

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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MISSION 3: "A Cheyenne Odyssey"

Visit to a Trading Post, 1850

Thaddeus Culbertson was a natural scientist who went on an expedition to gather fossils and other natural specimens in a region of the northern Great Plains known as the Badlands. In this excerpt, he describes a reception for the Blackfeet Sioux held at the Fort Pierre, a fur trading post in present day South Dakota.

They had just arrived with about fifty lodges, and while squaws were putting up these, the "Braves" came to announce themselves. They dismounted and entered the reception room with a friendly shake of the hand to most of the whites present. A feast was ordered for them. In the middle of the room were placed four (five gallon) kettles, filled with the most tempting mush, and beside these...were two others, equally large, filled with equally tempting coffee, already sweetened, while on the floor were fifty large hard crackers (pilot bread), and about one-hundred plugs of very common tobacco....an old palefaced warrior came forward, shook hands with us, and remaining on his feet began a speech....He stood erect, with his left hand holding his blanket, and with his right making gestures continually. Never did I listen to a more ready flow of language, or to a more self composed dignified speaker, whether he addressed us or turned to the Indians on either side of him. His speech was also a complimentary one, and was short, as the dinner was getting cold....It was pleasing to observe the quiet and decorum throughout the whole scene; each one waited patiently until his turn came, and then modestly received his cracker, meat or coffee...As they drank their coffee nearly everyone, especially the old man, made their compliments to us, as we do in drinking wine. The feast went on cheerfully, and towards the conclusion, our old man started a song, or rather a howl of thanks, which was caught up and echoed by several....The tobacco was then distributed, two plugs being given to each; but the young men, being able to kill buffalo and buy tobacco, gave their portion to some of their friends too old for the hunt. I noticed quite a number passing their pans, well filled with mush, to their squaws who were standing about the door, which indicated generous and kind feeling.

Source: Culbertson, Thaddeus A. *Journal of an Expedition to the Mauvaises Terres and the Upper Missouri in 1850*, 81-83.