Sitting Bull, Four Horns, and Fort Buford: Questioning A Famous Set of Plains Drawings

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Abstract
New research on a set of drawings known as “Four Horns copies of Sitting Bull’s drawings” reveals that both the name and ethnic identity of the artist are unsupported. Those identifications derive from research and records of an earlier era built upon Western understanding of cultural materials. Rather than seeking to provide definitive new answers to these questions, this paper explores other aspects of the drawings that are now better aligned with anthropological and ethnohistorical interest, seeking to recover the context of production and circulation and what the drawings may have meant to Native people.

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Competing Interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

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Among the most famous of nineteenth century Plains Indian drawings is a set commonly known as the Four Horns copies of Sitting Bull’s drawings. They have been reproduced dozens of times and examined from the perspectives of history, artistic style, and personal biography. However, a reexamination of the associated catalog record reveals many errors and assumptions. In this critical review, I challenge much that has been accepted about the drawings. This article serves as a case study of how even well-documented histories can be enhanced and how layers of accrued knowledge can be separated and examined, shedding better light on the path of transmission. The result is a finer grained history of the drawings. I have resisted the urge to speculate on the exact identity of the artist. Instead, I seek to position the material within a complex historical moment, and to recognize the agency and potential motivations of Native individuals within the broad sweep of the colonial encounter. This is not the type of information that museum catalogs are designed to accommodate, especially today’s electronic systems with their commitment to standardized fields and searchable terminology. Thus, this essay can be read as a second type of case study, one that encourages reflection on the ways that records about Indigenous materials discipline their history to fit Western narratives.

Looking at Records and Drawings

Among the records and drawings are in the National Anthropological Archives (NAA). The record on which generations of researchers have relied read, prior to this reassessment, “A copy made by Four Horns of autobiographical drawings by Sitting Bull and Jumping Bull . . . While they were in the possession of
Sitting Bull’s adopted brother Jumping Bull, Four Horns copied forty of them, as well as 15 drawings made by Jumping Bull. An unidentified Sioux brought the copies to Fort Buford, where they were acquired by James C. Kimball, Asst. Surgeon, in August 1870. Here I will be questioning each element of this record.

The set consists of fifty-five images on loose sheets of paper, all but one pair single-sided. Worked in the classic flat Plains style (Berlo 1996; Greene 2001) figures are firmly outlined in ink, filled in sparingly with solid blocks of color in a limited palette of red, blue, and yellow colored pencil (Figure 1). They are executed on the blank backs of identical printed rosters for the 31st U.S. Infantry, dated 1868. The regimental commander is Col. Philip R. de Trobriand, headquartered at Ft. Stevenson, Dakota Territory, but the rosters also detail companies stationed at Fort Totten and Fort Buford. Only one drawing is on different paper, the back of a handwritten order dated April 27, 1868, St. Paul, Minnesota, (headquarters for the Department of Dakota) regarding contractors at Fort Totten (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Sitting Bull is shown driving off a herd of captured horses. In addition to ink, the artist used a range of pencils in blue, red, and yellow to differentiate among the densely layered animals. Of the fifty-five drawings included in the collection and discussed in this article, twenty-one are scenes of horse capture, with Sitting Bull featured in twelve and Jumping Bull pictured in nine. Throughout the drawings, horses are more carefully rendered than human figures. Colored pencils were newly invented at this time and well-dated drawings such as this may help to establish when they reached the Plains (NAA 08588000).

All Figures (1–9) are from NAA MS 1929-a with supplemental images in Figures 7–9 from NAA MS 1929-b. Measurements for works from NAA MS 1929-a are 20 x 27 cm. Measurements for works from NAA MS 1929-b are 21 x 33 cm. All images (Figures 1–9) are reproduced courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.
Plains pictorial art is sometimes called “ledger art” in recognition that drawings were often produced on the pages of ledgers (account books) or other bound volumes. This aspect of compilation was so important to Plains artists that sometimes loose sheets, perhaps the only paper available, were stitched together into book form (Greene 2004; McLaughlin 2013; Wong 1992). This set of drawings, however, are an exception, a sheaf of loose sheets that can be arranged in any order.

