

Lesson 1 “Old Misery” and the Fur Trade

The Missouri River was like an interstate highway. There was a lot of traffic. The Arikaras and Mandans used bullboats to cross from side to side. Lewis and Clark went up and down. On their way down, they met fur traders hurrying upriver as fast as their keelboats could carry them. Today we would not think this was very fast. The Missouri River had earned the nickname “Old Misery.” Strong currents and mud made upriver travel hard work. Snags from dead trees could slow travel to a mile or so a day. Still, it was the quickest and easiest way to get from one point to another. It was also a pipeline of supplies. Trading goods came up the river, and animal pelts went down the river.

There were a few fur traders in South Dakota before Lewis and Clark came. Pierre Dorion was one. Registre Loisel was another. Loisel built a trading post on an

island. He called it Fort Aux Cedres. It was near what is now Pierre. Then Lewis and Clark made their reports. They told about the peoples and animals they had found. It was 1806. Many more fur traders headed up the river.

Manuel Lisa was a businessman. He was one of the first to build a company in the area. He left Saint Louis with twenty-five men. They went up the Missouri River to trade. This was the start of the Missouri Fur Company. Lisa built trading posts all along the Missouri River. Other fur traders built posts on the **tributaries** of the Missouri River. Soon there were also posts along the James River and the Big Sioux River.

Fur traders had to work closely with American Indians. The tribes were master traders. They traded beaver, muskrat, mink, deer, and buffalo hides. The fur traders gave them guns, gunpowder, and tobacco. They also traded flour, sugar, coffee, blankets,

kettles, cloth, and beads. Trade was built on **relationships**. Fur traders and Indian nations had to be partners. But sometimes they all fought with each other.

Countries also fought about the fur trade. Both Great Britain and the United States wanted to control the fur trade. British **agents** built posts in what is now North Dakota. They began to build their own relationships with Indian nations. Robert Dickson was a British agent. He started a post in eastern South Dakota. It was near Lake Traverse. He married a Nakota woman. She was the daughter of a Yanktonnais chief.

The trading posts were often called forts, but they were not **military** bases. A trading post was usually a bunch of cabins huddled along the banks of a river. Still, the United States and Great Britain wanted more trading posts. The fur business was a good one. It made high **profits**. The posts also set up relationships with Indian nations.

Soon the United States and Great Britain were at war. It was called the War of 1812. Both countries wanted to control the fur trade.

No battles took place in South Dakota. But people in South Dakota took part in the war. Manuel Lisa became an agent for the United States. He was the official voice of the American government. He asked the Dakotas and Lakotas to stand by his country. British agents worked with the Nakotas. Some of the Yanktonnais tribe fought with the British army. The war ended in 1815. The United States won. It now had control of the fur trade along the Missouri River.

Vocabulary

agents (n.), people who speak for a company or country

military (adj.), relating to war or the armed forces of a country

profits (n.), gains; money or goods left after costs are met

relationships (n.), connections between

people

tributaries (n.), rivers that flow into a larger
river

Lesson 2

The Rise and Fall of the Fur Trade

The fur trade along the Missouri River changed. Beaver and other small animal pelts were less important. Traders wanted buffalo hides and robes. They also wanted buffalo tongues. People on the East Coast ate them as delicacies. Thousands of pounds of buffalo tongue sailed down the Missouri River each year. The Tetons, or Lakotas, made good profits from this trade. Their camps were close to the buffalo. They were also close to the trading posts. They grew rich with trade goods—rifles, food, and tools.

Yet the fur trade also brought conflict. Indian nations fought over it. American traders did too. The two groups also fought each other. Everyone wanted to control this **booming** business. The United States government built a military post. It was near Council Bluffs, Iowa. Soldiers there kept an eye on the fur trade.

Trouble broke out four years later. It was 1823. The place was near the mouth of the Grand River. The Arikaras fired on a group of American traders. Soldiers from Fort Atkinson marched north. They were going to punish the Arikaras. Fur traders and Teton warriors joined with the army. The Arikaras slipped away in the night. Their village was burned.

Soon the United States sent an official **commission** to the area. These men met with the Indian tribes. They negotiated with the leaders. They asked them to sign treaties of goodwill. Leaders from the Arikara, Cheyenne, Yankton, and Yanktonnais tribes signed. Some Teton leaders did too. These were the first treaties between the United States and these Indian nations.

The fur trade kept growing. Such **legendary** fur traders as Jedediah Smith and Hugh Glass crisscrossed the prairie. They met to trade with Indians and other trappers

each year. Such a meeting was called a rendezvous. One was held on the James River near what is now Redfield. Here the traders and Indians traded furs and news. They also danced, sang, and feasted together.

