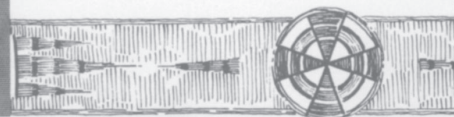
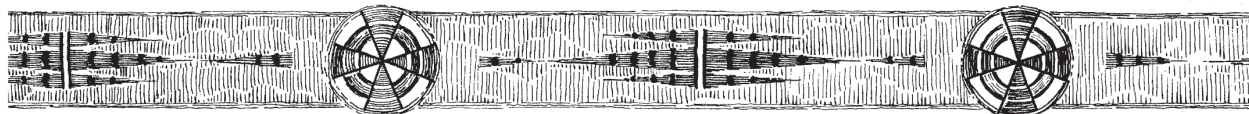




SADIE AND THE MISSING CUSTER BATTLE PAPERS

by **CARL L. PEARSON**





I T WAS IN THE early part of 1950 and I was still new to my assignment as Superintendent of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Southeastern Montana when I first met Sadie Whiteman. I was in conference with some of the Agency employees and a few tribal leaders when Sadie, unannounced, opened the door of my office and shuffled in, her aged body bent over the sturdy willow staff she used as a cane. Everything became as quiet as the touch of her moccasined feet.

All of us in conference rose from our chairs as Sadie leaned upon her cane in front of my desk. Wrapped around her was a clean but frayed grey blanket reaching almost to her ankles. Around her head and tied under her chin was a red scarf, beneath which fell long grey braids. She raised her head to peer at me, and her face, like her body, looked old and tired, but her eyes held a clarity and brightness which made them look out of place in their lined setting.

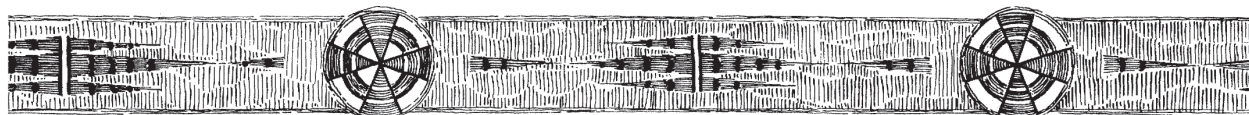
She uttered only one word, "Wood."

I smiled and nodded my head, reaching my hand out to her. She took my hand, looking briefly into my eyes. Then, she turned and moved out of the office as slowly and quietly as she had entered.

The conference ended a short time later and arrangements were soon made with the welfare branch for regular, monthly deliveries of stove-sized firewood to Sadie's two-room cabin on the outskirts of the nearest Indian village. This was a routine chore easily disposed of, but it did not mean that a fragile old brown-skinned lady, bent over a cane, was to be easily dismissed from my mind. I soon found myself seeking more information about Sadie Whiteman. The old Longbraids told me that she had always been a good and honest woman. She had lived in this Indian country most of her life, and when the Reservation was established by executive order in 1884, she was among the first to be officially enrolled into the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. Her husband had served with a Government scouting party after the Indian wars were over, and now, widowed for fourteen years, she was living alone on the small pension he had left.

My interest was aroused more than ever after I heard that Sadie had been with the hostile Cheyenne camp when George Armstrong Custer and his troops were annihilated at the nearby Little Big Horn River in 1876. Several old Indians claimed participation in the battle. Some stories clearly were untrue.

Was the story about Sadie true? After talking with several of the Old Ones, I was convinced that she had indeed been with the Indian camps at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. In the years gone by, some of the Longbraids had heard their warrior fathers speak about this great Indian victory; they said that Sadie was in the Cheyenne camp. Sadie was now eighty-seven years old, which meant that she was a girl of about thirteen in 1876.



After making many inquiries in the Sioux and other Cheyenne areas, I was convinced that the stories could be true, that Sadie Whiteman was likely the oldest living survivor of the Custer battle, perhaps the only one who had been old enough at the time to remember some of the things that had occurred.

A few writers and historians had learned of Sadie and had made trips to the Reservation to interview her, but no matter who the interpreter was, how influential the visitor, or how large the offer from purse or wallet, she never gave out any information. Reportedly, she had never been near the battlefield since she and her people began their flight southward on the day after the engagement. Various researchers and Custer Battle enthusiasts had asked her to visit the

photo by H. R. Locke, Deadwood, S.D.



