Lesson 1
First Peoples of South Dakota

Introduction

The past is as close as yesterday,

or this morning, when you ate breakfast,

or just now, when you read this sentence.

The past connects you to your family, your friends, and even to people you have never met. It connects you to people who lived right here in South Dakota before it was a state; before there were cars or computers; before people knew how to read and write.

What happened to all those people long ago is like one **continuous** thread. It reaches from the Ice Age to this very moment.

Right now.

That is why South Dakota history is important. It links us together and tells one story from many. It tells about the land, the climate, and the people who lived here.

First Peoples

A long time ago, swampy ponds covered the Badlands of what is now South Dakota. American camels, small horses, and Columbian mammoths roamed these swamps. Summers were rainy and cool. Winters were mild.

We know what happened in one of those swamps over eleven thousand years ago. A band of Paleoindian hunters killed and cut up two Columbian mammoths for food. These Clovis hunters were the first South Dakotans we know about. We know about them because of the tools and bones they left behind.

The Clovis hunters left us no written record of their lives. They lived during a prehistoric period. It was long before we humans developed writing and reading. But like many ancient peoples, they left us traces of their lives. **Fragments** of tools and weapons can be found. Slivers of wood or stone from their houses are buried in the

ground. Bones from the animals they hunted remain behind.

Today, **archaeologists** sort through these clues like detectives. They track the movement of ancient peoples. They study how human life changed. Often these clues do not tell the whole story. Archaeologists are not always sure what happened. Did the Clovis hunters die out with the mammoths and the first horses? Or did their lives change with the land? This is one of many unsolved mysteries of the prehistoric world.

Centuries and centuries passed.

The swamps of South Dakota became wide, sweeping plains. Short, scrubby grass grew everywhere. Giant bison thundered across the prairies. A new people came into the area. These Folsom hunters made beautiful spear points. They picked wild onions and prairie turnips to eat. They hunted buffalo in the Black Hills. But their way of life ended. Archaeologists are not sure why.

More centuries passed. Summers grew hotter, drier, longer. New hunters—the Plains Archaic people—**migrated** to South Dakota. Herds of giant bison grew scarce and died out. Smaller bison replaced them. The people also hunted deer or rabbit. They ground prairie turnips into powder for eating. They learned how to store food for long periods of **drought.** The Plains Archaic people lived in small groups because the land had less to give them.

Archaeologists believe these people left the first written record of life in South Dakota. It is literally carved in stone. These first writings do not use an alphabet as we know it. They use signs and symbols. These "pictures" had meaning for the people who lived here at one time. These records are called petroglyphs.

The climate of South Dakota shifted again about three thousand years ago. Spring, summer, fall, and winter felt much as they do now. People began to hunt in

bigger groups. They drove large herds of bison off high bluffs (Unit 3 tells more about this kind of hunting). These Woodland people traded with native people from the east. From them, the Woodland people gained new ideas about life and death. They began to build burial mounds for their dead. These mounds are in eastern South Dakota.

Vocabulary

archaeologists (n.), scientists who study ancient peoples and the way they lived

centuries (n.), hundred-year blocks of time

continuous (adj.), unbroken, having no gaps or holes

drought (n.), a long period of dry weather

fragments (n.), small pieces broken off of bigger things

migrated (vt.), moved from one area to another

Lesson 2
A Changing World

Milder winters and summers came to South Dakota. It was about one thousand years ago. Villages sprang up along the rivers. One village was near present-day Mitchell. Here, people built wattle and daub houses. They wove twigs together and covered them with clay or mud. These buildings had long walls dug into the earth. Men hunted bison, but women began something new. They became the first farmers in South Dakota.

The women grew corn, beans, sunflowers, tobacco, squash, and pumpkins. They made rakes, hoes, and knives from bones and antlers. They cooked in large clay pots. They dug cache pits for storing food. These farmers and hunters are now called the Middle Missouri people. They were the ancestors of the Mandans.