A new company came into the Missouri River country. It was the American Fur Company. Pierre Chouteau, Jr., built a fort for the company. It was Fort Pierre at the mouth of the Bad River. The year was 1832. Fort Pierre became the most important trading post in the region. It was the first permanent American settlement in the state. It was more than a little cluster of cabins. Fort Pierre had its own farm and a blacksmith shop.

Pierre Chouteau, Jr., had sailed up the Missouri River in a steamboat. It was a new kind of boat driven by steam power. It was called the *Yellowstone*. This steamboat was loaded with trading supplies. It sailed all the way from Saint Louis to central South

Dakota. The *Yellowstone* was the first steamboat on the Missouri River. A steamboat could go faster than keelboats or bullboats. It could go longer distances. It could carry more cargo.

Steamboats also brought visitors to South Dakota. Artists and writers steamed up the river. They came to see the Indian way of life. They wanted to learn about the Great Plains. Artists George Catlin and Karl Bodmer came to paint the Tetons and the Mandans. John James Audubon came to paint the birds and the animals.

Missionaries came as well. Father Pierre De Smet worked among the Yanktons. Later this Jesuit priest worked with the Tetons. Presbyterian minister Stephen Riggs came to look at the country.

Sadly, visitors and traders brought more than trade goods. They brought more than curiosity or religious ideas. They did not know it, but they also brought smallpox. This disease was deadly. It spread quickly

through the Arikara villages. Many, many people died. The Arikaras were hit hard. So few people were left that they joined the Mandans in North Dakota.

Soon the buffalo herds began to **dwindle**. There were no more furs to trade.

Vocabulary

booming (adj.), growing fast

commission (n.), a group of people sent to do a job

dwindle (v.), to get smaller

legendary (adj.), being famous or a part of an important old story

missionaries (n.), people who teach their religion to others

Lesson 3

New Settlers Move West

Hundreds of people from the United States now began to go west. They went across the Great Plains to Oregon. Most did not cross South Dakota. They went through Indian hunting lands to the south. These people planned to settle in the Far West. They brought wagons and livestock. They drove away the wildlife. Hunting became harder for the Indian tribes of the Great Plains. Buffalo were scarce. Indians sometimes took oxen, mules, and horses from the migrating settlers. They fought with the people going west. Fear and anger grew on both sides.

Eight Indian nations met with the United States to talk about the problem. They met at Fort Laramie in what is now Wyoming. Lakota and Cheyenne leaders were there. These two tribes were allies. The year was 1851. The Indians said they would stop fighting with white settlers. The Indians promised not to fight each other.

They would let the United States build roads across their lands. The United States promised to keep whites from settling on Indian lands. It promised to give the Indians food and tools. Neither side kept the agreement.

The year 1854 brought new trouble. Settlers said that a Minniconjou Lakota man had stolen a cow. Lakota warriors killed thirty soldiers when the troops went to arrest the Lakota man. The army struck back a year later in Nebraska. General William S. Harney led an attack on a Lakota camp. The soldiers killed eighty-six Brulé people. Harney and his troops later marched to Fort Pierre.

The general and his men were not **impressed** with what they saw in what is now South Dakota. They marched through heavy rain. Their wagons and horses bogged down in thick, gooey mud. Why would anyone want to live here, they wondered. In summer, the land looked like

a great American desert. Nor were they impressed with Fort Pierre. The buildings at the old trading post had fallen apart. They were not designed for an army. The men spent a winter of misery. The next spring, General Harney moved south. He built Fort Randall near what is now the town of Yankton. The army was in South Dakota to stay.

One of the soldiers *did* like what he saw in South Dakota. John B. S. Todd quit the army to start a trading post near Fort Randall (learn more about Todd in Unit 5). Todd quickly learned that he could make more money by selling land. But first the Yankton Nakotas had to open their land to white settlement. Yankton chief Struck-by-the-Ree went along with Todd's idea. Struck-by-the-Ree, Todd, and fourteen Yankton leaders went to Washington, D. C.

There they negotiated a land treaty. The Yanktons would live on just a portion of their lands. Only they could settle that

portion. It was to be reserved just for them. Such land is called a reservation. The rest of the Yankton lands were then opened to American settlers. The government agreed to pay the tribe for the land. It would pay over one and a half million dollars in food and supplies over fifty years.

White settlers moved into the newly opened lands. Todd brought people to the town of Yankton. Another land agent brought people to the town of Sioux Falls. Soon people started the towns of Vermillion, Elk Point, and Bon Homme. The settlers wanted the area to become a state. First it had to be a territory. The president created Dakota Territory in 1861. Yankton was the **capital**. The president made William Jayne of Illinois the first governor. He came to Yankton on a steamboat. He worked in the **capitol**, which was nothing more than a log cabin. He had a **census** taken to see how many people lived in the new territory. The

first legislature met. It was known as the Pony Congress.

