Colonial Encounters, Narrative Production, and the Possibilities of the Personal: Exploring Historical Memory and Meaning in Central North Dakota, 1911-1955

by

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ABSTRACT

In the winter of 1804-1805, the men of the United States Corps of Discovery or Lewis and Clark Expedition resided with the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians at their villages in present-day North Dakota. The hospitality the expedition received from these Indigenous residents in the form of material aid and the guide Sacagawea helped establish their critical role in what would become one of America's premier foundation myths by the early twentieth century. This thesis argues that both the Three Affiliated Tribes (the modern Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara nation) and the Euro-American settler residents of Mercer County, North Dakota deployed the narratives of hospitality in the Lewis and Clark story to further their own community interests in the early twentieth century. For the settlers this meant progress and a prosperous settler future while for the Three Tribes it meant stopping progress, in the form of Garrison Dam. The first section explores the long history of colonial interaction between the Three Affiliated Tribes and numerous non-Indigenous visitors to their homeland on the upper Missouri River. These personal encounters with the Lewis and Clark Expedition and later settlers resulted in both positive and negative experiences for the Indigenous residents. The second section analyzes booster rhetoric, published histories, and a Lewis and Clark themed historical pageant produced by leading citizens of the settler community in Mercer County, North Dakota. It demonstrates how a colonialist discourse of progress, Manifest Destiny, and a vanishing Indian race rendered Indigenous people as historic helpers in the establishment of a colonial state (despite their acknowledged contemporary presence). The third section shows how representatives of the Three Affiliated Tribes deployed their own narrative of hospitable colonial encounters during U.S. Senate hearings to try and block the construction of the Garrison Dam that threatened to flood out their reservation. In the end, this thesis argues that despite a tradition of hospitality and respect expressed in historical narratives, a stronger colonialist discourse determined both the main message of the settler narratives and the decision to construct Garrison Dam.
PREFACE

The author received approval from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board in order to undertake the project titled: “Stanton, North Dakota Lewis and Clark Pageants Oral History Interviews” certificate # H12-00509.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract......................................................................................................................................................i
Preface.......................................................................................................................................................ii
Table of Contents.....................................................................................................................................iii
List of Photographs...................................................................................................................................iv
Acknowledgments.......................................................................................................................................v
Dedication..................................................................................................................................................vi
Prologue....................................................................................................................................................1
Introduction...............................................................................................................................................3
Moments of Encounter and the Possibilities of the Personal: From Lewis and Clark
to Euro-American Settlement..................................................................................................................6
Our Land, Our History, Our Indians: Employing the Indigenous Past in the Settler Narratives of Mercer County, 1911-1932........................................................................................................18
Three Tribes, Two Explorers, and a Dam: An Indigenous Appeal to the Past in the Fight Against Garrison Dam, 1943-1955........................................................................................................39
Conclusion...............................................................................................................................................50
Bibliography.............................................................................................................................................53
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1: George Gillette ..................................................................................................................1

Photo 2: Big Hidatsa Village.........................................................................................................7

Photo 3: D. W. Enyart and Albert Little Owl...............................................................................16

Photo 4: 1931 “Sakakawea” pageant cast photo........................................................................35

Photo 5: 1931 “Sakakawea” pageant first white settlers...............................................................36
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Dedicated to the memory of

Kaylene Jaeger

(1984-2013)
I have seen it a hundred times but it still makes my heart sink. Fourteen delegates from the Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, filed into a Washington D.C. office for a solemn ceremony. With the stroke of a pen, Secretary of the Interior Julius Krug transferred 155,000 acres of tribal land to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. These rich Missouri River bottomlands, a full one-quarter of the tribal landbase, had supported an almost millennium long unbroken tradition of Indigenous agriculture and village life, lands that would now be forever lost under the waters of the Garrison Dam reservoir. Overcome with emotion, Tribal Chairman George Gillette could not hold back his tears. He wept for his people. He wept for his land. He wept for the Missouri River. A profoundly personal act in the face of a profoundly impersonal American state.

But not all the moments of colonial interaction were as impersonal, as austere, as removed from the wide open plains of North Dakota as this solemn ceremony. For more than two centuries, the
Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people had welcomed visitors into their midst. Whether famous explorers or European immigrants, newcomers to central North Dakota both befriended and belittled their Indigenous neighbors. They both knew them by name and yet knew them as “Indians.” Admired and ignored, visible and invisible, Indigenous people faced a settler community that understood them according to both personal experience and a powerful colonial narrative. Far from the marble-clad halls of Washington, amid the remains of earthlodge villages and sod houses, where rolling prairie met Missouri River, the possibilities of the personal met the power of discourse.

I embarked on this thesis project to come to terms with these two conflicting themes I experienced while living and working in central North Dakota. What I discovered, in the end, was a history behind this history. Two distinct communities, the Three Affiliated Tribes and the settler community of Mercer County, North Dakota, who told stories about past colonial encounters that not only reflected their situation in the present but, as one photo has proven, profoundly affected their future.
Introduction

On October 24, 1804, Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark landed at a series of Mandan and Hidatsa Indian villages after leading thirty eight men on an 1,800 mile journey up the Missouri River from St. Louis. Their goal- to find an overland route to the Pacific Ocean and exert American sovereignty over a broad swath of North America recently acquired from France. The ensuing five months of trade, dialogue, and diplomacy between the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians and the Lewis and Clark Expedition would go down as one of the most momentous occasions on their three year long trek across the continent.\(^1\) As the vanguard of the ensuing conquest and settlement of the American West, their near-mythic story of adventure and discovery has since been told and retold to the point of popular saturation.

On June 20, 1931 a group of young men and women adorned in feathers and face paint, buckskin and green army jackets, acted out their own interpretation of the Lewis and Clark story in a small North Dakota town. These “sons and daughters of Old Settlers of Mercer Co.,” mainly second generation European immigrants, dressed as Indians and explorers to reenact the pivotal moment that had taken place in that very spot 127 years prior.\(^2\) They stood on the banks of the Knife River in the Stanton city park just a short walk away from the remains of the Hidatsa village that once hosted the explorers. For the local residents reenacting this moment of encounter, the reason was clear:

To commemorate the history that has been made on the very river banks where Stanton now stands; to pay homage to “The Bird Woman,” [Sacagawea] and to bring the thought home to the average citizen that it was also once the cradle of civilization and valorous deeds, a magnificent pageant is to be presented.\(^3\)

Residents of Mercer County, North Dakota saw in their own local history, an exceptional Indian

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\(^1\) For a general overview of the Lewis and Clark Expedition see James Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).
\(^3\) “Stanton to be host for hundreds,” *The Hazen Star* (Hazен, ND), June 11, 1931.
tribe worthy of admiration, a famous Indian guide (Sacagawea) worthy of respect, and an American expedition that received unparalleled hospitality and assistance from both. They were not the only ones who saw this history in such a favorable light.

On July 16, 1947 a group of community leaders dressed in suits and sport coats walked into a United States Senate chamber in Washington D.C. They were the official delegates of the Three Affiliated Tribes, the modern Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people, there to testify before the Senate Committee on Appropriations. They had one goal in mind, to convince the federal government to halt its construction of the massive Garrison Dam on the Missouri River that threatened to flood out their thriving community on the Fort Berthold Reservation. Tribal member Jefferson B. Smith spoke first relating the long history of friendly relations between his people and the white man. Moving through the history, he gave special mention to that famous meeting on the banks of the Knife River:

These three tribes welcomed the Lewis and Clark expedition sent by the United States. They came and camped near our villages. Because of our friendly feeling, and the decree of our chief, Lewis and Clark were provided for with corn, venison, and other provisions, throughout the winter. Later on, Tsa-ca-ca Wea, which means Bird Woman, went with the expedition in the westward expansion. She was a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes. That is a friendly relation there.⁴

Smith saw in his own tribal past a history of friendly interaction. “From that time on until today,” he declared, “we have regarded the white man as our friend.”⁵

But beneath both these moments of hospitality, respect, and admiration between the Indigenous and settler communities lay another reality, a colonial reality. The 1931 Lewis and Clark pageant praised an Indian tribe, but only a historic one “that by its peaceableness and friendliness toward the white man did more to further the settlement of this state than any other single factor.”⁶ Jefferson Smith was proud of his people's actions toward the newcomers Lewis and Clark but also understood

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⁵ Ibid., 881.
⁶ The Hazen Star, “Stanton to be host for hundreds.”
that since then, “it is the Indians who have done most of the giving, and the whites who have done most of the taking.”

These are just two examples of the competing narratives at work in central North Dakota. On one side was the narrative of hospitality and neighborliness, both in 1804 when the Mandan and Hidatsa people welcomed Lewis and Clark and between later nineteenth and twentieth century settler residents and their own Indigenous neighbors. On the other side was the narrative of progress, improvement, and modernity for the land and the people. By exploring the ways the settler community of Mercer County, North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes each deployed similar historical narratives, this essay argues that narratives of progress and settler prosperity always, in the end, proved more influential and dominant than narratives of hospitality and friendship.

Leading theories about public memory have argued that memory formation is a selective process wherein the remembered past becomes a modern creation, actively molded to fit modern needs and expectations. As Edward Said has noted, this selective process is often a tool in the imperial contest over land wherein “sanctioned narratives” become a way to defend the colonizer and justify their place in a colonized space. In her study of Williams Lake, British Columbia, anthropologist Elizabeth Furniss demonstrated how one settler community constructed its own “sanctioned narrative.” Euro-Canadian residents used their privileged status within a colonial society to construct a frontier mythology that reflected certain “truths” about the past, and by extension the present. These “truths” pitted civilization against wilderness, whites against Indians, in a moral struggle where Euro-Canadians were destined to conquer the land and people through rational improvement. Several works have looked specifically at the popular Lewis and Clark narrative arguing that the expedition became a fundamental Euro-American frontier myth. Popular attitudes toward the expedition glorified the

7 “Wednesday, July 16, 1947,” 881.
frontier past and painted Lewis and Clark as leading America’s westward march of “progress” and “civilization.” These same works have also noted, however, that communities along the expedition route developed their own quintessentially local versions of the Lewis and Clark myth that addressed local events and served local needs.  

Finally, a small but growing body of literature has begun to show how public manifestations of the past and Indigenous Other in settler communities are concerned less with celebrating those things as they are serving the needs of the settlers themselves.

The settler residents of Mercer County, North Dakota constructed their own frontier mythology that reflected certain “truths” about both past and present. There was the notion of hospitality, neighborliness, and personal relationships reflected foremost in the historical narrative of Lewis and Clark but also in contemporary experience. But there were also the colonial “truths” of capitalist expansion, Manifest Destiny, and a vanishing Indian race. For the settler residents, one set of truths reinforced the other, but for the Three Affiliated Tribes, one set of truths opposed the other. When the Three Affiliated Tribes saw the latest example of progress, modernity, and the taming of the West looming on the horizon, they responded in a unique way. By deploying narratives of hospitality, reciprocity, and friendly relations in their fight against the Garrison Dam project, they proved their unwillingness to remain mere subjects of history. They too could employ historical narratives of colonial encounters to serve their own needs but in the end, one narrative would prove unstoppable.

Moments of Encounter and the Possibilities of the Personal: From Lewis and Clark to Euro-American Settlement

Mercer County, North Dakota stood at a crossroads. To the northeast stood the Missouri River,

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a waterborne highway whose steamboats supplied the prairie economy. To the southeast stood the state
capitol Bismarck, a bustling marketplace and administrative center. To the southwest stood the
Northern Pacific Railway, gateway to the West and beyond. And to the northwest stood the Fort
Berthold Reservation, home of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people. A patchwork of mixed-grass
prairie, sand hills, Missouri River bluffs, and wooded bottomlands supported a mixed ranching and
farming economy. Gravel highways, pioneer wagon trails, and old Indian paths crisscrossed the
county. Residents hailed from all over the United States and Europe but mostly Germany, Russia, and
Scandinavia. And nestled in the southeast corner of the county, amidst the undulating remains of half a
dozen Mandan and Hidatsa earthlodge villages, stood the county seat of Stanton.