ABOUT THREE YEARS after I first met her, I found a change coming over Sadie and suddenly realized that she was failing fast. She was thinner, the lines of her face were more drawn and her head seemed to bend lower over her willow staff. When she lifted her face and looked at me I could see that her eyes no longer held the sparkle and animation I had seen before.

I was especially aware of this one day when Wallowing of the Chiefs' Group brought her to my office and said, "Sadie has something to tell you." After she spoke in Cheyenne, Wallowing interpreted, and I knew that Sadie's "someday" had arrived. Wallowing agreed to go to the battlefield with us and interpret.

Two days later, on a hot sunny afternoon, the seventy-seventh anniversary, almost to the day, of the battle itself, Sadie Whiteman, Wallowing and I drove to the fenced monument on the highest point overlooking the eastern slope of the Little Big Horn Valley. Wallowing and I helped Sadie out of the back seat of the car and we walked a few steps along the top of

the ridge. Then for several moments Sadie leaned on her cane, pondering the terrain below us and saying nothing. I wondered if the changes which had taken place confused her. Now running along the valley bottom was a modern blacktop highway, paralleled by railroad track. Telephone and power lines stretched across the landscape. A large red water tank looming beyond fenced fields blemished the timber and foliage along the Little Big Horn.

Sadie's eyes gazed searchingly up and down the river bottom. Finally she started talking in Cheyenne and at times she pointed to places below us in the valley and along the timbered stream. Wallowing listened intently, then explained to me the places where the different hostile tribes had been camped — the bands of Sioux, Cheyennes, and a few Arapahoes.

"She say she and children and women were bathing in river . . . then criers came on their ponies and shout that soldiers are close by . . . all women and children very 'fraid . . . the braves tell them and old men to run away

scene with them, but her only answer was: "Not now. Maybe someday."

Whenever I was in the vicinity of Sadie's cabin, I stopped to visit with her. Inside the neat, clean dwelling, I usually found her sitting on a straight-back chair, her chin resting on hands folded at the top of her cane. She always thanked me for the wood, and when we talked about anything else it was mostly about a hope for her people, the troubles facing the younger Indians and the evils of the white man's drink. On a few occasions, with the help of an interpreter, I ventured into the subject of local history, but she always shook her head slowly and gave no reply. A few times I invited her to visit the battlefield with me, but always the same answer came: "Not now. Maybe someday."



to the mountains . . . there was much running and yelling in the camps . . . braves ran for guns and bows and arrows . . . many go out on foot and on ponies . . . go out in circles . . . then many come to place right here and Yellowhair Chief and all his soldiers die . . . criers come find us again and tell us all soldiers die . . . come back."

She was here all right, I thought. Then, I asked Wallowing, "Does she remember anything that happened on the field after the battle?"

As soon as Wallowing interpreted this question, Sadie answered almost immediately, and it was evident that there was one thing she wanted clearly understood: "White man story say Indians cut up dead soldiers and eat hearts. All lies!" She shook her head, this time quite vigorously.

I ventured the question, "Did the Indians take anything from the dead soldiers?"

The answers came slower and there were several long pauses. I could see that Sadie was tiring and I suggested to Wallowing that I

get a blanket from the car that she could sit on, but she insisted on standing. She looked up at me and nodded her head very slightly after Wallowing asked her the question. I listened to the interpreted words.

"They find iron things and watches and money and papers and letters on dead soldiers!"

I hesitated in my next question, because exciting thoughts were racing through my mind. Missing papers! Missing letters! What happened to them? Perhaps some mystifying riddles about Custer's orders and the battle would finally be solved. Maybe the record of an army leader described in some histories as a vain glory-hunter finally would be cleared. What happened to those letters and papers? But I still hesitated in asking the important question, for already I saw Sadie reaching out her cane and with shuffling steps begin moving toward the car.