The drawings all show war deeds, acts of valor formally recognized by the Lakota as coup: facing enemies, claiming captives, and capturing horses. The majority of scenes are of Sitting Bull, who is identified by a “name glyph,” a picture representing his name that appears behind him. In many pictures, he also can be identified by the distinctive shield that he is carrying, a blue disc with a dark bird painted on it (Figure 3). Thirteen of the pictures are evidently of a different warrior. Although there is no name glyph or shield, the pictures are tied together by the war regalia that he displays in almost all of them, a lance in the form of a large bow with a long blade at one end (Figure 4). The identity of the protagonist is uncertain in three drawings, one of which includes Sitting Bull’s shield (Figure 5).

Each drawing has an identifying number handwritten on it, running one through fifty-five. These were added by the collector as he was preparing the set to send it east. We do not know how he decided what was the appropriate order (images of Sitting Bull’s shield)}
Figure 3. Sitting Bull identified this as his first coup at age fourteen (Stirling 1938, 7). It includes his identifying name glyph and the shield that he carries in many scenes. Typical of the set, he is dressed simply in a short breechcloth with his hair clubbed on top of his head. The unidentified enemy includes more personal detail with a striped cloth shirt and hair pompadoured in front and cut short on the sides (NAA 08584300).

Figure 4. At least thirteen drawings in the set represent deeds of Jumping Bull. He is identified by his war regalia of feathered bow lance, eagle bone whistle at his neck, pendants at his heels, and red full-body paint with a black circle on his face. The backgrounds of many Jumping Bull scenes, like this one, are dense with the marks of flying bullets (NAA 08588200).
Figure 5. The identity of the protagonist is not certain in some scenes. The upper figure may represent Jumping Bull without his usual regalia. The center image with a distinctive saber and no-re-treat sash is an unknown warrior. The lower drawing, the single image on mismatched paper, has been assumed to be Sitting Bull because of the unfinished shield. However, differences in clothing, hair, and weapons do not support that, and the drawing may be a composite by two different hands (NAA 08589200, 08589502, and 08589601).
Bull and the second warrior are somewhat mixed), but once written, the numbers stabilized the organization of the loose sheets and have been a point of reference since. The control numbers now in use by the museum for inventory and online access follow the collector's system.

The drawings were collected by Dr. James Kimball, an Army surgeon serving at Fort Buford in Dakota Territory. His numbers linked the drawings to individual explanations that he provided for each picture. These were transmitted in the form of a seven-page handwritten text, which he titled Index. Office stamps on the back of the Index show that it was received by the Medical Director's Office, Department of Dakota on March 14, 1871, and then forwarded to the Army Medical Museum (AMM) in Washington, DC, where it was received on March 29, 1871. The Index and the drawings were eventually transferred to the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) in May 1915. The Index offers an explanation for each scene. All fifty-five pictures are described as depicting Sitting Bull; with one exception, all Indian enemies are identified as Crows and all White men as “soldiers.”

A letter from the Rev. John Williamson filed with the drawings shows that research to improve identifications began in 1882. Seeking information about the drawings, the AMM had shipped them west to Fort Randall, where Sitting Bull was being held prisoner after he returned from his Canadian exile. Williamson, a missionary at the nearby Yankton agency who spoke Lakota, was called upon to assist in interviewing Sitting Bull about the drawings. In general, Sitting Bull acknowledged that the pictures represented his deeds, but he pointed out that several were not of him but of Jumping Bull, his adoptive brother, thus resolving the identity of the second warrior. The only pictures that he was willing to be specific about were No. 1, his first war deed at age fourteen, (Figure 3) and No. 10, where he counted coup on an Arikara (Figure 7). Williamson noted that the situation of captivity was not an opportune one for candor. When asked about the authorship of the drawings, Sitting Bull said that they must be copies of ones that he had made some years previously. He had given the originals to Jumping Bull, whom he believed still had them. He did not know who might have made these copies.

19th Century Newspaper Accounts

This is as far as the materials received from the AMM take us, but it leaves many questions. How had Kimball come by the drawings? How did he know who produced them, who was depicted, or what the events were? Apparently, he provided some of this information in an introductory statement that he sent to the AMM, which has since been lost. Our knowledge of the contents of this key document comes from two newspaper articles by journalists who examined the drawings at the AMM in July 1876. The articles were inspired by news of the defeat and death of George A. Custer at the Little Bighorn days before. Sitting Bull was big news. Consistent with journalistic standards of the time, they were highly sensational with many imaginative flourishes. However, the two sources do provide provenance information from Kimball, and they agree on several points.