Living with such a visible Indigenous presence on the land, everyone knew about the Indians
but not everyone knew Indians. Residents of Mercer County were typical of most North Dakota
residents, mainly first generation German and German Russian immigrants. They had left the old world escaping poverty, overcrowding, and onerous conscription laws. German Russians especially had seen their privileged status slowly fade away as discrimination and drastic efforts to fill the ranks of the Tsar's armies made the nearly 8000 mile journey from South Russia to North Dakota an appealing one. Once one family member arrived, more were soon to follow. But little did they know, they were just the latest in a long line of Euro-Americans traveling to the home of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people.

For over a century, the Mandan and Hidatsa people living along the upper Missouri River welcomed scores of white traders, explorers, and artists to their villages, establishing a precedent of friendly relations. Living at the center of an extensive Indigenous trade network that connected Great Lakes with Rocky Mountains, Canadian prairies with Southern Plains, the Mandan and Hidatsa people were the preeminent businessmen of the Northern Plains. Their successful horticulture amassed large surpluses of corn for trade and they mined the equally prized Knife River flint from regional quarries. These two commodities brought Indigenous traders from across central North America to their sedentary villages to trade. It was during one of these trades that they undoubtedly first encountered metal trade goods and horses, decades before the arrival of Europeans. Three Affiliated Tribes historian Calvin Grinnell argues that these warm relations with outsiders originated with the very first European traders to arrive at the villages in the early eighteenth century. Sensing an opportunity, the Mandan and Hidatsa “cultivated close relationships with the French and English traders from the north,

13 “German Russians” also called “Black Sea Germans” were ethnic Germans who migrated to Russia in the late eighteenth century. In 1762 and 1763, Catherine the Great issued two Manifestos that promised religious and political autonomy as well as free land and exemption from military service for Western Europeans willing to settle in South Russia. More than 20,000 ethnic Germans eventually took this offer in part to escape their own war-torn lands. With the rise of nationalism in the late-nineteenth century, Tsar Alexander II revoked many of these privileges and enacted a program of Russification, thus prompting a second migration out of Russia. American Railroad companies such as the Northern Pacific and Great Northern successfully attracted these immigrants with offers of cheap land and transport. This concentrated German Russian settlement along their routes on the Northern Plains. For more information see Barbara Handy-Marchello, Women of the Northern Plains: Gender and Settlement on the Homestead Frontier, 1870-1930, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), 24-26. and the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia website: www.ahsgr.org.

14 Ronda, Lewis and Clark, 75-76.
because it was good business.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus, it was a practical relationship as much as a friendly one. Eventually, many traders moved into Indian homes, paying a fee and becoming “tenant traders.”\textsuperscript{16} Some even married into the tribe, a common practice in the North American fur trade, further strengthening ties. In the end, these reports of positive trading relations filtered back east, encouraging Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to designate these Indian villages as their wintering spot.

When the Lewis and Clark Expedition arrived at the villages in October of 1804, their pompous attitudes and unwillingness to trade initially alienated them from their Indigenous hosts. The Mandan and Hidatsa were familiar with French and English traders but this large party from St. Louis represented something altogether new. After listening to a bombastic speech from Meriwether Lewis, demanding their allegiance to the “Great Father,” some Mandan and Hidatsa leaders rejected his gifts and refused to play host. These unprecedented diplomatic demands to blindly accept American sovereignty only engendered more hostility and confusion.\textsuperscript{17} The further unwillingness of Lewis and Clark to trade also confused and even angered some who “persisted in viewing the expedition as a trading venture.”\textsuperscript{18} One Hidatsa chief was recorded as saying the only “sensible men among them [were] the worker of Iron, and the mender of Guns.”\textsuperscript{19} Thus, the pragmatic business underpinnings of their relationships with outsiders held firm.

After a cold start, the relationships between the village Indians and the expedition members eventually grew through varied encounters, but personal bonds remained key. After an initial reluctance to trade, the Captains realized they needed Mandan corn and game to survive the winter. Thus, their winter quarters at Fort Mandan became the trading post the Indians had sought all along. Expedition members routinely joined their Indian neighbors on hunting parties and villagers sought medical attention at the Fort. Sexual encounters between the all-male expedition crew and village

\textsuperscript{16} Ronda, Lewis and Clark, 74.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 81, 85.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{19} Grinnell, “Mandan and Hidatsa”
women brought people together on an intimate level, but not without its share of scandals.\textsuperscript{20} The strongest bonds, however, were forged on a personal level. Almost thirty years after Lewis and Clark departed the villages, Hidatsa chief Black Moccasin related a story to visiting artist George Catlin:

[Black Moccasin] has many distinct recollections of Lewis and Clarke... It will be seen by reference to their very interesting history of their tour, that they were treated with great kindness by this man; and that they in consequence constituted him chief of the tribe, with the consent of his people; and he has remained their chief ever since. He enquired (sic) very earnestly for 'Red Hair' and 'Long Knife' (as he had ever since termed Lewis and Clarke), from the fact, that one had red hair (an unexampled thing in his country), and the other wore a broad sword which gained for him the appellation of 'Long Knife.'

I have told him that 'Long Knife' has been many years dead; and that 'Red Hair' is yet living in St. Louis, and no doubt, would be glad to hear of him; at which he seemed much pleased, and has signified to me that he will make me bearer of some peculiar dispatches to him.\textsuperscript{21}

What exactly Black Moccasin conveyed to William Clark is unknown, but this recollection hints at a fond personal friendship from decades past.

In his own summary of the five months of interaction between visitors and villagers, historian James Ronda sums up the mutual feelings with two particular stories. In late March 1805, two Hidatsa war parties left their villages heading west. This act of Indigenous political sovereignty completely undercut the efforts of Lewis and Clark to broker a peace on the Northern Plains, a peace intended to benefit American traders.\textsuperscript{22} Young Hidatsa warriors knew that war was a way to seek both vengeance and gain personal status. “If they were in a state of peace with all their neighbors,” one young warrior wondered, “what would the nation do for chiefs?”\textsuperscript{23} Thus, these war parties were acts of cultural sovereignty as much as political sovereignty.

In a second anecdote, Ronda hints at the personal bonds that, despite many setbacks, still formed between the Captains and their Indigenous counterparts:

Personal relationships between explorers and villagers during the Mandan winter were

\textsuperscript{20} Ronda, \textit{Lewis and Clark}, 106-107.
\textsuperscript{21} Quoted in Grinnell, “Mandan and Hidatsa.”
\textsuperscript{22} Ronda, \textit{Lewis and Clark}, 111-112.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 93-94.
marked by genuine good feeling with only few misunderstandings... That sense of harmony, security, and good spirits can be felt in the last visit Lewis and Clark paid to Black Cat... Lewis smoked with the Mandan chief 'as is their custom,' and when Clark arrived the Mandan presented him with a pair of beautifully decorated moccasins. If the Hidatsa war parties were an unpleasant reminder of unachieved goals, those moccasins symbolized what good neighbors both peoples had been. The simple rituals of hunting, eating, trading, and sleeping together had bound the explorers and villagers together during a Dakota winter.24

For the Mandan and Hidatsa people, the lesson of Lewis and Clark was clear. This first look at the coming wave of American traders, settlers, and bureaucrats taught them to distrust the abstract colonial message but embrace their very real colonial neighbors.25

After the dual setbacks of war and disease, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people confronted a new type of visitor in the 1880s- the permanent settler. After Lewis and Clark departed the villages for the last time in 1806, the Indian peace for the Northern Plains they so desperately sought never materialized. In fact, increased trade and westward expansion of the American state only exacerbated conflict between the village Indians and their nomadic neighbors. Furthermore, the smallpox outbreak of 1837 decimated the tribes. The numbers are sobering: a nearly 50% mortality rate for the Hidatsa and upwards of 90% for the Mandan. The survivors banded together and in two separate waves, in 1845 and in 1862, they left their villages at the confluence of the Knife and Missouri Rivers and relocated forty miles up the Missouri. It was a move made under their own volition, according to their own cultural values. With the establishment of the Fort Berthold Reservation in 1851 and the arrival of the Arikara people beginning in 1862, the modern 'Three Affiliated Tribes' took shape.26 It was under these circumstances that the next chapter in Three Tribes history unfolded.

While it is impossible to construct a comprehensive view of Indigenous-settler relations in early Mercer County history due to the limited source material, a few examples hint at the realities. In

24 Ibid., 112.
25 Ibid., 67.
particular, a series of pioneer biographies collected in the 1930s reveal an early settler community separate from, yet at times intimately connected to their Indigenous neighbors. The first settlers arrived in the 1880s, a transitional period in Euro-American attitudes toward Indigenous people. Violence at the hands of Indian people remained a very real threat in the eyes of both settlers and government officials. Several pioneer biographies specifically referenced the Indian “outbreaks” of the 1880s. These instances of armed Indian rebellion off the reservations were more a creation of sensational news coverage than on the ground reality, but nevertheless felt very real in Mercer County. From 1886-1887 and again in 1890, panic swept across the county as government officials warned settlers that they might have to leave at a moment's notice. Some settlers prepared for the worst, building defensive works, while others simply sold their property at a loss and left. Those who stayed faced tense encounters. The account of Christina Danielson was typical of most:

In the early summer of 1888 while Mrs. Danielson was about her work she noticed a few Indians approaching the house. They were begging for anything they could get. She noticed more of the Indians were out in the field where Mr. Danielson gave them all he had but that was not enough. They demanded more and began to brandish knives and guns, Mr. Danielson stood his ground and told them in both English and Swedish neither of which they understood to go on and they would find all the water they wanted in the river which was about ¾ of a mile away. They hung around for a long time and left without doing any violence only leaving Mr. and Mrs. Danielson badly scared.

In 1890, Mrs. Danielson again faced an Indian man brandishing knives and “making all sorts of motions and signs” but only after the fact learned “he was trying to tell them that he was a cripple and would not do them any harm.” Such was the palpable fear at this time among settler residents of Mercer County, that a lone crippled Indian man could “leave behind a scare.”

27 The Historical Data Project was a joint effort of the Works Progress Administration Division of Women's and Professional Projects and the State Historical Society of North Dakota. From 1936 until 1940, field workers gathered historical and biographical data on early settlers in North Dakota. According to the project parameters, a “pioneer” was defined as “a person who was born before 1870 and who lived in Dakota Territory prior to the division into North and South Dakota, or considered the first settler in a township.” A total of 256 pioneer biographies were collected in Mercer County. See “Biographies – Archives,” history.nd.gov, last modified April 5, 2013. http://www.history.nd.gov/archives/whatbooralhist.html/.
30 Ibid.
Mrs. Danielson hints at another reality on the ground.

Evaluating Indigenous-settler relations is further complicated by the fact that so many settlers in Mercer County had just departed their European homelands a month or two earlier. Upon arriving in North Dakota, many immigrants were dismayed to find that a life of isolation on distant homesteads awaited them. Furthermore, the diversity of the immigrant pool and the checkerboard nature of homesteading meant that your immediate neighbors could hail from half a dozen different nations and speak just as many languages. As historian Barbara Handy-Marchello has noted, “the presence of so many people who were foreign in language, religion, dress, and custom- and who often considered those of other nationalities to be inferior- enhanced the sense of isolation that settlers sought to correct by creating communities.”  

There were, however, limits to this community building, as it was a process that relied to a certain extent on “excluding those who did not fit.” Handy-Marchello continued:

Fear of losing one's culture to English-language and American customs or to other European immigrants motivated settlers to build communities with cultural boundaries. Such boundaries were often flexible enough to accommodate people of other races or backgrounds... However, most North Dakota communities excluded American Indians. Though northern plains tribes had been assigned to reservations by the time of agricultural settlement and there was little hostile contact between settlers and natives, immigrants brought with them from Europe a fear of Indians that had shifted into local legends about America. Some, especially Norwegians and Germans, were familiar with the 1862 war between the Dakota and settlers in Minnesota. Others had a blurry sense that their destination was the American frontier and that its history was marked by warfare with Indians. Fear impaired settlers' abilities to create inclusive communities.