Wallowing helped her in and the three of us began the forty-mile return trip to Sadie's cabin. During the first several miles nothing was said, but my head was full of unanswered

questions. Already, news of Sadie's visit to the battlefield could be leaking out from the Reservation grapevine and I knew that the story would quickly reach certain writers and historians. I felt certain that inquiries about her and requests for interviews would soon be reaching me. If the few things she told me were revealed, there would be unlimited pressures to obtain the important information she was keeping to herself.

I finally broke the silence by asking Wallowing, "Does Sadie know now what happened to any of those letters and papers?" Pausing briefly, Wallowing again spoke to her in the Cheyenne tongue. We rode about two miles further and I was feeling a sense of guilt about my question when she spoke.

Wallowing again interpreted: "She say . . . hid in hills . . . watches, guns, spurs, letters, papers . . . hid where rattlesnakes live and white man 'fraid to go."

Softly, after again pausing, he added, "Sadie knows."

The rest of the way very few words were spoken. When we reached her cabin, Wallowing and I helped Sadie up the pathway to the door. Dusk was falling and Wallowing went ahead inside and lit the kerosene lamp sitting on a small table. When we went inside, Sadie turned and raised her head to look at me standing near the doorway.

Quietly, I told her goodbye and then, with the palm of my right hand down, gestured a motion across the front of me, saying by sign, "All is good." She remained quiet, nodded her head with the trace of a smile, then lifted one hand feebly from her cane and repeated the same gesture.

Two days later Sadie was laid beside her husband's grave in a small cemetery overlooking Rosebud Creek where George Custer and his men had rested at their last campfire.

My memories of Sadie Whiteman are memories which confirm the words of the old Longbraids — a good and honest woman. And I still see her as I saw her in the glow of the lamp the last time I told her goodbye — a fragile old lady bent over a stick of willow, giving me the sign that all is good and showing on her wrinkled face an expression of a deep and contented peace.

AND THEN: On the cold afternoon of January 3, 1957, six other men and I climbed a small hill above U.S. Highway No. 212 near Busby, Montana on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. Two of the men were white employees from the Agency; the other four were tribal leaders. At the top of the small hill we approached a teepee-shaped stone monument rising about ten feet above the ground.

Agreements had been reached between Agency officials and members of the Chiefs' Group, as well as members of the tribal council, all with the approval of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Area Office in Billings. It had been learned that there was soon to be some publicity in the highly reputable MONTANA the magazine of WESTERN HISTORY and in newspapers about a sealed envelope locked within the Two Moon Monument — an envelope which contained information leading to the hiding places of letters and papers taken by Indians from the bodies of United States soldiers after the Custer Battle.

Especially after the completion of paved U.S. Highway 212 in the isolated area, special concern about the forthcoming publicity arose, and protection against vandalism and thievery became of special importance. Excellent cooperation was received from the above-mentioned magazine and Kathryn Wright, the researcher-writer who had developed the story. Publicity was carefully delayed until precautionary moves had been completed. Moreover, we believed that the sacred trust left by departed old Indian warriors and W. P. Moncure, an early day trusted trader who had obtained important information from them should remain intact.

At the monument we opened the steel door with the key which one of the Chiefs' Group had in his possession. Contents of the vault included early Cheyenne objects, such as stone tools, a bullet mold and capper, a Seventh Cavalry gun, arrowheads, a portrait of Chief Two Moon, and, most importantly, a manila envelope.

Typed on the face of the envelope were these words: "June 25, 1936. Why I erected the Two Moon monument. My connection with Montana Pioneers, Broadwater, Granville Stewart [sic], W. G. Conrad and others. Busby, Montana, where Gen. Custer spent his last

Three concerned people met in the U.S. Indian Affairs office in Billings on May 14, 1956, to insure the safety of items and information contained in the Two Moon Monument. At left is Kathryn Wright, now editor of the Sunday Magazine section of the Billings Gazette, who initiated the story which appeared in the Winter, 1957, issue of this magazine. In the center is Milton Johnson, acting director of the BIA office in Billings, while at the right is Carl Pearson, then superintendent of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation with headquarters at Lamedeer. Pearson, who spent nearly a quarter century with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is now a western states rural lands research and valuation consultant, and lives in Meeker, Colorado.



night on earth. History and location of Starved to Death Rock. Bozeman Expedition 1875 up Rosebud Creek. Two soldiers got away from Custer Battle alive. History, Indian fort up Busby Creek. Hiding place and location of money and trinkets taken from Dead Soldiers on Custer Battle Field. To be opened June 25, 1986. Key. Remove screws with off-set screw driver. W. P. Moncure, Busby, Montana. June 25, 1936."

