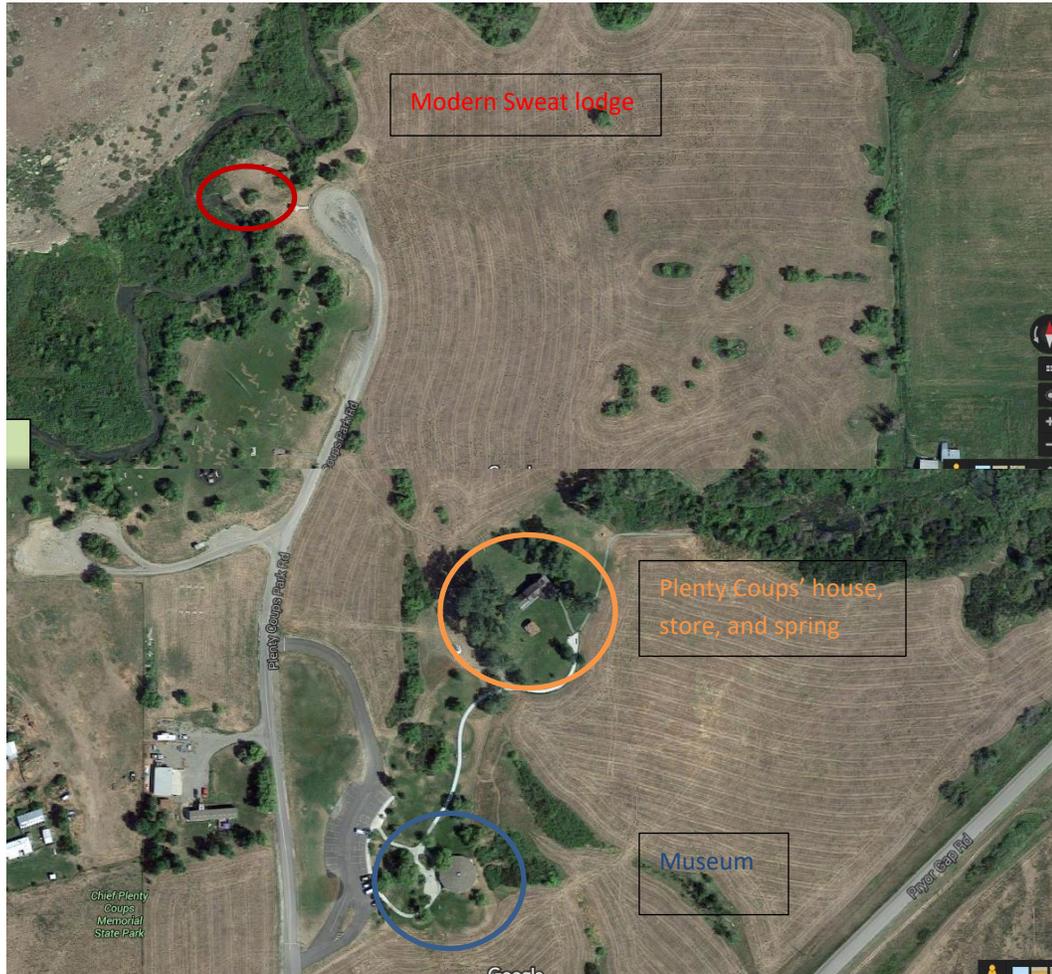


Fig. 25 View of the park from Google Maps, 2016.



Fig. 26 Map of reservation from Google Maps, 2016.

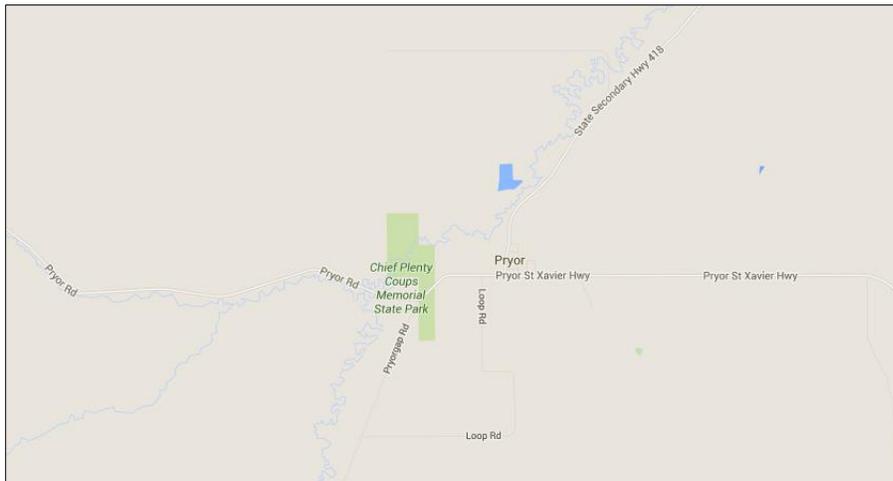


Fig. 27 Enlarged map showing Chief Plenty Coups State Park and surrounding area (Google Maps, 2016).

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