Sheer distance also hindered the creation of more inclusive communities, as the reservation system effectively isolated newcomers from Natives. But as immigrants poured into Mercer County in the 1880s and 1890s, they faced a rapidly evolving discourse about Indian people that would turn many of these old notions on their head.

As Wild West Shows set mythic Indians in stone and Frederick Jackson Turner declared the

31 Handy-Marchello, Women, 90.
32 Ibid., 113.
33 Ibid., 108-109.
frontier closed, the threat of Indian violence did an about face. Historian Philip Deloria argues that after the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, a transformation in non-Indian expectations toward Indian people occurred. With the end of open hostilities between Indians and government soldiers on the Northern Plains, some saw the possible end of violence itself. The Indians, as they saw it, were pacified, to be pitied instead of feared.\textsuperscript{34} But while people living in Mercer County may no longer have feared a war party riding off the Fort Berthold Reservation, violence still remained a reality. Settler J. O. Erickson recalled an early fourth of July celebration in Mercer County:

> Indians used to come to the celebration in great numbers, and always managed to get a fight started for the reason that they did not have the same privileges the white man had in drinking beer and whiskey, the officers such as [the] town marshal and county police had to watch the Indians very closely in order to prevent a lot of trouble between the Indians and the settlers.

Such a story also hinted at the new colonial power dynamics that defined Mercer County. With the arrival of Euro-American settlers, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people effectively became second class citizens in their own land. The Indian agent had to grant them permission to leave the Fort Berthold Reservation and travel into Mercer County, their former homeland.\textsuperscript{35} Once there, the watchful eyes of town marshals, county police, and local residents alike followed their every move. And wherever they went, discriminatory laws like Indian prohibition reminded them that in the eyes of the state, they were different.\textsuperscript{36} The Indians may have been “pacified” but they still needed to be controlled.

While the early encounters between Mercer County residents and members of the Three Affiliated Tribes could best be described as infrequent, informal, and awkward, they still permitted opportunities for positive personal encounters. For example, both groups faced the same climactic extremes on the open prairie of North Dakota. Pioneer Gottlieb Heihn recalled one incident of mutual

\textsuperscript{34} Deloria, \textit{Indians}, 47-49.
\textsuperscript{36} The Indian prohibition law of North Dakota was only rescinded on July 1, 1955
support:

in November 1898 a wagon load of Indians were caught in a snow storm coming from Hebron, one of their horses played out and died one half mile west of the homestead, and the Indians came to the Heihn place for shelter, they stayed in the barn with the horses and cattle for two days and nights, till the blizzard let up so that they could travel, Mr. Heihn gave them one of his horses so they could get home which was still about fifteen miles north to the reservation, they returned the horse the following week, and to show their appreciation the Heihn's were presented with a big piece of frozen deer meat, and an Indian made a shawl for Mrs. Heihn and they thanked the Heihn's many times for the use of the horses.37

While the recollections of Christina Danielson, J. O. Erickson, and Gottlieb Heihn represent just three chance encounters between these two communities, they represent the possibilities of the personal, both good and bad.

Other early pioneers formed much deeper relationships with their Indigenous neighbors. Pioneer David Warren Enyart lived just outside Stanton along the roadway connecting the reservation with the railroad. A family autograph book recorded the names of countless guests who stayed at the Enyart home including “Indian families en route between reservations, riverboat captains, relatives, friends, and even total strangers.” Enyart even became close friends with Albert Little Owl, a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes who lived in the small portion of the Fort Berthold Reservation located within Mercer County.38 Stanton resident Donna Buchmann recalled her own family connections to the Three Affiliated Tribes. Growing up on a farm immediately outside the Fort Berthold Reservation, her father became close friends with the Indians on the reservation. Her father's cousin even married into a family on the reservation creating direct kinship ties.39 Thus, from a chance encounter on a snowy winter day to years living just outside the reservation, the physical proximity of individuals often precipitated personal connections.

As the decades passed and both communities grew and developed, the occasional connections continued, albeit in different forms. In an effort to promote large-scale agriculture among the Three Affiliated Tribes, bureaucrats in Washington sent them seed grain and farm machinery in lieu of cash payments.\footnote{Gilman, \textit{Independence}, 201.} In 1891, the government also first issued cattle to the Three Affiliated Tribes. While the farming ventures struggled in the dry western North Dakota climate, the cattle industry boomed. Both activities brought Indians off the reservation to markets as close as Mercer County and as far away as Chicago. In addition, countless young men earned their living as cowboys on leased ranches located both within and outside the reservation.\footnote{Ibid., 242-246.} From this, a popular rodeo circuit developed with Indian cowboys competing against their settler counterparts. Eventually, this competition extended to the gridiron as the Elbowoods High School 'Indians' on the Fort Berthold Reservation regularly competed...
against their Mercer County counterparts in the 1930s and 1940s. Lastly, when Indians received title to an allotment under the 1887 Dawes Allotment Act, they also received citizenship and the right to vote. As early as 1902, they were electing each other as delegates to the Republican county conventions. All of these activities brought together Indian and settler people on a professional, social, and political level.

But despite these many examples of everyday interaction and even deeper friendship, the Fort Berthold Reservation and Mercer County remained two separate worlds. People may have experienced moments of hospitality and even admired their fellow man, but this does not mean they necessarily saw each other as political, social, or cultural equals. Moments of hostility and daily discrimination existed but were infrequently preserved in the historical record. Considering the largest archive that does exist, historian David Wrobel warns that one must always remain skeptical of pioneer reminiscences. They were acts of selective memory, constructed to serve more as parables for future generations than as authentic records of past deeds. Furthermore, the stories of early Mercer County come exclusively from those who stayed. For every pioneer who lived until the 1920s or 1930s to relate his or her own account of the early years, there were countless more who either died or simply left Mercer County altogether. And those pioneers who arrived as European immigrants in the 1880s and 1890s had four decades to acculturate to a dominant view of Indian people that defined Indians as timeless, traditional, and historic- explicitly different from settlers. How much could any amount of personal interaction compete with such a discourse?

The answer to this question came in the form of history. In the town of Stanton furthest from

43 Gilman, Independence, 266.
45 Historian Paige Raibmon argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the dominant view of Indian people placed them in binary opposition to white colonizers. Indians were timeless, static, irrational, rural, and subsistent in opposition to historical, dynamic, rational, urban, and capitalist colonizers. See Paige Raibmon, Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 3-13.
the reservation yet closest to the historic Indian villages that hosted Lewis and Clark, a new type of relationship grew. Not one between settler residents and their Indigenous neighbors, but rather between settler residents and the Indigenous past. As the following exploration of settler historical narratives will show, leading citizens of Mercer County celebrated historic hospitality and friendship, but for decidedly colonial ends.

Our Land, Our History, Our Indians: Employing the Indigenous Past in the Settler Narratives of Mercer County, 1911-1932

In the August 3, 1911 edition of the *Mercer County Republican*, two headlines shared the front page. On one side the headline read, “Agricultural Show: Facts in Regard to The Agricultural Show at Bismarck.” The article touted the upcoming Industrial Exposition in the state capital of Bismarck. It talked of extensive exhibits “demonstrating the very latest improved machinery” and a “great white way of electrical illumination.” Visitors could attend instructional lectures and exciting automobile races. Even the railroads would take part, transporting free of charge all county exhibits to the event. The goal of all this effort- to definitely prove to the outside world that “North Dakota has developed into one of the greatest agricultural states in the Union.” With a complete display of its own resources and industries, Mercer County residents were assured that they too would share in an inevitable future of economic progress and prosperity.46

On the other side of the front page appeared another headline, “The Amahamis: Some Interesting Data in Regard to The Amahami Indians.” This article gave a brief history of the Amahami village whose remains stood next to the Mercer County courthouse in Stanton. It talked of lodge circles, cache holes, and Indian warriors. It gave the vital statistics of this historic site, “one of three villages which for many years stood on the banks of the [Knife River].” It “was said to contain eighteen houses” and could muster fifty warriors. Related to but distinct from their Hidatsa neighbors,

46 “Agricultural Show,” *Mercer County Republican* (Stanton, ND), August 3, 1911.
they eventually joined that community after a smallpox epidemic decimated their numbers. With all this information, Mercer County residents were reminded that they walked on historic ground.47

One article pointed to a prosperous economic future, while the other looked back upon a unique Indigenous past. Appearing together on the front page of the Mercer County Republican, these two seemingly unrelated themes would begin their long association with one another in just a few weeks time. When representatives of Mercer County, North Dakota arrived to “boost for Majestic Mercer” at the 1911 State Industrial Exposition, they strategically deployed a narrative of Indigenous agricultural ingenuity and peaceful colonial encounters to promote a prosperous settler future, foreshadowing decades of settler narratives to come.48

First among the Mercer County boosters was Christian F. Schweigert. Born in Eisingen, Germany in 1883, C. F. Schweigert followed the well-worn route of thousands of German immigrants to North Dakota. He arrived in Mercer County in the year 1900, finding work at a ranch, flour mill, and general store before homesteading on 160 acres of available land. Receiving his U.S. citizenship in 1906, Schweigert wasted no time getting involved in local politics. He simultaneously served as deputy county auditor, deputy treasurer, and deputy clerk of court for Mercer County from 1906-1908. His next venture came in 1908 when he and fellow businessman C. B. Heinemeyer purchased the weekly Mercer County Republican based in Stanton.49 Not to be outdone, he served as U.S. Commissioner from 1910-1912, moving to Stanton in the process.50 As a politician, businessman, and publisher, C. F. Schweigert was invested in the future prosperity of Mercer County.51 Thus, it is not surprising that on September 29, 1911, he led the county delegation boosting Mercer County at the State Industrial Exposition. But the rhetoric that he and the other representatives employed in their boosting is what set their efforts apart.

47 “The Amahamis,” Mercer County Republican (Stanton, ND), August 3, 1911.
48 “Boosts for Majestic Mercer,” Mercer County Republican (Stanton, ND), Oct. 5, 1911.
49 Beverly J. Huber, The History of Stanton, North Dakota to 1982 (Stanton, ND, 1982), 22.
Working with the Mercer County Boosters organization, C. F. Schweigert created a showcase booth that featured not only a bounty of natural products, but a story of agricultural prosperity rooted in the Indigenous past. An article appearing in Schweigert's *Mercer County Republican* the week after the exhibition covered the event in detail. Written from the perspective of the boosters, the article enthusiastically reported on the successful impact of their efforts:

> We saw the Mercer county booth and the products of its fields spread before us. We saw James J. Hill president of the Great Northern and Howard Elliott president of the Northern Pacific, in company with other officials, stay in the Mercer County booth for at least 10 minutes and feast their eyes upon the products of our railroadless county. We saw numerous reporters from large eastern dailies interviewing Hon. H. L. van Benachoten and C. F. Schweigert who have charge of the exhibit.  

But to truly demonstrate that their efforts at boosting were a success, the article went on to quote at length three of the leading regional papers and their take on what the boosters dubbed “Majestic Mercer.” This demonstrated not only what the boosters physically displayed, but more importantly the stories they told about Mercer County.

