

CHAPTER EIGHT

MONTANA INDIANS AND THE WHITE MAN

With the coming of the white man, historical events affected all the Indian tribes in Montana. In a short amount of time, they were changed from people who ranged the wide open plains to people confined to small reservations. The Indian culture almost completely disappeared, and it is just beginning to make a recovery today.

Vocabulary

migrate	treaty	tract	battalion
nomadic	negotiate	intrusion	plague (v)
dominate	cede	sacred	
Jesuit priest	annuities	dependence	

Montana Indians In 1600

Few of the Indian tribes we know today as Montana Indians lived in Montana in 1600. They lived further east or in Canada. As white settlers began to expand in the eastern part of the United States, they pushed Indian tribes further west, who in turn pushed other tribes further west, in a domino effect. From 1600 to 1800, many tribes settled in the land we now know as Montana.

Montana Indians in 1800

Indian tribes in Montana around 1800 roamed very large general areas, with no defined boundaries. The Kutenai, Kalispel, Pend d'Oreille, and Flathead tribes lived in northwest Montana, making trips to Eastern Montana to hunt buffalo several times a year. They had other sources of food such as fish, berries, roots, and other game animals that lived in the mountains and valleys of the west. They did not migrate, which means to move around, very much.

The Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, Crow, Cheyenne, and Sioux tribes lived in eastern Montana and had more of a nomadic culture, which means they had to move around a lot to follow the buffalo, their main source of food. The Sioux and Blackfeet were the most ferocious and tended to dominate their neighbors. After the tribes got horses from the Spanish in the southwestern United States in the early 1700's, they were able to travel much further after the buffalo. Most of the tribes became excellent horsemen and the number of horses a man had determined his wealth. One of their greatest sports was stealing horses from other tribes.

Arrival of the White Man

In the early 1800's, until about 1840, the only contacts the Indians had with whites were with the fur trappers. Most of the trappers and traders did not wish to remain in Indian country, but came only to trap or trade for furs. They did not establish towns or settle on Indian land. They did, however, introduce the Indians to liquor, infect them with diseases (mainly smallpox), and cause conflict among the different tribes. During this time, some Jesuit priests came to Montana to introduce the tribes to Christianity.

In the 1840's, with the opening of the Oregon Trail, more white people began to cross Indian territory. Even at this time, however, few white people wanted to stay in Montana. They were headed for the farm land of Oregon or the gold fields of California.

The Indian Wars

In 1851 the first Treaty of Fort Laramie in Wyoming was negotiated with the Plains Indians. No Indian lands were actually ceded, which means given up, but the Indians were assigned certain territorial limits to their hunting grounds and they agreed to allow the government to build military posts to protect settlers on the Oregon Trail. In return, they were promised annuities, or annual payments, of livestock and supplies.

In 1853 a man named Isaac Stevens came to Montana searching for a route to bring a railroad through Indians lands to the Pacific Ocean. Two years later, in 1855, he negotiated two treaties with Montana Indian tribes. The Flathead, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille tribes agreed to live on the Jocko Reservation near Flathead Lake. The Blackfeet agreed to a treaty which restricted them to a large area of land north of the Missouri and east of the Continental Divide.

The discovery of gold in Montana in 1862 changed everything. Now white men started to arrive by the thousands, demanding protection from Indians who fought against this intrusion into their hunting grounds and sacred lands.

In 1863, the Bozeman Road was built by John Bozeman. It was a shortcut between Fort Laramie on the Oregon Trail and the gold fields of Montana and went right through important Sioux and Cheyenne hunting grounds. The Indians forced the

whites to close this road in 1868 by attacking the travelers, but that did not solve the problem.

Whites continued to come into the land, now to homestead and ranch. They demanded more and more Indian land. Gold was discovered in the Black Hills of South Dakota in approximately 1874, and whites began to rush onto this land, which was sacred to the Indians. Realizing that none of their ground was safe, the Plains tribes decided to protect their hunting grounds no matter what. This ended with the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876, where General George Armstrong Custer and more than 200 of the soldiers in his battalion were killed by Sioux and Cheyenne warriors.

Establishment of Reservations

The defeat of Custer so angered Congress and the public that they demanded the Indian wars be ended. After a few years of pressure and force, almost all of the Indians were on reservations by 1881. As there were more and more demands from the whites for Indian land, the original reservations became smaller and smaller in size, until the boundaries of the seven reservations in Montana today were established - the Blackfeet, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, Northern Cheyenne, Crow, and Salish-Kootenai (Flathead.) The Rocky Boy's Reservation was the last to be established in 1916.

Reservation life meant the dependence of Indians on whites and the end of the Indian way of life. The buffalo herds were gone, and as whites wanted more land, the reservations became smaller and smaller. Promises made to the tribes of supplies and food were broken. Many Indians died from poverty, disease, and alcoholism.

In 1887 Congress passed the Dawes Act. The United States Government decided it wanted the Indians to raise crops and reside on a homestead like whites, so each Indian family was given 160 acres of land. Most of the legal authority of the tribe was taken away. Since traditional Indian culture did not understand the concept of land ownership, many of the Indians sold their land to whites, weakening the tribal structure and the reservations still further.

In 1934 the Dawes Act was repealed and the Indian Reorganization Act was passed. The tribes were encouraged to re-establish tribal organizations and governments. Today many Indians are working to achieve a balance between

preserving their Indian culture and being successful in society today. Colleges and businesses are developing on the reservations. However, the problems of alcoholism, high unemployment, health problems and low life expectancy continue to plague the reservations today.

Locate the following on the map below:

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|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Rocky Boy's Reservation | Fort Peck Reservation | Blackfeet Reservation |
| Ft. Belknap Reservation | Crow Reservation | |
| Northern Cheyenne Reservation | Salish-Kootenai (Flathead) Reservation | |