Then the climate changed again. It was about A.D. 1300. Archaeologists call this time the "Little Ice Age." Winters grew long and cold. Farming was harder. New tribes moved into South Dakota. They came from the south and went up the Missouri River. They settled near the Middle Missouri people.

The men hunted bison; the women farmed. They lived in houses lined with sod. They built ditches or fences to protect their villages. Their hunting camps stretched across the entire state. These people are called the Coalescent people. They were the ancestors of the Arikaras and Pawnees, who were living in South Dakota when the first Europeans began to explore the Great Plains.

Christopher Columbus landed on the island of San Salvador in 1492. He was from Italy, a country in Europe. He was trying to sail around the world. He thought he had made it. He thought San Salvador was part of the East Indies. The East Indies is a group of islands near China. But he was only halfway there. San Salvador is in the

Bahama Islands near Florida. It is just south of North America.

The people who lived in Europe did not know about America. Columbus called the people he met on San Salvador "Indians." He thought they were natives of the East Indies. It was not long before Europeans figured it out. Soon they knew that Columbus had sailed to a "new" world. But they still called the people living here Indians. That is not what these people called themselves. Each American Indian nation had its own name for its people.

Two hundred years passed. Many native peoples now lived in South Dakota. Small towns dotted the banks of the Missouri River. Here the Arikaras built rounded houses. They dug them into the earth. They used tree branches and clay for the roofs. The Arikaras traded corn, vegetables, and tobacco for meat and buffalo hides. They traded with the Mandans to the north. They also traded with the Crows, Cheyennes, and Pawnees, who lived west and south of the Arikara villages. Soon the Arikaras were also trading horses. Europeans brought horses back to America. These animals would change the life style of the people of South Dakota.

Our earliest written record of the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota (Sioux) peoples dates from the 1640s. French priests met them in what is now Wisconsin. The people fished and hunted in deep forests. They lived in houses made of bark and wood. Within a few years, they began to move west toward South Dakota. Three groups came to the Great Plains. Each had different customs and languages. They all learned to ride horses and hunt buffalo. They lived as nomads on the prairie. Soon, the Dakotas, Lakotas, and Nakotas pushed the Arikaras north. They pushed the Mandans, Cheyennes, and Crows farther north and west.

The early South Dakotans did not have books. They did not have computers or even an alphabet. They passed their history from one age to another by telling stories. This is known as the oral tradition. Storytellers memorized important stories. Then they told them again and again. They told them to the children in their families and tribes. When the children grew up, they told these same stories to their children—and so on.

The Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota peoples also kept winter counts. Each winter, the keeper of the winter count drew one picture on an animal hide. The image stood for the most important event of the year. The elders of the tribe and the keeper of the winter count chose the event. A famous winter count is Lone Dog's winter count. The images begin in the center. Then they circle out and around. A winter count is similar to a time line. They both keep track of important events.

Lesson 3
Europe Claims North America

Columbus had found the way to America. Now many European countries sent people to this land. France, Spain, and Great Britain sent **colonists**. These people crossed the Atlantic Ocean. They claimed great chunks of land for their countries. They pushed the people who lived there west.

Two centuries went by. Great Britain claimed all of North America east of the Mississippi River. It had thirteen colonies. They were on the East Coast. Spain held the territory west of the Mississippi River. It was called Louisiana. France had lost its claim to Canada, but many French people lived there.

The people who lived in the thirteen colonies paid taxes to Great Britain. Great Britain told them what to do. Soon the colonists felt that Great Britain made them pay too many taxes. It did not let them trade freely. The colonists wanted **independence** from Great Britain. They began to fight. This war is called the American Revolutionary War. George Washington led the American side. The war lasted six years. It ended with a new country being formed. It was the United States of America.

The colonists had to turn the colonies into states. They wanted to make one big country. The leaders wrote a plan to **unify** the colonies. It was called the Articles of Confederation. The thirteen colonies were **allies**. Each one had its own government. There was no strong central government. This idea did not work.