The *St. Paul Pioneer Press, The Bismarck Tribune, and The Fargo Forum* each reported on the varied products at the Mercer County display. Oats, wheat, apples, and lignite coal all sat comfortably under a sign titled “Wanted: A railroad. N. P. preferred.” Following the logic of booster theories, Mercer County residents already had the natural resources necessary for growth and prosperity. All they needed next was a transportation route to convey their products to an outside marketplace. But each article also included a curious section about the most promising natural product in the county, corn. For example, *The Bismarck Tribune* reported, “Majestic Mercer's long suit seems to be corn and judging from the entries made, some of the big corn prizes will go west of the Big Muddy to the banks of the Knife.” The article went on to mention not the potential for corn production in the county, but

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52 *Mercer County Republican*, “Boosts for Majestic Mercer.”
53 Ibid.
55 “Big Muddy” refers to the Missouri River and the Knife River flows through Mercer County entering the Missouri at the town of Stanton. See *Mercer County Republican*, “Boosts for Majestic Mercer.”
rather a history of corn in Mercer County:

   It is not generally known that corn was raised successfully in the Missouri valley long before the white man came to Dakota. The explorers Lewis and Clark found a goodly supply of corn as the Ree and Mandan villages at Stanton as early as 1805. For many years thereafter these villages supplied the trappers and traders with corn. One of our present varieties known as 'Mercer' is the improved Ree or Squaw corn.56

The St. Paul Pioneer Press made an equally dramatic transition from potential railroad development to the history of corn in their article stating:

   In this country corn was raised in 1805. That is 106 years ago there was corn growing on land which is now part of Mercer County. Lewis and Clarke (sic) in their expedition to the Pacific coast record that they bought corn of Indians... Later visitors to the Mandan Indians in that vicinity report corn, and it has been developed during the 26 years white men have been there, until it is a well known variety. This year fully 1,500 acres of corn has been raised there, running 25 to 50 bushels to the acre.57

Finally, The Fargo Forum provided the most extensive account of the history of corn in Mercer County with the following write-up:

   No one knows when corn was first raised in Mercer county, but history records the fact that the Mandan Indians cultivated it years before the famous explorers, Lewis and Clark, visited their villages which were located near Stanton... Again we hear of corn raising in Mercer county through Catlin who visited the Indian villages near Stanton in 1832... It was not until 1880 that the first white families came to Mercer County; whom was Edward Heinemeyer... [He] made a special effort to raise corn the first year, but did not succeed until he had secured seed from the Mandan Indians at the Fort Berthold Reservation... That crop was the foundation crop of the variety known as “Mercer Flint.” Today, after twenty-seven years of experimenting and improving this variety, Mr. Heinemeyer has a corn that can compete with any corn grown in this state as to size and quality.58

Considering that all these articles gave a near identical take on the history of corn in Mercer County and the reporters were unlikely to have had such a thorough and intimate knowledge of this local history, it is likely that all this information came from the Majestic Mercer boosters themselves. But why would a group of small town boosters be so interested in relaying the long history of corn in their county?

56 Mercer County Republican, “Boosts for Majestic Mercer.”
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
Considering their unique location along the route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, it is no surprise that Mercer County boosters appealed to this popular national narrative. Beginning with a series of publications at the turn of the twentieth century and a pair of centennial Lewis and Clark Expositions in St. Louis (1904) and Portland, OR (1905), the historical “Corps of Discovery” received new attention in the United States. What had previously been a footnote in American History was quickly becoming one of the nation's premiere foundation myths. Authors, artists, and playwrights all praised the hospitality and friendliness of the village Indians toward the expedition. In Bismarck, North Dakota, the site of the Industrial Exposition, the Federated Women’s Clubs of eastern North Dakota had just erected the year prior a statue of Sacagawea, the young Indian girl most associated with the Indian villages near Stanton. Thus, this unique connection to a popular American story would have been an easy way to make the Majestic Mercer booth stand out among all the other displays. But there is a much more likely reason the Mercer County boosters relayed this history that favors profitability over popularity.

In her work *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England*, historian Jean O'Brien argues that local histories became a primary means by which European Americans asserted their own modernity while denying it to Indian peoples. She articulates what she calls the “replacement narrative” in which the encounter between European colonizer and Indigenous colonized served as a definite break between an Indigenous past and Euro-American future. These “replacement narratives” accepted as orthodoxy the concept of the “vanishing Indian,” that Indigenous people and their culture were dying out. Such developments were the lamentable but “natural” result of progress.

The Mercer County boosters articulated what I would call an “economic replacement narrative.” In their story of corn in Mercer County, the Mandan Indians, who had grown their own

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59 Lewis, *Footsteps*, Ch. 1.
61 Ibid., 92.
varieties for hundreds of years, hand over some seed to Edward Heinemeyer who after “twenty-seven years of experimenting and improving... has a corn that can compete with any corn grown in this state.” In essence, the boosters created an origin myth rooted in a past of Indigenous agricultural ingenuity to convince investors of their future agricultural potential. Considering that both Stanton and Mercer County were less than thirty years old, this strategy makes perfect sense. Would a potential investor like the railroad put its money in an untested crop, or one that had a proven track record of successful cultivation going back centuries? Thus, while the story painted a picture of Indigenous hospitality culminating in the critical moment when Edward Heinemeyer received the first seed corn from his Mandan neighbors, the conclusions mirrored the colonial reality. By appealing to a long history of Indigenous corn agriculture that would only now improve with the rational experimentation of men like Edward Heinemeyer, the boosters painted corn, and thus Mercer County, as the safe, proven, and natural choice for investment. In sum, the Mercer County boosters created a narrative that commemorated the past Indigenous contributions to corn agriculture, but predicted a future of settler ingenuity and prosperity.

While the “Majestic Mercer” boosters concocted their narrative of agricultural transformation for outside investors, other leading citizens of Mercer county aimed their narratives toward their fellow citizens. Between 1910 and 1930, the population of Mercer County, North Dakota more than doubled from 4,747 to 9,516, but the early pioneers like Edward Heinemeyer were quickly growing old. In May 1923, Mercer County Superintendent of Schools, E. R. Thomas, decided to do something about that. He invited all the old pioneers to attend the annual school play day in the town of Beulah west of Stanton. In an address, Mr. Thomas “urged the old settlers to organize an old settlers association.” A number in attendance responded to his call and met again on July 4 to formally organize the Mercer County Old Settlers Association. They established the criteria for membership stating, “membership is

63 Mercer County Republican, “Boosts for Majestic Mercer.”
64 Census information available at www.census.gov
to consist of any settlers in Mercer Co. who was an actual resident in Mercer Co. prior to 1903.” They established a series of offices including honorary president, vice-president, and historian. And most importantly, they set out the objective of the association, “to have an annual picnic or reunion, to gather historical data, make record of the same, and keep a record of all things pertaining to the deeds of old settlers and pioneers.”65

In the decade following the organization of the Mercer County Old Settlers Association, two of its most prominent members would serve as historian and permanent secretary, C. B. Heinemeyer and E. R. Thomas. Both men would write histories of Mercer County that covered the Indian villages, Lewis and Clark, Sacagawea, explorers, fur traders, frontiersmen, first white settlers, and early industry. While different in tone and length, their narratives shared several characteristics. Each narrative began with laudatory praise of the local Indigenous people and their culture, then highlighted the importance of their assistance to the Lewis and Clark Expedition as exemplified by Sacagawea, and finished with the majority of the text dedicated to the deeds of white explorers, traders, and finally settlers. In essence, they created a historical and cultural pedigree for Mercer County, a clear chronological narrative that built a prosperous settler future on the foundation of an almost mythical past of exceptional Indigeneity and peaceful colonial encounters. These authors praised the Indigenous people, but their work could not escape the colonialist discourse of their day. They could only, in the end, justify and rationalize the settler place upon the land.

In “A Brief History of Mercer County,” E. R. Thomas created a historical narrative that left little doubt as to the status and importance of the Indigenous and colonial past for Mercer County residents. The four page typed pamphlet began with a rather bold statement, “There is so much to tell that it is difficult to make it brief for truly we have a history back of us.”66 This tone of historical exceptionalism continued throughout the entire text as Thomas succeeded in writing a “replacement

65 C. B. Heinemeyer, et al., “Minutes.”
66 E. R. Thomas, “A Brief History of Mercer County” (1925?) in Records of Mercer County Old Settlers Association: Organized 1923, Archives, Mercer County Historical Museum, Beulah, ND.
narrative.”

The first page of “A Brief History of Mercer County” dealt almost exclusively with the Indigenous history of Mercer County. In a flourish of colorful language and bold claims, Thomas painted an idealistic picture of an exceptional Indigenous community:

Three strong Indian villages were established in our County long before there is any recorded history. These Indians had reached a high state of civilization long before Columbus. Unlike other Indians of the United States they lived in permanent homes and tilled the soil for their principle food supply, here they lived in peace and plenty, crime and want was practically unknown, strong and healthy until the white men brought them diseases, his tricks of trade and his fire water. Strange it is that they worshiped one God whom they called the Great Spirit and this was long before they had heard of the white man's religion.67

What is striking about Thomas' narrative is his level of admiration for the Indians. They were “strong” and “civilized,” healthy until the lamentable tricks of the white man took their toll. Yet Thomas reserved his highest praise for those curious cultural elements that made these Indians so truly exceptional: permanent homes, farming, worshiping one God. It is almost as if they were already one step above the “other Indians” and therefore that much more ready to receive the colonial project. Such a project would arrive in the guise of Lewis and Clark, the single most exceptional moment of Mercer County history for E. R. Thomas. Marking a clear break between the exceptional Indigenous past and an inevitable prosperous settler future, Thomas wrote the following:

And now here comes real history the record of events that are to follow are nationwide in their scope and effect. The wise, far sighted Jefferson was President of the United States. He dreamed of a vast empire beyond the Mississippi which he visioned one day should contain the richest farms and most populous cities teeming with a people prosperous and contented citizens of the United States. He immediately set about to make his dream come true.68

Relaying the history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition at the Mandan and Hidatsa Indian villages, Thomas noted that “a friendship grew between the white men and the Indians,” focusing the bulk of his attention on the figure of Sacagawea. Thomas told how Sacagawea came to join the expedition and her

67 Ibid., 1.
68 Ibid., 1.
pivotal role in the journey. Her importance to not just the United States but to the residents of Mercer County was made abundantly clear when he wrote:

> The value of her services as guide and the help of our Indians during the long winter toward the success of this expedition cannot be over estimated. How they left as soon as the Missouri opened and made their long and perilous way westward to the Pacific is a story belonging to the whole United States but our part of it belongs to us.\(^69\)

Thomas' strong feelings about Sacagawea were bolstered by another sentence, “Some time when you are in Bismarck you may see a handsome statue of this wonderful guide, who received only the praise of the leaders of this great expedition while she was living.”\(^70\) These opinions about this singular figure were consistent with the Sacagawea legend that historian Donna Kessler lays out in her work *The Making of Sacagawea: A Euro-American Legend*. Kessler argues that Sacagawea's role as a guide and interpreter for the Lewis and Clark Expedition earned her an important place in one of America's most cherished foundation myths. More importantly, Sacagawea was deemed a noble savage, occupying a liminal space between savagery and civilization. She was defined as good and celebrated because “she is receptive to and fosters the invasion of the wilderness by a superior 'civilization.'”\(^71\) Thus, the Sacagawea legend lent itself “to the needs and aspirations of the dominant culture.”\(^72\) In a way, Thomas extended this legend to the entire Indigenous culture. Indians who lived in permanent homes, farmed the land, and worshiped one God were themselves already well on the way to civilization. They, like Sacagawea, received the Americans and helped them along their way. Such rhetoric made the reality of settling in a place with such a visible Indigenous presence that much easier. It sanitized a history of uneven colonial power relations and rationalized white settlement. But the cruel irony of all this is that no matter how much Indian people may have moved toward the norms of the dominant culture, they still remained fundamentally different in the eyes of the colonizer, stuck in a liminal space between civilization and savagery.