I placed the envelope into a larger manila envelope and after sealing and stapling, wrote on its face the words, "Taken from the Two Moon Monument," with time and date shown, and after signing it, had the others with me sign as witnesses, including members of the Chiefs' Group, two of them with fingerprints.

After returning to the Agency office, a very reliable clerk also added her signature in our presence and placed the large manila envelope with its contents into a locked compartment inside the office vault.

In June, 1957, came my resignation and departure from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. A month later, on July 29, I learned, to

my great surprise, that the original sealed envelope had been taken from the Agency vault and placed back into the stone obelisk at Busby.

And then, sometime in October, 1960, I learned with real sadness that the monument had been vandalized and the envelope taken. All the other objects in the rectangular space within the obelisk had been left untouched; obviously, the thieves were not casual vandals. Repeated inquiries yielded no information, and finally, late in 1974, I was informed that the case was all but closed. Whereabouts of the envelope are unknown.

Today, like many others, I cannot help wondering: Where? Why? Who? The Centennial of the Battle of the Little Big Horn is upon us in 1976. Ten years from now, on June 25, 1986, will W. P. Moncure's wishes be honored by whoever has the envelope with its supposed clues of discovery? Will a treasure of money as well as of historical objects, perhaps even new truths about what really happened at the Little Big Horn in 1876, be revealed? Or will I regret even more that Sadie Whiteman died before she could tell any of us what she knew?

Kathryn Wright's intriguing story about the Two Moon Monument and its contents appeared in this magazine in the Winter issue, 1957. As suggested by Mr. Pearson, it was published only after the author, officials of the Montana Historical Society and Cheyenne and Agency leaders had taken every reasonable step to see that contents of the vault were safe. Since the news broke in 1960 that the glass door on the front of the obelisk had been broken into and that only the mysterious manila envelope had been taken, Mrs. Wright has received numerous inquiries, and so have officials of the F.B.I., the Cheyenne Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Historical Society.

Transfer of the envelope from the safe at the Agency office on July 29, 1957, and its replacement at the monument was, however, both official and documented. The Society has a copy of an affidavit which reads, in part, as follows:

W. P. Moncure, John Woodenlegs, William Mehojah and Victor Meeker did this 29th day of July, 1957 at 9:30 AM remove from the vault of the old Northern Cheyenne Agency Office, a manila envelope containing the papers removed from the Two Moon Monument on January 3, 1957. The seal of the envelope was examined by all and found intact. The envelope was given into the possession of Mr. Moncure who transported it to the Two Moon Monument location.

In the presence of W. P. Moncure, Victor Meeker and the following named Two Moon Monument Committee, named by Mr. Moncure, the vault of the monument was opened this 29th day of July, 1957 at 11:00 AM.



by KATHRYN WRIGHT

Telephones ring all the time on my desk at the *Billings Gazette*.

But one afternoon early in November, 1960, one constant ringing presaged a different kind of call from the usual inquiries about feature stories, recipes, weddings, engagements or complaints that "my paper didn't arrive yesterday."

The operator asked if she had Kathryn Wright; I acknowledged she did, and I heard coins dropping into a slot somewhere out of Billings.

"Kathryn Wright," said the caller in a guttural voice, "you wrote about Two Moon monument."

"Yes."

"It been robbed. Manila envelope telling about treasure is gone."

I questioned the caller and he identified himself as a one-time member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council. (Probably he was on

the Council when I talked to that group in 1956, telling them of my discovery and asking — pleading with them — to put it under constant guard. If I stumbled on to this, I said, how many more after me will, too? And those who find it later may not believe as I do that the spoils of battle belong to the victor.)

The caller agreed that was why he was calling me.

"I know you want to get envelope back. I can help."

So how can he help?

He said he was driving down the road the other morning and two Indian lads came running to stop his car. "Monument glass broken," they shrieked.