The leaders came up with a new plan. They wrote the Constitution of the United States. It has governed our nation ever since. It sets out the rights and freedoms of citizens. It sets up our government in Washington, D.C. (learn more about this in Unit 8). George Washington was the first president of the new country.

It was a big country. Great Britain had ceded all its lands south of Canada. The United States now claimed that land. The new country ran west to the Mississippi River and south to Florida. Soon Americans **ventured** north and west. The Northwest Territory drew many people. Wildlife was plentiful there. Fur trappers and traders came first. Settlers came after them. Soon the United States let newly settled regions become states. Each area was first a territory and then a state. By 1803, four new states were part of our country. They were Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio.

South Dakota was far away. Changes in government meant little to the people there. First France claimed South Dakota as part of Louisiana. France then ceded it to Spain. Spain returned the land to France. The Arikaras, Mandans, and other Indian peoples did not know about these dealings. They lived much as they always had. But there were some big changes. Horses had made their way to the area. They had changed the life style of the Lakotas and other tribes. French, Spanish, and soon American trappers and traders began to live among the native peoples. Never again would South Dakota be quite the same.

Vocabulary

allies (n.), friends or units of government that act together

ceded (v.), gave up land, rights, or power to another country

colonists (n.), people who settle together in a foreign country

independence (n.), freedom from control by others

unify (v.), join together into one

ventured (v.), took a dangerous trip

Lesson 4
Europeans Visit South Dakota

We marched "over magnificent prairies where wild animals were plentiful," wrote François La Verendrye. He was a French-Canadian. He and his brother, Louis-Joseph, were on a **trek** across South Dakota. It was 1743. The brothers met the Arikara and Mandan peoples. They were looking for the Northwest Passage. They thought the Northwest Passage would be a river that would take them across North America to the Pacific Ocean. But the brothers turned back. A mountain range, perhaps the Black Hills, blocked their path. On their way back, they buried "a lead tablet" on a hill near Fort Pierre. They "placed some stones in a pyramid" over the top.

The stones toppled and disappeared. No one knew where the lead tablet was buried. No one, that is, until a group of Fort Pierre high school students found it one hundred seventy years later. It was 1913. The plate claimed the area for France. It is the first record of a visit by Europeans to South Dakota.

The Verendrye brothers were traders. They built trading posts near Lake Superior. It is one of the Great Lakes. It was near the Northwest Territory. French-Canadian, English, and Scottish businessmen lived there. They traded guns and other goods. They wanted animal **pelts** in return**.** Fox, otter, and muskrat pelts were good, but beaver pelts were best.

Beaver fur was soaked, pounded, and woven to make **felt**. Felt was ideal for hats. It was fine, warm, and beautiful. **Elegant** gentlemen wore beaver hats. These hats were so valuable that they were often passed down from father to son. The market for beaver pelts grew. Traders pushed west. The Verendryes and others looked for new land where beavers were still plentiful. This **quest** brought French-Canadian,

Spanish, and English traders to South Dakota.

Pierre Dorion was one of the first fur traders here. He was a French-Canadian. He came to South Dakota in 1785. He may have been the first permanent white settler. He married a Nakota woman. They lived along the Missouri River near what is now Yankton.

More French-Canadians came to South Dakota. They traded with the Poncas, the Dakotas, and the Arikaras. British traders came up the Missouri River. They went as far as the Mandan villages in North Dakota. They built a trading post there. Even so, the area was still a mystery. Most white people knew little about it. The Lewis and Clark Expedition would change that. It began in 1804. It showed the **potential** of the region.

Vocabulary

elegant (adj.), showing grace in style or manners

felt (n.), a fabric made from animal hair or wool

pelts (n.), animal skins with the hair or fur still on them

potential (n.), having a great deal of promise

quest (n.), a search for something important

trek (n.), a slow or difficult journey