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69 Ibid., 2.
70 Ibid., 2.
72 Ibid., 11.
The second half of “A Brief History of Mercer County” dealt exclusively with the Euro-American exploration, settlement, and future development of Mercer County but ended with both a gesture toward the Indigenous past and an acknowledgment of the Indigenous present. After lauding the old settlers who “were made of the real pioneer stuff” and relating the founding of each town, the coming of the railroad, and the steady growth of population and prosperity, E. R. Thomas ended his historical narrative with two simple lines that speak volumes, “Our agricultural and mining industries are growing rapidly and we shall come into our own as a part of a great commonwealth. The Indians found Mercer County a good place in which to live, and so do we.” Thomas predicted a prosperous economic and political future for the settlers of Mercer County while treating the Indigenous people as purely historic. He combined the future and past tense to emphasize what had been (Indigenous prosperity and hospitality) and what would be (progress and prosperity for the settlers). And yet he wrote all of this knowing full well that an entire section of the contemporary Fort Berthold Reservation actually lay within Mercer County. Not only that, but for two brief moments, Thomas actually did acknowledge contemporary Indigenous presence. He referenced Holding Eagle as his source when describing an old Indian village and acknowledged the “many Indians from the reservation” who attended the arrival of the first train into Stanton in 1912. This proves that Thomas simply could not escape the popular discourse of his day. As historian Jean O'Brien noted in her own study of small town histories:

Local narrators took up the histories of the exact places their audiences lived, and they rooted stories about Indians in those places. The overwhelming message of these narratives was that local Indians had disappeared. These local stories were leashed to a larger national narrative of the 'vanishing Indian' as a generalized trope and disseminated not just in the form of the written word but also in a rich ceremonial cycle of pageants, commemorations, monument building, and lecture hall performance.

The Indians in Thomas' narrative, despite their commendable qualities and hospitality toward

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73 Thomas, “History.”
74 Ibid.
75 O'Brien. *Firsting*, xiii.
Lewis and Clark, mattered only in so much that they were central to telling the colonial story he wanted to tell. Not unlike for the Mercer County boosters in the decade prior, the Indians served the purpose of establishing a long history of prosperity and civilization in Mercer County. As soon as that prosperity took the form of modernity and Euro-American progress, Indigenous people no longer fit and thus vanished from the narrative. It was an evolution deemed natural, a theme mirrored in the next written history of Mercer County.

With the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Mercer County in 1932, Charles Bertrand Heinemeyer took the opportunity to finally create his own singular work of local history. C. B. Heinemeyer (no relation to Edward Heinemeyer) was born in New York City on January 5, 1882. As a sixteen year old, he left the metropolis, eventually finding work as a country school teacher in rural Mercer County in 1898. His early ventures included purchasing the *Mercer County Republican* along with C. F. Schweigert in 1908 and a stint as the local state representative in 1911. He later worked for the North Dakota State Land Department before moving onto private business and eventually farming from 1919-1936. After the fateful meeting in 1923 that created the Old Settlers Association, this self-described “student of history” was able to combine two of his passions in life, service to the community and local history. Wasting no time, Heinemeyer began the slow process of compiling pages of historical research, but he would have to wait until he was back in the position of Old Settlers Association secretary and historian to finally complete his work.

Drawing heavily upon his own historical notes but incorporating large amounts of new material, C. B. Heinemeyer published *History of Mercer County, North Dakota* in 1932. This sixty page long published history began with a section appropriately titled “Indians.”

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76 “C. B. Heinemeyer, Obituary” (1940) in *Records of Mercer County Old Settlers Association: Organized 1923*, Archives, Mercer County Historical Museum, Beulah, ND.
77 C. B. Heinemeyer, “Some Historical Data” (1925) in *Records of Mercer County Old Settlers Association: Organized 1923*, Archives, Mercer County Historical Museum, Beulah, ND.
described in dry historical prose the main facts and theories surrounding the local Indian tribes. Heinemeyer was sure to mention whether each tribe grew corn, however, mirroring the efforts of the Majestic Mercer boosters twenty years earlier. In the section titled, “The Country of the Mandans” Heinemeyer transitioned into a more colorful style reminiscent of E. R. Thomas. He reminded readers that while Mercer County “seems to be a newly settled section of our State... every foot of it is historic ground.”

He continued:

Long before the event of the first white man, thriving villages, inhabited by blue-eyed, white haired Indians, who lived in houses, were located here and there along the west bank of the 'Big Muddy,' near the mouths of the smaller streams. This was the life of the fabled Mandans... a peaceful nation, so different from their neighboring tribes not only in physical make-up, but also in their customs, usages and mode of living... Strange as it may seem they worshiped one God, long before they had ever heard of the white man's God... They had laws for the tribe, the village, the clan, and the individual. A criminal, a civil code, and laws on health and sanitation. Elaborate ceremonies were conducted in connection with birth, puberty, marriage, and death, both of males and females... All of the early explorers and travelers comment on their well planned villages, fortifications, their gardens, and good earth lodges. Many make special mention of how well their villages were policed.

Like the Majestic Mercer boosters and E. R. Thomas, C. B. Heinemeyer was not afraid to paint an idealistic picture of the local Indigenous past. The Indians in his account showed remarkable affinity with those in Thomas' account. Their high state of civilization was bolstered with curious elements like their blue eyes, white hair, and apparent monotheism. But among all the villages in North Dakota where these Indians lived, Heinemeyer made sure to point out where the main one stood writing, “While ruins of ancient Mandan villages have been found all along the Missouri, from the mouth of the Heart River to the mouth of the Little Missouri, the most eminent investigators believe, that the main or first village was located near the mouth of the Knife river.”

Invoking the cultural authority of “the most eminent investigators,” Heinemeyer emphasized the notion that the most prominent village of the most prominent tribe just happened

78 C. B. Heinemeyer, History of Mercer County, North Dakota (Hazen, ND: The Hazen Star, 1932), 3.
79 Ibid., 3-5.
80 Ibid., 5.
to be right next to the town of Stanton, the principal city and county seat of Mercer County, North Dakota. It was a case of prominence by geographic association.

Immediately following this section, C. B. Heinemeyer related the story of the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians until the present day. He noted the 1837 smallpox scourge that decimated the villages calling it “the saddest epoch in the history of our red family.”81 Continuing where Thomas' narrative ended, Heinemeyer followed the Indians north onto the land eventually designated the Fort Berthold Reservation.82 Finally, Heinemeyer included a list of all “the most prominent Indians who were allotted lands on that part of the Ft. Berthold Indian Reservation which is now in Mercer County, and are now living.”83 This acknowledgment of a contemporary Indigenous presence did not overshadow the overall narrative arc of the history however. Lumping together contemporary Indian people with the early history of the Indian villages in one section effectively segregated their history from the rest of Mercer County history. The Indians were absent from the rest of the narrative as it continued with a section titled “the first white man” before sketching the biographies of explorers, trappers, traders, and finally settlers. Only in sections like “agriculture” did the Indians make a brief appearance and only then to show how they had pioneered something that the settlers would then improve upon.84

The section about the Lewis and Clark Expedition was remarkably succinct in comparison to Thomas' narrative. Nevertheless, Heinemeyer did make sure to emphasize just how important a role the Indian villages played in the expedition:

It is a known fact that the Lewis and Clark expedition was nearly destitute of food when it reached the territory which now comprises western North Dakota, and unless they had obtained food they would have been compelled to retrace their steps and abandon further explorations. History substantiates the fact that from the Indians in this territory they obtained enough corn to continue their journey.85

Heinemeyer was equally succinct with his narrative of Sacagawea. The two paragraphs that described

81 Ibid., 5.
82 Ibid., 9.
83 Ibid., 9.
84 Ibid., 53.
85 Ibid., 13.
her participation in the expedition read like a series of simple historical facts without the laudatory tones of Thomas. Sacagawea “was chosen as the guide to blaze the trail for [Lewis and Clark] across the 'Shining Mountains' to the shores of the Pacific as she was the only one at the villages near the Knife River who had crossed the continental divide before.” Thus, she was a figure of singular importance to the expedition but Heinemeyer did not explicitly claim her quite like Thomas.\footnote{Ibid., 5.}

While \textit{History of Mercer County, North Dakota} was an impressive work of local history with a more neutral tone than Thomas' narrative, even C. B. Heinemeyer could not escape the colonialist rhetoric of his day. Just as he praised their advanced society and generosity towards Lewis and Clark, Heinemeyer still referred to the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians as “our red family.”\footnote{Ibid., 5.} Both his and Thomas' reference to white hair and blue eyes clearly drew upon the legend of the Welsh Indians, that twelfth century Welsh Prince Madoc sailed to North America and settled somewhere in the interior. These stories spoke to a centuries long desire to establish some kind of pre-Columbian European heritage in North America. They also carried with them racist overtones because, as the thinking went, the well fortified villages, elaborate ceremonies, and extensive agriculture could only be the work of Europeans or some other advanced civilization and not “primitive” Indians.\footnote{Kenneth L. Feder, \textit{Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology} (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990), 74-75.} Just as he sought cultural affinity through notions of white hair, blue eyes, and monotheism, C. B. Heinemeyer put each name from his list of contemporary Indians in capitals and quotations marks (e.g. “HENRY SITTING CROW” and “ALBERT GILLETTE”) marking the names and thus the individuals as somehow different.\footnote{Heinemeyer, \textit{History of Mercer County}, 9.} Lastly, the chapter titles created a clear linear narrative, beginning with a section titled “Indians” and ending with a section titled “Industries.” Heinemeyer may not have rendered Indigenous people as mainly historic like Thomas but the impact was clear. Mercer County had supported an advanced and civilized Indigenous culture worthy of praise but the prosperous future ahead was a
settler one.

Taken together, the overall narrative of both Thomas' and Heinemeyer's histories of Mercer County was clear. An exceptional Indigenous community lived here in Mercer County, providing the crucial assistance to the Lewis and Clark Expedition in the form of both food (corn) and guidance (Sacagawea) before fading away from the scene as a series of further white explorers, trappers, traders, and finally settlers completed the transformation. Mercer County had had a noteworthy Indigenous past but the real history of Mercer County began with that proverbial “first white man.” Even when Indian people showed up in a contemporary setting, they were either overlooked or lumped together with the old village history. These authors praised the Indigenous past just as they predicted a settler future. It was a “sanctioned narrative” produced by two leading community members and old settlers for their fellow pioneer citizens.

The efforts of E. R. Thomas, C. B. Heinemeyer, and the Mercer County Old Settlers to compile a history of Mercer County did not stop with the written word. In 1931, the Mercer County Old Settlers combined together two of their primary objectives, an annual picnic or reunion and compiling historical data, into one grand event. Drawing upon one of the most widespread and popular forms of public history in the early twentieth century, C. B. Heinemeyer spearheaded the effort to produce a stage show the likes of which Mercer County had never seen.

The “Sakakawea” pageant was more than just a staged historical reenactment of Lewis and Clark's first encounter with the village Indians; it was the most vibrant example yet of the “replacement narrative” at work in Mercer County. Staged outdoors in the Stanton city park on June 20 and 21, 1931, the pageant took several months of planning and hard work to become a reality. On April 22, 1931, C. B. Heinemeyer traveled to Stanton to arrange an entertainment program for that year's annual Old Settlers Picnic. He worked with a three man program committee that included his old business partner C. F. Schweigert, now serving as Mercer County judge in Stanton.90 Heinemeyer also worked

90 “Old Settlers' Picnic Stanton, June 20-21,” Mercer County Farmer (Stanton, ND), April 24, 1931.
closely with local Stanton resident Edith Janssen, a school teacher who served as pageant director. While a pageant of this scope had never been undertaken in Mercer County before, the residents were simply following a decades old trend of historical pageantry.

At the height of the pageantry craze in the first two decades of the twentieth century, hundreds and sometimes thousands of local performers acted out historical scenes of both national and local importance. Historical pageants joined museums, monuments, historical markers, and murals as a critical vector for public history. As a form of public historical imagery, historian David Glassberg argues that a pageant had the power to both reflect and reform society. It could give “recognition to various group and individual histories” while also suggesting “categories for our understanding the scale of our social relations and the relative position of groups in our society.”