Dakota Territory grew slowly. The Civil War started in the East. Few people ventured west. It seemed too dangerous after a group of Santees killed five settlers. The Santees, or Dakotas, traded much of their land to the United States for money and supplies. They lived on a reservation in Minnesota. But white settlers moved onto their lands without asking. Then the United States fell behind in its payments because of the war. The Dakotas grew hungry and **desperate**.

Some Dakotas began to raid white settlements in southern Minnesota and Iowa. This set off a panic in Dakota Territory. Then two settlers were killed in a hay field near Sioux Falls. The settlers gathered together at Yankton, where they built a fort. Everyone left Sioux Falls. It was empty. In the end, the raiders lost their land in Minnesota. They had to move to the

Missouri River and live with the Lakotas there.

Vocabulary:

capital (n.), the city or town which is the official seat of government

capitol (n.), the building where government officials meet to do business

census (n.), an official count of the people living in a town, territory, state, or country

desperate (adj.), without hope

impressed (v.), greatly pleased

Lesson 4

A Time of Strife

The United States Army built two new forts in what is now South Dakota. Fort Sully was on the Missouri River. Fort Wadsworth was near Lake Traverse. The settlers wanted the army there to protect them. A new trail across Indian lands soon opened. It was called the Bozeman Trail. This road led even more people to the West. **Prospectors** went over it to the gold fields of Montana.

Many Indians now felt that their way of life was at stake. They feared white settlements would eat away at their lands. They were afraid that they would be left with nothing. Red Cloud, was an Oglala Lakota leader. He warned the United States government of **opposition**. He said that there would be war if the Bozeman Trail opened. This was called Red Cloud's War. Oglala warriors attacked wagons along the trail. The army sent troops, but a large group of Oglalas and Cheyennes defeated them.

Crazy Horse was a leader in this battle. The Oglalas and Cheyennes killed more soldiers. Soon the United States wanted peace. The government called a treaty **council**. The year was 1868.

The treaty made at Fort Laramie ended Red Cloud's War. The Indians had won. The Bozeman Trail was closed, but the tribes had to give up some land. They would be paid for it in money and supplies. They would have to live on reservations. The treaty set up the Great Sioux Reservation for the Lakotas. This was all the land west of the Missouri River to what is now the border of Wyoming. The Black Hills were part of it. The hills had spiritual meaning for the Lakotas and Cheyennes. This treaty made it possible for the United States to buy more of their land. Three-quarters of the adult men in the tribes had to agree to any sale.

Agents of the United States could still enter the reservation even though

settlers could not. The army sent Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer to explore the Black Hills. No one in the United States knew much about them. It was 1874. Custer brought one thousand soldiers and fifty Indian scouts. He took along scientists, newspapermen, a photographer, and even a band. Two men found gold in French Creek. The newspapers let the rest of the country know about it.

Just a few months later, the Gordon party left Sioux City, Iowa. These twenty-eight people slipped into the Black Hills illegally, or against the law. They spent a hard winter in a log **stockade** on French Creek. They found only forty dollars worth of gold. In the spring, the army forced them to leave. But prospectors poured into the Black Hills without permission. Perhaps eight hundred slipped past the army the next year.

The United States tried to buy the Black Hills from the Lakotas, but they

refused. So the army withdrew from the Black Hills. More prospectors rushed in. The Black Hills gold rush had begun. Soon thousands of people were there. They were panning or digging for gold. Deadwood Gulch was the center of the richest strikes. People from all over moved there. A group of Chinese people migrated there. Colorful people like Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane, and Poker Alice walked the streets of Deadwood. Hotels, dance halls, saloons, laundries, and banks sprang up almost overnight.

The army told the Lakotas to go to their agencies. Each Lakota group had an agency on the reservation. They met with United States agents there. Many groups would not go. The army planned to force them to go. Lakotas and Cheyennes waited for the army to come. They camped on the Little Bighorn River in what is now Montana. The Seventh Cavalry attacked the camp. George A. Custer led the United

States troops. Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Gall were the Indian leaders. Custer and all his men were killed. This is known as the Battle of the Little Bighorn, or Greasy Grass as Lakotas call it. It took place in June 1876 near what is now Hardin, Montana.

But the Indians had little to celebrate. The buffalo were almost gone. The army was angry. Soldiers now moved onto the reservation. They took guns and horses away from the Indians. Soon Crazy Horse and his people went in to their agency. Sitting Bull and Gall and their people fled to Canada.

The United States Congress acted even quicker than the army. It passed a bill that cut off payment to the Lakota people unless they gave up the Black Hills. Some leaders agreed; their people were starving. But less than three-quarters of the adult Lakota men approved the sale. This was not what the Fort Laramie Treaty had said. The

Indians now lived on the reservation. A new and hard way of life had started for them.

Vocabulary:

council (n.), a group of people brought together to negotiate or decide something

opposition (n.), an unfriendly attitude toward something

prospectors (n.), people who look for gold, oil, or mineral deposits

stockade (n.), a fort made of log posts