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## Introduction- Summer/Fall 1997

Frances W. Kaye

*Great Plains Quarterly*, fkaye1@unl.edu

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# INTRODUCTION

This special double issue of *Great Plains Quarterly* has been a long time in the making. Unlike the yearly special issues that showcase papers from our annual symposia, this number of the *Quarterly* contains four articles submitted at various times, revised and expanded, and collected together. All deal with Euro-North Americans' misperceptions of indigenous peoples and the consequences of those misperceptions for all peoples of the Great Plains.

In "The Sacred Black Hills," Linea Sundstrom painstakingly contradicts the view many researchers have proposed that Cheyenne and Lakota beliefs and oral traditions about the sacredness of the Black Hills had been conveniently developed by contemporary people seeking to buttress contemporary claims to the area. Because history, as a scholarly discipline, has always privileged written texts over oral ones and because of the common folk belief among literate peoples that oral texts are less reliable than written ones, ethnohistorians have had to learn from indigenous peoples and from other disciplines, such as archaeology, how to deal with oral and pictographic texts. Sundstrom's methodology here, however, is to compile written texts more than fifty years old that support the oral and pictographic claims for the sacredness of the Black Hills. Her research makes clear that the oral histories were right all along. Not only have the Black Hills been sacred to the Cheyennes and Lakotas, but also to the Arapahos, Kiowas and Kiowa-Apaches, Arikaras, and Mandans, who had all known the area. Although Sundstrom cannot answer questions about the more distant past—such as whether the Lakotas had known the sacred Black Hills thousands of years earlier and then returned more recently—she does make it clear that the area was sacred

to the Lakotas and Cheyennes when the United States seized the land and even that its sacred status was known—and disregarded—by Euro-American reporters at the time.

In "Mapping the Marias," Barbara Belyea looks at one decision made by Lewis and Clark on their long trek from St. Louis to the Pacific. For nine days they paused where two rivers converged, exploring and checking their maps to discover which should be considered the Missouri—and followed to its source to reach what they supposed would be a portage that led to the headwaters of the Columbia and hence to the Pacific—and which they should declare a tributary and leave unexplored. The stream coming from the northwest they eventually named the Marias, and continued along what is still called the Missouri, flowing in from the southwest. Subsequent historians have praised their choice as a victory for scientific methods of observation. Yet had they chosen to follow the river Clark named for his cousin Maria, they would have found a shorter and easier passage to the Pacific. Belyea points out that both the captains' Native informants and the Native mapmakers whose information had been incorporated into their most recent European map depicted rivers less in terms of European conventions of watersheds and tributaries and more, at least in these cases, as passageways through the mountains. The captains hesitated at the Marias not because Native understanding of the relationships between rivers was sketchy or unreliable, as historians have implied, but because Lewis's and Clark's own preconceptions about rivers, tributaries, and watersheds prevented them from understanding the full import of the information available to them.

The next two articles shift from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. In "The Thatcher Government in Saskatchewan and the Revival of Metis Nationalism, 1964-71," James Pitsula continues a series of articles he has been writing that show that Metis nationalism and Indian nationalism in Saskatchewan during the twentieth century—including the years prior to the 1970s when federal and provincial policies were based on assimilation—continued to grow and develop on their own terms. By the period examined in this article, when Howard Adams and other emerging leaders had developed in Metis terms the ideals of nationalism coming from Asia and Africa as well as the civil rights movement in the United States, they were met by the paternalistic government of Ross Thatcher, whose agenda of assimilation through jobs was not only unworkable but engaged him in conflict with most of the Metis leadership. As had been the case for Lewis and Clark, Thatcher's mindset made it impossible for him to hear what the Metis people were saying. Like Sundstrom's article, Pitsula's deals explicitly with what particular groups of indigenous peoples did and believed and not just with the Euro-North American interpretation of their information or lives.

Michael Lawson's 1982 book *Dammed Indians* establishes the utter disregard in which Indian treaty rights and occupancy rights were held by the government agencies involved in planning and building the massive Pick-Sloan dams on the mainstem of the Missouri River. In "Flooding the Missouri Valley," Robert K. Schneiders looks in more detail at exactly how and by whom the dam building decisions were made and why Indians lost more land than anyone else involved. Off-reservation interests were able to band together to protect cities and land that was valuable for Euro-American monocropping, while sacrificing Indian-owned bottomlands, rich in game and wild plants, to the lakes of the Pick-Sloan dams. Once again, Euro-North American conceptions of value blocked the recognition of alternative ways of using and depicting land.

All four articles point to the need for all of us to comprehend and value oral, indigenous understandings of land and peoples. The remaining pages of the issue contain reviews of books that deal with Native North American topics and that further discuss the ways of knowing demonstrated in these articles.

FRANCES W. KAYE  
Editor

#### A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This double issue will be my last as editor of *Great Plains Quarterly*. I began as managing editor in May of 1983 and became editor in January of 1985. I've enjoyed every issue and every article, though perhaps not every semicolon and footnote. I have learned something from every manuscript I read, and if I am not wiser than anyone has need to be, it's certainly my own fault and not the fault the authors. But editing a journal is much like running a dairy farm. There's milking twice a day, and it's hard to get cowsitters when you want to go away. I've decided I need to put all the stuff I've learned in this longest of post-docs to work, so I've stepped down from the *Quarterly* to pursue my own writing—including long research trips to Canada. I am forever grateful to all the authors and referees and to our excellent staff, particularly Production Editor Linda Ratcliffe, Production Secretary Gretchen Walker, Book Review Editors George Wolf and Charlene Porsild, and all the Editorial Assistants over the years, including, most recently, Matt Hokom and Daniel Justice. Thanks, everyone. I'll miss you!

Your new editor will be Charlene Porsild, daughter of the Yukon, an assistant professor of history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and an authority on mining history and the women's Wests. Good luck, Charlene. I hope you'll have half as much fun as I've had.