In other words, historical pageants had the distinct ability to replicate on stage the unequal power relations of the colonial state. But historical pageants were also distinct in their multi-vocality. A pageant may have had one writer but countless actors, stage dressers, costumers, musicians, and a director who contributed to the overall artistic work. The “Sakakawe” pageant was no exception, as this excerpt from The Hazen Star newspaper demonstrated:

The pageant has as its foundation the arrival of Lewis and Clark at the three Indian villages near the mouth of the Knife river. With about fifty characters all wearing costumes of the day, and having five scenes with a closing Tableau, it is as ambitious an undertaking as anything ever staged in this section. Characters for the Pageant are to be selected from all over the country, with [Edith] Janssen in charge. The text of the pageant, written by C. B. Heinemeyer, shows keen historical knowledge and a strong sense of artistic values. If presented with the brilliance of the written work, the pageant will be a remarkable success.

While it is impossible to know what exactly C. B. Heinemeyer included in his script (none were found in the archive), undoubtedly it mirrored his History of Mercer County, North Dakota. Therefore, newspaper reports serve as the best way to understand both the content and the deeper significance of

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92 The Hazen Star, “Stanton to be host for hundreds.”
this theatrical performance.

Reporting a week before the “Sakakawea” pageant, the author of a front page article in *The Hazen Star* gave their reasoning for staging such a prominent event, “To commemorate the history that has been made on the very river banks where Stanton now stands; to pay homage to 'The Bird Woman' [Sacagawea], and to bring the thought home to the average citizen that it was also once the cradle of civilization and valorous deeds.” Like so many local narratives before it, this article celebrated the local Indigenous past, but the deeper meaning and significance was only revealed when the author explained the role for the village Indians:

> When the sun rises on the morning of the twentieth, it will mark the beginning of the 127th anniversary of Lewis and Clark's long trek up the Missouri River. It will mark a day to be spent in picnicking on the very grounds made almost sacred by once carrying the light footsteps of that courageous and famous Indian maiden Sakakawea. It will shine over the spot once peopled by the Mandans, the Indian tribe that by its peaceableness and friendliness toward the white man did more to further the settlement of this state than any other single factor.

This article reflected the prevailing trend in both local and national discourse about the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the village Indians, and Sacagawea. In this version, the Mandan Indians did not act out of mere hospitality in their interaction with Lewis and Clark, but instead were active participants in the opening of North Dakota for eventual settlement. Just like E. R. Thomas, who extended the Sacagawea legend of a receptive Indigenous woman to all the village Indians, this journalist rendered the entire Mandan people as willing actors in the Euro-American settlement of North Dakota. Thus, the Mandans were valued not for their hospitality, but for how that hospitality aided the transition to a settler future.

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93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
On the morning of June 20, 1931, the “sons and daughters of Old Settlers of Mercer Co.” finally dressed in their feathers and face paint, buckskin and green army jackets, to star in the “Sakakawea” pageant. Amid a backdrop of tipis and cottonwood trees, the pageant opened with the landing of Lewis and Clark at the Indian villages. The Indians then “gave several war dances, smoked the pipe of peace, and gave Sakakawea as guide for the explorers.”

C. B. Heinemeyer actively participated in the production describing “the pantomine of the actors during the various scenes.” Despite the historical weight that Heinemeyer’s narrative must have given the pageant, one reporter hinted at the lighthearted feeling of the day with this telling line, “The braves wore war paint but were really quite friendly.” With this tongue-in-cheek reference, the reporter hinted at one of the most significant elements of the pageant. The braves were not really braves at all.

With their elaborate costumes and layers of “war paint,” the “sons and daughters of Old Settlers of Mercer Co.” moved beyond mere praise of Indigenous people to actually becoming Indigenous people. They indulged in what historian Philip Deloria calls “playing Indian.” He argues that from the

95 “Old Settlers Celebrate,” *Mercer County Farmer* (Stanton, ND), June 26, 1931.
96 “Old Settlers Picnic Great Success,” *The Hazen Star* (Hazen, ND), June 25, 1931.
97 *Mercer County Farmer*, “Old Settlers Celebrate.”
earliest days of the young Republic, Americans have acted out their fantasies about Indigenous people in order to experience new identities. In the case of the “Sakakawea” pageant, it was a group of mostly second generation European immigrants manifesting their claim to the land in the guise of an Indigenous costume. But the tongue-in-cheek line from the reporter hinted at another reality in this scenario. At the end of the day, it was only a costume that fooled no one and could be slipped on and off with ease. They may have been dressed like Indians, but everyone understood that they were settlers, a point reinforced in the final scene of the “Sakakawea” pageant.

After Lewis and Clark departed the stage and the historical tableau was complete, the pageant actors staged one final historical scene. Jumping almost eighty years ahead in the narrative, actors representing Edward Heinemeyer and family appeared on stage driving a team of oxen as the first white settlers to arrive in Mercer County. For the local audience, the connection would have been clear. The local discourse about the village Indians and Lewis and Clark had prepared them for this one final moment when Indigenous past bled seamlessly on stage into a settler future. Indians left stage left as white settlers entered stage right. It may have been titled the “Sakakawea” pageant, but it may just as well have been titled the “Heinemeyer” pageant, because just like all the other historical narratives before it, the content was Indigenous but the conclusion was not.

Photo 5: Actors representing the first white settlers in Mercer County take part in the final scene of the 1931

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99 Mercer County Farmer, “Old Settlers Celebrate.”
Whether through local boosterism, historical writing, or staged pageantry, leading residents of Mercer County, North Dakota enthusiastically curated and disseminated their own unique interpretation of local history. As respected government officials and leading citizens of their community, men like C. F. Schweigert, E. R. Thomas, and C. B. Heinemeyer had both the means and the authority to create these narratives. They also had the motivation. As civic leaders invested in the economic and political life of Mercer County, their careers and social positions depended on the perpetuation of the colonial status quo. The literal transformation of a group of Indian villages into a prosperous settler community made their own prosperity a reality. Anything they could do to further that narrative would only lead to further settlement and economic development to benefit themselves.\textsuperscript{100} For men like E. R. Thomas and C. B. Heinemeyer, whose audiences were decidedly local, stories about mythic Indians and brave explorers also helped unite together and give meaning to the experiences of a very diverse immigrant community. Simply put, both Mercer County and the new “Americans” living within had to be invented. Through their work with the Mercer County Old Settlers Association and the creation of local histories, these men placed their own community's experiences within the broader framework of the American frontier. In traveling thousands of miles to the North Dakota prairie, the immigrant pioneers of Mercer County completed the process that Lewis and Clark had begun. They fulfilled the promise of Manifest Destiny and in the process became American. Telling stories about this simply validated their experiences and their claim to a piece of the frontier.\textsuperscript{101} But at no point were these three men working in a vacuum.

Just as they praised and claimed the village Indians, each also interacted with his Indigenous


\textsuperscript{101} For more about the significance of pioneer remembrance and its role in settler identity and sense of belonging in the American West see Wrobel, \textit{Promised Lands}, 121-128.
contemporaries. C. F. Schweigert had many Indian customers at his store in the north end of the county. E. R. Thomas and C. B. Heinemeyer both had Indian contacts through their work with the Old Settlers Association. In particular, Heinemeyer worked with James Holding Eagle and Albert Little Owl to help him identify the old Indian villages and write his history (possibly providing the reference in Thomas' history). And Frank Chase and Albert Little Owl, who resided in the section of the Fort Berthold Reservation that lay within Mercer County, attended the 1931 Old Settlers Picnic that featured the “Sakakawea” pageant. Whether or not they actually attended the pageant and what they thought about their own history and culture being staged by their settler neighbors is unknown.

How then do we make sense of this seeming contradiction? Three men who personally knew Indigenous people, yet in their narratives left no place for them in the future of Mercer County. Herein lies the true power of the colonialist discourse. The logic of frontier mythology and Manifest Destiny permitted European immigrants to travel thousands of miles, carve out a homestead on the wild frontier, and through this struggle become American, yet the Indigenous people who were there all along were doomed to vanish from the scene. Or perhaps there was a place for Indigenous people in the future of Mercer County, just not as the mythic Indians of Lewis and Clark lore. As a thriving community on the Fort Berthold Reservation who engaged in modern farming and ranching, lived in timber-framed houses, and cheered on their football team against neighboring towns, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people absolutely had a future in Mercer County. Not only that, they also had a say about its past. How much did these settler narratives of colonial interaction resonate with the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people? How did the Three Tribes understand the Lewis and Clark story themselves? When a government project threatened the land and livelihood of both Mercer County residents and the Three Affiliated Tribes, the visceral reactions of both communities would provide the answers.

102 Larson, Interview.  
103 Heinemeyer, “Some Historical Data”  
104 “Local News Items,” Mercer County Farmer (Stanton, ND), June 26, 1931.  

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A sudden spring thaw caused the Missouri River to jump its banks in April of 1943, setting off a series of events that would inextricably change the future for both Mercer County residents and the Three Affiliated Tribes alike. As torrential rains in May and June further raised the Missouri to near record levels, flooding over 1.5 million acres, Congress ordered the United States Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate the flood-control needs of this untamed river. Within ninety days, Colonel Lewis A. Pick submitted his plan to tackle the Missouri River, a series of five massive main stem dams across four states to control flood waters. The Bureau of Reclamation tasked William Glenn Sloan to develop its own plan for controlling the Missouri River in a flurry of bureaucratic competition. His plan involved a basin-wide complex of smaller reservoirs and dams to control flow in the main channel. Each man lobbied hard for his plan and neither one consulted with the Three Affiliated Tribes who lived along the Missouri River. In the end, both men won. Of 113 major projects proposed by both plans, 107 survived. On December 22, 1944 President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Flood Control Act of 1944 and the combined Pick-Sloan Plan became law.  

In the extreme northeast corner of Mercer County, the Missouri River took a sharp right turn between two high embankments and headed south toward Stanton. At this strategic location, Colonel Pick planned the crown jewel of his flood control program, Garrison Dam, the largest earth-filled dam ever proposed. The numbers were staggering: $161,000,000 initial cost; reservoir storage capacity of 23,000,000 acre feet; earth-filled dam 210 feet high and one mile long; up to 320,000 kilowatts of hydroelectricity. But it was the hidden costs that would fuel a fight: flood one-quarter of the Fort Berthold Reservation; forcibly relocate 80% of the Fort Berthold population; flood all the best

106 “Garrison Dam Will Cost $161,000,000” The Hazen Star (Hazen, ND), June 13, 1946.
agricultural land, timber, and mineral resources; sever a culture and community from the river that had defined it for a millennium.  

The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people had always followed the cycle of the seasons. So much in their world worked on a yearly rhythm— the spring rise in the Missouri, the planting of their gardens, the fall harvest, the winter buffalo hunt. Very quickly they learned to add the federal government to that list. From the arrival of Lewis and Clark onward, agents of the United States promised the Three Tribes so much, only to take it back again and again and again. When the Mandan and Hidatsa people left the villages outside Stanton in 1845, they left on their own terms moving forty miles upriver onto land they had always claimed as their own. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 established a twelve million acre reservation where the Arikara joined them in 1862 but in just twenty-five years, the land promised to the now 'Three Affiliated Tribes' would be reduced to one-tenth of its original size. Two executive orders in 1870 and 1880 removed the largest portion of federal land. In 1887, the Dawes Allotment Act further reduced the tribal landbase. The goal was to break up communal tribal lands and impose a system of individual land ownership. In essence, force the Indians to adopt private property and abandon any notion of communal land ownership. Religious missions and boarding schools further destroyed the cultural integrity of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people. Missionaries and government agents outlawed sacred rituals and ceremonies just as Indian children were forcibly removed to boarding schools where they were punished for speaking their own language. It was a process repeated across the American West with countless Indian communities forced to assimilate.