He said he checked that announcement; found it to be true. Only the manila envelope was gone — lifted out through a cut in the glass enclosing the monument's hidden cache. Nothing else was taken — not a gun from a Seventh Cavalryman, not a bullet mold, not age-old

Two Moon Monument Committee:

John Woodenlegs
John Teeth
John S. Timber

Martin Roundstone
Frank Waters
Charles Whitedirt

James King
Oliver Risingsun
Grover Wolfvoice

This Committee as named was empowered by Mr. Moncure to be the authority in charge of future actions concerning the monument and its contents.

But the end of the story — the theft of the envelope from the stone obelisk late in October, 1960 — is still unsolved. W. P. Moncure, the Busby storekeeper who had erected the monument to Cheyenne Chief Two Moon in 1936 and who had entrusted contents of the envelope to Cheyenne leaders in 1957, no longer lives to tell whether it contains directions to hidden battle loot or if the whole story is a hoax.

Federal and tribal officials investigated but in the Centennial year of the Custer Battle, no one knows where the envelope or its contents are. Perhaps those who have it are waiting for 1986, the year Moncure specified for its opening.

To round out the story for our readers, we asked Kathryn Wright, now Sunday Editor of the BILLINGS GAZETTE, to tell about her final contact with the Cheyennes concerning the story she originally sought out so diligently nearly two decades ago.



relics of Cheyenne culture, all of which had been put in the monument's hidden recess by W. P. Moncure, Indian trader at Busby, Montana, and adopted brother of the Cheyennes, when he built the stone obelisk and dedicated it in 1938 to the memory of his friend, Chief Two Moon.

The caller then said he was ready to meet with me to discuss return of the manila envelope. Allegedly, it contained directions to the hiding place of money, rings, religious objects, lockets and other mementoes that Seventh Cavalry men carried into battle. I had already ascertained through research that Custer's men carried from \$25,000 to \$30,000 in bills, coins and U.S. Treasury notes into battle. A few bills and a few personal belongings were found later. But the bulk of what the troopers carried when Custer's guidon was trampled into the dust that hot June 25, 1876, day in Montana has never been found.

So I asked how he knew who took the manila envelope.

photo by Kathryn Wright



"I talk; I listen. You meet me. I let you know."

He asked me to meet him late the next night at a bar I considered rather unsavory. I suggested a meeting room in the *Gazette* building at the late night hour he wanted.

He said he'd come.

I waited and waited.

No show.

Next day, he called again — this time collect.

"My wife, she was sick. I could no come."

"Okay, so when are you coming?"

"I come tomorrow. Same time. Same place. *Gazette*."

photo by L. A. Huffman. Miles City

By this time I'd come to the conclusion that my caller had the manila envelope and wanted to make a deal — probably a money deal. I told him I believed the envelope should go back to the Cheyenne tribe, that my only interest was returning it to the tribe and to the monument.

He agreed and said he'd be there. His wife was feeling much better now and he could make the trip.

I called the FBI. Since the looting, the federal men had been in on the case, but had discovered nothing.

An FBI agent showed up at the *Gazette* a few minutes before the time my caller was to show. He sat in the editor's office, a glass-



enclosed cage providing a good view of the newsroom for checking on reporters. He had an edition of the *Gazette* up in front of his face, which he lowered every time someone entered that sanctuary.

A lot of people came in, but not the one he and I were looking for.

Finally, he lowered the paper for the last time, put on his trench coat and stalked out in disgust. "False alarm," he growled at me out of the corner of his turned-down mouth.

Then, a few days later, one more call came — again collect.

It was the same Indian.

"My wife, she still sick. Maybe I come later. I call you."

That was the last call.

As far as I know, the FBI has closed the case; the Bureau of Indian Affairs has shoved it to the back of a forgotten file. And the manila envelope has not been recovered and the buried treasure has not been discovered.

Directions to it in that manila envelope were pretty vague, W. P. Moncure told me one day back in the 1950s.

He was a smart Indian trader, and he wasn't telling all he knew.

Maybe today, he's in his own Happy Hunting Ground chuckling over the whole thing. Perhaps Chief Two Moon, whom he sought to honor, is doing the same thing.

TWO MOON AT THE BATTLEFIELD - JUNE 25, 1901