After decades of broken promises and cultural attacks, things began to turn around for the Three Affiliated Tribes in the 1930s. On December 1, 1930 a United States Court of Claims ordered the federal government to pay $2.1 million in compensation for the nearly 10 million acres of reservation

107 Lawson, Dammed, 59.
108 Sanstead, History and Culture, 16-21.
land promised in the 1851 treaty but illegally taken in 1870 and 1880.\textsuperscript{110} The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act allowed the Three Tribes to expand self-government and experience greater autonomy over their affairs. Cattle ranching became a primary means of support for many on the reservation and with the outbreak of World War II, 224 men and women proudly served in the United States armed forces.\textsuperscript{111} But despite all the pressure to assimilate, the old ways still held firm for the Three Tribes. Women still planted their gardens in the fertile Missouri River bottomlands and men hunted in the wooded draws. Their connection to the river that sustained them economically, culturally, and spiritually remained intact.

The news about Garrison Dam hit the Fort Berthold Reservation hard. For several years, federal surveyors had crisscrossed the reservation taking measurements, marking a new water line along the high Missouri River bluffs. Residents heard rumors about a dam downriver and immediately voiced their opposition. But in the bureaucratic frenzy led by the obsessive Colonel Lewis A. Pick, their voices went unheard. “I want to control the Missouri!” Colonel Pick once declared and no mere Indian tribe was going to get in his way.\textsuperscript{112} In the heady years of the Second World War, when government money poured out of Washington and anything seemed possible, why not control a river?

In the nineteenth century, the spirit of Manifest Destiny convinced Americans of all stripes to travel to a mythic Western frontier where they would triumph over wilderness and improve a primitive land and people.\textsuperscript{113} In the twentieth century, this same spirit inspired men like Colonel Pick to “improve” the land on a scale never before seen. The Pick-Sloan Plan was the epitome of progress, modernity, and colonial control. Its stated goals were flood control, irrigation, power generation, recreation, and maintaining adequate water levels for downstream navigation, but its unstated victims

\textsuperscript{110} Sanstead, \textit{History and Culture}, 21.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{113} A summary of these ideas and how they apply to rural settler-Indigenous relations can be found in Furniss, \textit{The Burden of History}, 16-22.
were five Indian reservations and thousands of private landowners.\textsuperscript{114} The mighty Missouri River had roamed around its flood plain for thousands of years and Colonel Pick intended to set it straight. Little did he know his efforts to control a river would spark a bitter struggle against a people determined to have their own say in the matter.

Written into the legislation authorizing the Garrison Dam was a single line addressing the Three Affiliated Tribes. It required the government to compensate the tribe with lands “comparable in quality and sufficient in area” to those they would lose under the waters of the Garrison reservoir.\textsuperscript{115} For the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people, no comparable or sufficient land could ever be found. They inherited an almost millennium long unbroken tradition of Indigenous agriculture along the banks of the Missouri River. Their lifestyle was perfectly adapted to life on the river. They had built traditional earthlodges and later cabins from cottonwood and river willow growing along its banks. They made pottery from river clay, bathed in its cool waters, and traveled long distances over these natural highways.\textsuperscript{116} Spring floods were not a menace to be controlled, but rather a necessary step to restore the fertility of the land. They respected “Grandfather River” just as much as they respected “Grandmother Earth.”\textsuperscript{117} The Missouri River valley was simply a part of their identity.\textsuperscript{118} Tribal member Daniel Wolf of Elbowoods made this clear in a May 1947 meeting speaking directly to Colonel Pick:

I heard your saying that you would do your best to give us the best land in exchange for our lands. I must tell you that I doubt your word. You have fooled us before. Why do I know this? Because there is no land that compares to what we have here. I am here to

\textsuperscript{114} Lawson, Dammed, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{115} “Meeting in the Secretary's Office Room December 16, 1946, For the Purpose of Obtaining the View of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation on the Lieu Lands Offered by the Secretary of War,” 22. Garrison Dam Archive, Three Affiliated Tribes Museum, New Town, ND.
\textsuperscript{116} For an overview of the traditional lifeways of the Three Affiliated Tribes see Meyer, The Village Indians, 59-82.
\textsuperscript{117} Gilman, Independence, 328.
\textsuperscript{118} Roxanne Teresa Ornelas has argued that the Three Affiliated Tribes have an “ontology and epistemology... that was/is spiritually tied to the landscape of what is believed to be a sacred riverine environment.” Tribal cultural memory was/is also directly tied to their traditional riverine environment along the Missouri River. See Roxanne Teresa Ornelas, “Placing the Body on the Bones: Transformational Hybridity Perspective, Sacred Lands and Heritage,” (PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2007), 33. For more information about the Three Affiliated Tribes and their spiritual connection to the natural world see Gilman, Independence, 328-339.
tell you that if we are forced to move somewhere else, to leave this land, the Indian people who called this place home before the white man came across the water will pass away with loneliness and sadness.\textsuperscript{119}

But the government still had to follow the letter of the law and “lieu lands” needed to be found. Enter Mercer County. A huge swath of land hugging the Missouri River and including the town of Stanton and the old Indian village sites would be bought up from the Euro-American settlers and handed over to the tribe. Reaction was swift and fierce. Ranchers in the proposed area were “violently opposed” to the proposed move and Stanton residents “stirred up violent opposition” to being absorbed by the reservation.\textsuperscript{120} Affected residents formed the Oliver-Mercer-Morton Resources Association to fight the plan. Some residents were more optimistic though, looking forward to at least a period of economic growth from dam construction. Still others thought the deal all but done and didn't want to “alienate the new residents of the area.”\textsuperscript{121} Such reactions reflected the long convoluted history of interaction between these two communities. Some absolutely opposed the idea of losing the land their pioneer ancestors “rightfully” claimed as their own while others took a more pragmatic approach toward their possible future neighbors. Thus, from the settler perspective, both feelings of neighborliness and their rightful place upon the land remained true.

Faced with a daunting choice, the Three Affiliated Tribes held town hall meetings across the Fort Berthold Reservation in early December 1946 to gather testimony to be presented in Washington D.C. The arguments put forth by various members in opposition to the lieu lands proposal ranged from practical to economic to cultural to spiritual. Here they are, in their own words:

“Land areas would be so scattered that wherever Agency headquarters may be located, large numbers of people would have extremely long distances to travel to carry on their official business.” -resident of Lucky Mound District

“The Mandans of the Three Affiliated Tribes have as part of their heritage an obligation since time immemorial that pledges them to migrate upstream as a manifestation of progress... To 'move back' to the lieu area is a violation of this sacred trust.” -resident of

\textsuperscript{119} Van Develder, \textit{Coyote Warrior}, 125-126.
\textsuperscript{120} “Eastern Mercer-Oliver May Be Reservation,” \textit{The Hazen Star} (Hazen, ND), December 5, 1946.
\textsuperscript{121} “Future of Stanton Depends on Indian Relocation Outcome,” \textit{The Hazen Star} (Hazen, ND), December 19, 1946.
Lucky Mound District

“Army's proposal of relocating cemeteries does not include private burial grounds.” - resident of Lucky Mound District

“Impounded water behind the dam will exist as an ever present threat to the life and property to those who would live on the lieu land.” - resident of Red Butte District

“Families would be separated in such a way that it would be difficult for them to visit back and forth as they do now.” - resident of Red Butte District

“We are creatures of the Creator and place in this area... Believing the purpose of the creator to be all wise, had he found need for a water in the place where the dam is to be created, he would have done so.” - Frank Young Bear

“Good business and fair consideration to the other fellow (a good American practice) was not followed in this instance, the Government went ahead with its plans leaving the Indians out until it was too late.” - Richard Burr

“I am a Mandan whose forefathers lived on the land in and around Stanton and we know it to an almost desert section. To accept this offer would be just like taking back a horse that we had thrown away.” - John Sitting Crow

“The Army's job is to fight wars, not build dams to flood out people like us. This land is our home, our people are buried in the hills of our lands.” - James Driver

“I object to anyone coming and appraising out land, we are the ones to do this. We are not naturalized Americans, we are real Americans. The man pushing this should go to another country where force is recognized.” - Edna Atkins

These represent just a few of the eighty-two individual comments collected at seven separate meetings over the course of a week. They show the true diversity of opinion among members of the Three Affiliated Tribes concerning the proposed Garrison Dam. For a community rooted in the Missouri River valley with established economic ventures and respect for tradition, the decision to reject the lieu lands was an easy one. On December 11, 1946, the Tribal Business Council of the Three Affiliated Tribes voted unanimously to reject the lieu lands offer.

At the first meeting in Washington D.C. to address the lieu lands offer, tribal delegates Jefferson B. Smith, Byron H. Wilde, and Mark M. Mahto submitted the comments from their fellow Three

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122 “Meeting in the Secretary's Office Room,” 27-43.
123 Ibid., 44.
Affiliated Tribes members, but argued an explicitly rational economic case before government officials. Addressing the exact wording of the legislation (“comparable in quality and sufficient in area”) Three Tribes General Counsel Ralph H. Case asked the delegates about the reservation economy and the impact of lieu lands. Employing soil data, economic statistics, and business acumen, the three men described a system of cattle ranching and farming rooted in their present location along the river. Their present lands contained black soils worth five times those in the lieu lands area and the annual movement of cattle into the bottomlands for the winter would be impossible in the replacement lands. Such a proposed land swap would, in the words of tribal member Mark Mahto, “never be considered by any sane cattle man.”

Thus, the delegates from Fort Berthold constructed an argument that not only reflected the economic reality on the reservation but utilized a rational, capitalist discourse that they knew the Euro-American government officials would understand. Whether or not the three Indian delegates or their non-Indian lawyer developed this strategy is unclear.

After a second meeting a week later saw the same economic arguments presented to no avail, delegate Jefferson B. Smith shifted strategies in one last attempt to stop the Garrison Dam. On July 16, 1947, Smith testified before the United States Senate Subcommittee on the Committee on Appropriations. He opened with a story:

Mr. Chairman, in about 1620, there was a boatload of people came over. As history has it, they were a Christian people, Christian white people. They established themselves in the New England States. They were known as the Pilgrim Fathers. They introduced their Christianity into this grand country of ours. There were Indians here at that time to welcome them. They gave them land, and all that was within, to them for their use.

From this act of Indigenous hospitality, Smith shifted to two reciprocal acts of respect and hospitality. Addressing the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Smith noted “the Spanish people and the French had always respected the rights and privileges of the Indians who owned the soil” and the Americans “endeavored to protect [Indian] rights when they made a treaty in the purchase of Louisiana.”

124 Ibid., 12.
125 “Wednesday, July 16, 1947,” 880.
continued his narrative with nods toward the standard Indian policy of the 1787 Northwest Ordinance which declared “good faith shall always be observed toward the Indian” and “their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent.” Smith finally came to his own people and their first encounter with a white man. He told of a Mandan Chief who spoke with a white man and upon returning home the Chief declared:

I have met a white man, he was fair to behold, very pleasant, very genial personality. He appealed to me as a higher type man. He tried to speak to me and I to him. We did not understand each other. But he appealed to me so much that we shook hands in friendship. My people, from henceforth, white man is your friend. Protect him, furnish him food, furnish him shelter, because he is our friend.

Finally, Jefferson Smith spoke of Lewis and Clark:

These three tribes welcomed the Lewis and Clark expedition sent by the United States. They came and camped near our villages. Because of our friendly feeling, and the decree of our chief, Lewis and Clark were provided for with corn, venison, and other provisions, throughout the winter... From that time on until today we have regarded the white man as our friend.

Not resting with just his community as a whole, Smith made sure to mention that “Tsa-ca-ca Wea [Sacagawea], which means Bird Woman, went with the expedition in the westward expansion. She was a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes. That is a friendly relation there.” He continued with references to Three Tribes members serving as Indian scouts in the army and quoted Dakota Territory Governor John A. Burbank in 1870 who praised the Three Tribes as “firm friends of the whites.”

Here was a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes deploying the themes of hospitality and respect from the Lewis and Clark story and many others, not to rationalize settlement and progress as Mercer County residents had done, but rather to stop the most recent and glaring example yet of that progress, Garrison Dam. But how much of this narrative spoken in a Washington Senate chamber reflected tribal reality and how much was purely strategic, an appeal to the dominant narrative of a

126 Ibid., 880.
127 Ibid., 881.
128 Ibid., 881.
129 Ibid., 881.
mythic colonial past?

While the themes expressed in Jefferson Smith's historical narrative reflect wider feelings in the Three Affiliated Tribes, his specific choice of this historical narrative still points to a possible rhetorical strategy. During the December 1946 town hall meetings on the reservation, several individuals delivered comments that showed clear concern for their settler neighbors. Robert Lincoln said, “We do not know the feeling of the whites to be disposed by this offer. It might be well to hear from them.” Martin Fox testified, “White residents of lieu areas are pioneers in the agriculture of that section and it is not right that we should be called upon to force them to move.” Edna Atkins noted, “The city of Mandan is named after my tribe. After we left that area the white man took possession and we never went back to there to ask to return of that country... As Mandans, we befriended the whites.” This hospitable rhetoric even caught some Mercer County residents by surprise if this excerpt from a local newspaper editorial is any indication: “One observation made by John Sitting Crow should make any white man with a knowledge of history cringe. Mr. Sitting Crow remarked, 'The residents of the lieu lands are pioneers of that country, and I do not think it right to compel them to leave their homes.'” Therefore, the themes in Jefferson Smith's testimony were not anything unusual, but the choice of history was.

In an attempt to create a historical narrative that would appeal to his audience, Jefferson B. Smith drew upon both themes in tribal history and the dominant discourse about his own and other Indigenous peoples. As a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes born around the year 1887, Smith undoubtedly gained his historical knowledge through both traditional and institutional means. The Three Tribes have their own distinct narratives of migration and hospitality that in many ways mirrored the settler narratives. For example, the Mandan have a strong tradition of migrating up the Missouri River, as one resident noted during the lieu lands hearings. They also share a tradition with the Hidatsa

130 “Meeting in the Secretary's Office Room December 16, 1946”
131 “The Star Gazer,” The Hazen Star (Hazen, ND), December 12, 1946.
of the latter's arrival at the Missouri River. This particular story tells how the Mandan taught the wandering Hidatsa bands how to cultivate corn and insisted they move upstream to establish a village close enough that they would remain friends but not too far away that they would become enemies; in other words, be good neighbors. Beyond these tribal traditions, Jefferson Smith experienced the dominant discourse about Indian people during his formal education. Early in life he attended the local boarding school and later the infamous Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. At these institutions, Jefferson probably learned about those historical elements of his story outside tribal memory including the Pilgrims, Louisiana Purchase, and even Lewis and Clark. While Sacagawea and the arrival of York (Clark's black slave) remained in tribal memory well into the twentieth century, the historical Corps of Discovery left little impression on the Mandan and Hidatsa. They were, in the words of one tribal member, “no big deal to our people” as countless groups of English, French, and American trappers and traders passed through the villages. And yet, Jefferson Smith chose the Lewis and Clark story as a central element of his historical narrative presented to the Senate Subcommittee. Furthermore, delegate Mark Mahto, speaking later that same meeting, chose to reiterate the statement made by Smith about Lewis and Clark. With a clear sense of frustration, Mahto took a less conciliatory approach that bordered on condescension:

The Mandans took those men in and watched them like hawks to keep them from freezing and starving... these white men were almost like children, helpless. They could


133 “Meeting in the Secretary's Office Room December 16, 1946”

134 The general consensus in a series of oral history interviews conducted with Three Affiliated Tribes members for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial (2004-2006) is that the arrival of Lewis and Clark at the Indian villages was not of any particular tribal significance and did not leave a lasting mark on tribal memory. An earlier set of twenty-five oral histories conducted with Three Affiliated Tribes members in 1986 and 1990 echoes these themes with only two passing references to Lewis and Clark. These themes are further echoed in the writings of tribal members on the topic. There is evidence that particular members of the expedition such as York and Sacagawea did leave a mark in tribal memory however. For more information see Lewis and Clark Oral Histories, Three Affiliated Tribes Museum, New Town, ND, 2004-2005., “Oral History of Traditional Mandan and Hidatsa Twilled Basketry,” Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, Stanton, ND, 1986, 1990., and Gerard Baker, “Mandan and Hidatsa of the Upper Missouri” in Lewis and Clark Through Indian Eyes, ed. Alvin M. Josephy (New York: Knopf, 2006), 125.
not even gather firewood for their fuel. The Indians had to show them how, where to get the wood and how to get game. The Indians really pulled that expedition through the winter of 1804-1805.\textsuperscript{135}

Considering its minor importance in tribal memory, but huge significance as a frontier myth in the United States, both Smith and Mahto strategically deployed the Lewis and Clark narrative, even as the underlying themes of hospitality still rang true with their own cultural traditions.

Furthermore, despite this tale of hospitality and mutual respect between the Three Affiliated Tribes and its many non-Indigenous neighbors, Jefferson Smith still understood the underlying colonial reality at work. Immediately after finishing his historical narrative, Smith let his true feelings be known:

The fact of the matter seems to be that their peace-loving friendship with the United States Government seems to work largely to their undoing. On the whole, it is the Indians who have done most of the giving, and the whites who have done most of the taking. There are people in this supposedly Christian country who think and believe that the common people, especially if they belong to a certain inferior race group, are not qualified to participate in the benefits of American justice. It is unfortunate that all races in the United States whose skin is pigmented face this discrimination.\textsuperscript{136}

Jefferson Smith knew that this entire legislative process was a sham, a legal farce all because of the discrimination they faced as Indian people. Work on the Garrison Dam had already commenced before the lieu lands talks even got underway. “If the United States is going to evict us forceably,” Smith testified “the United States becomes an aggressor nation against a weaker nation.”\textsuperscript{137} He outright accused the committee of discrimination, claiming supporters were denied the chance to testify on the Three Tribes' behalf. Mark Mahto went one step further with his fiery rhetoric:

I think the quickest and most merciful way to exterminate the three affiliated tribes is by mass execution like they used to do in Germany. I think that would be the cheapest, too. And furthermore, we think that a treaty made between the aggressor nations of Japan and Germany are more binding, more sacred than the treaties made by the United States with the three affiliated tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{135} “Wednesday, July 16, 1947,” 888.  
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 881-882.  
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 883.  
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 886.
And all this from a “supposedly Christian country.” For these tribal members who survived the religious indoctrination of boarding schools and proudly served their country during World War II, the hypocrisy was clear. Hospitality, friendship, and mutual respect were not only the Indian way, they were supposedly the Christian and the American way.¹³⁹

In the end, the testimony of Jefferson Smith proved that the Three Affiliated Tribes could also play with history. He proved that they were unwilling to be the mythic Indians of Lewis and Clark lore, providing unrestrained hospitality to further the colonial mission. They were instead independent, rational people who saw in the dominant colonial narrative one theme that rang true with their own experiences and customs, but another that threatened their very existence. In his attempts to use the narrative of hospitality to attack the narrative of progress, Jefferson Smith revealed the colonial reality behind the rhetoric of hospitality. But no amount of Indian goodwill or mythic admiration could stop the forward march of progress.

Conclusion

Construction on the Garrison Dam had began a full year and half before the Three Affiliated Tribes in the end reluctantly signed away 155,000 acres of prime river bottomlands. Forced to accept monetary compensation, the tribe received just over $5 million and aid in relocating, but these things could never replace the land. As Tribal Chairman George Gillette put it so succinctly at the signing ceremony, “You will excuse me if I say that the members of the tribal council will sign this contract with heavy hearts. With a few scratches of the pen, we will sell the best part of the reservation. Right

¹³⁹ Mark Mahto's strong words also hinted at a new nascent indigenous patriotism whose roots lay in wartime. 224 young men and women from the Three Affiliated Tribes proudly served during World War II. Historian Angela Parker argues that Three Affiliated Tribes members developed out of this experience a unique form of indigenous patriotism, “one that not only recognized their standing as American citizens but as tribal members whose collectivity had a unique relationship with the federal government.” Like other minority groups who served during the war, they demanded full citizenship and equality before the law. See Angela Parker, “Taken Lands: Territory and Sovereignty on the Fort Berthold Reservation, 1934-1960” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011), 248-249.
now the future does not look too good for us.” Over the next eight years, 80% of the tribal membership was forcibly relocated to the land above the river.

The Three Affiliated Tribes were not only on the wrong side of Garrison Dam, they were on the wrong side of history. From Lewis and Clark onward, the federal government had sought to conquer and control the Western environment. They treated the land like a resource to be given away. For the immigrant settlers, this meant opportunity and prosperity, an escape from their previous lives. For the Three Affiliated Tribes, it meant a constant struggle to hold onto what little land they could from the prying hands in Washington who spoke of progress, destiny, and the American Dream.

For the residents of Mercer County, North Dakota, the Garrison Dam was a mixed blessing. Large sections of Missouri River bottomlands east of the Fort Berthold Reservation would also be flooded out. Hundreds of farmers and ranchers would have their land taken by eminent domain, receiving only financial compensation in return. For the town of Stanton, the construction of Garrison Dam brought much needed jobs and money to this modest farming and ranching community. New businesses opened on main street and residents enjoyed a quality of life they had never experienced before. The old dilapidated school building from 1914 badly needed to be replaced to handle the new growth. On February 6, 1955 Stanton residents gathered to formally dedicate their new school with everything a town could need... except a gymnasium.

As part of a larger fundraising drive to fund a gymnasium, Stanton residents decided to do what they knew best. They dressed in feathers and face paint, buckskin and green army jackets, to put on a Lewis and Clark pageant. Coinciding with the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Lewis and Clark at the Indian villages, Stanton residents once again staged the meeting of explorers and Indians. Pageant director Edith Janssen, who had directed the 1931 pageant, wrote a short article for the *The Beulah*

140 *The Hazen Star*, “Berthold Indians Transfer Garrison Dam Land to U.S.”
142 “Aerial View Shows City of Stanton,” *The Hazen Star* (Hazen, ND), November 24, 1949
143 Huber, *The History of Stanton*, 17.
Independent newspaper to drum up support for the new production. She wrote the following:

One hundred and fifty years ago the Indians trod the soil where Stanton now stands. They had no worries of taxes, income tax due next March; Bank accounts; Gasoline bills; H Bombs or the new school to be paid for. They had no woes of civilization. They reaped good harvests, as the soil was very rich. Hunting and fishing was excellent and the river water pure. They were content.¹⁴⁴

On their own, such comments can appear romantic or naive. In light of the tragedy the Three Affiliated Tribes just experienced with the Garrison Dam, they are ironic, even cruel. One community celebrated history, while another almost became history.

When the Stanton community was asked to stage their pageant a second time a few months later to formally mark the 150th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, they were not alone at the event. As soon as the pageant finished, Three Affiliated Tribes chairman Martin Cross and “a delegation of dancing Indians” joined in the festivities and performed for the gathered crowd and dignitaries.¹⁴⁵ Even as their community recovered from the massive shock of removal and relocation, members of the Three Affiliated Tribes went out of their way to participate in this event.¹⁴⁶ Even as mythic Indians remained central to the historical discourse in Mercer County and Lewis and Clark remained the mythic pioneers of the American West, members of the Three Affiliated Tribes still found opportunities to be good neighbors.

¹⁴⁴ “Indian Days in Stanton...” The Beulah Independent (Beulah, ND), February 3, 1955.
¹⁴⁶ Martin Cross knew his settler counterparts both informally through farming and ranching operations and in his official capacity as Chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes. In particular, he personally knew State Historical Society of North Dakota Superintendent Russell Reid who helped organize the Lewis and Clark Sesquicentennial activities. Marilyn Hudson. Interview by Stephen Bridenstine, Tape recording, Stanton, ND, August 16, 2012
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