In July 6, 1876, the New York Herald wrote that a book, believed to have been drawn by Sitting Bull, “fell into the hands of Assistant Surgeon James C. [sic] Kimball, of the army, in the month of August, 1870. . . . The book was brought into Fort Buford by a Yanktonnaïs Sioux, and offered for sale and purchased for $1.50 worth of provisions.
The Indian gave conflicting statements regarding the manner in which he came into possession of the book, exciting suspicion that he had stolen it from Sitting Bull, who in his turn, undoubtedly stole the book in blank from the whites.” By this time, the drawings at the AMM had been pasted into a scrapbook, but “By holding the sheets up to the light it is seen that they are the muster-roll blanks of the 31st United States Infantry, of which Col. De Trobriand was the commandant” (Anonymous 1876).

The *Herald* article was published without illustrations, but that lack was soon met by a lavish supplement to *Harpers Weekly* that appeared on July 29, 1876 under the byline Porte Crayon, who had also made a visit to the AMM. It included reproductions of eleven of the drawings and repeated much of the same information: “About the year 1870 a collection of MS. drawings, put up in book form, bearing the autograph of Sitting Bull and exhibiting a record of his exploits and adventures, was brought into Fort Buford by a Yanktonnais Sioux and sold for a dollar and fifty cents worth of provisions. When cross-questioned regarding ownership of the book, the Indian shuffled and prevaricated so as to confirm the belief that he had stolen it from Sitting Bull himself.” As to the Index, the article says that Kimball relied on “the aid of interpreters, Indians, and others versed in the picture-language of the Northwestern tribes.” Like the first article, the author believed that the drawings were made by Sitting Bull himself, and he crafted a dramatic vision of the assembly of the various media: “the lucky larceny of a quire of blank army rosters, a pen and ink from some murdered emigrant’s cabin, brushes of a superior quality, deftly fashioned from some fair child’s scalp-lock” (Porte Crayon 1876).

Porte Crayon was the pen name of David Hunter Strother (1816–1888), an artist and journalist (Eby 1960). Among his archived papers is a record of his visit to the AMM, including photographs of several pages of drawings from which he traced illustrations for Harpers. His papers also include a transcription of the Index and, most significantly, of the missing introduction (Strother n.d.). The copy establishes that the *Herald* article quotes it almost verbatim, Porte Crayon a bit more loosely.

**20th Century Scholarship**

These newspaper accounts had been long forgotten by the time that Walter S. Campbell contacted the BAE in 1928 to inquire after the drawings. He was working on a biography of Sitting Bull and he had learned of them from an entry in the Smithsonian’s *Handbook of American Indians* (Hodge 1907), and perhaps also from an inaccurate description in a biography by W. F. Johnson (1891, 18). Campbell appears to have been the first scholar to give the drawings serious attention. He had tracked them from the AMM to the BAE, which provided him with photographic prints.

Campbell (1887–1957), who wrote under the *nom de plume* of Stanley Vestal, was an English professor at the University of Oklahoma with an interest in Native American and frontier biography (Berthrong 1965). His research on Sitting Bull is well documented in his papers, which are held by the University of Oklahoma’s Western History Collection (Walter Stanley Campbell Collection [WSC]).

Campbell began work on the topic in 1928, and over the course of three summers he made visits to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation where he enlisted the support of two of Sitting Bull’s nephews, Joseph White Bull and Oscar One Bull. He supplemented local interviews with extensive correspondence undertaken at other times of year, sending money to support interpreters and group consultations. When the biography was published, he...
acknowledged the contributions of thirty-four Lakota people (Vestal 1932). Campbell’s work, written for popular consumption, has a flowing style akin to historical fiction. In the second edition, he described it as “a straight-forward narrative, not cluttered up with the documents and eye-witness accounts on which it was based” (Vestal 1957, ix). He included no footnotes. Campbell’s Sitting Bull has received both praise and criticism. He assembled a wealth of primary source material and was far ahead of his time in taking Lakota people’s historical knowledge seriously. Anthropologist Raymond DeMallie acknowledged the tremendous value of Campbell’s notes while noting that he missed nuances of Lakota culture (Vestal 1984; DeMallie 1984); Robert Utley, a historian, was dubious of many facts (Utley 1993). In spite of such assessments, Campbell’s book has been widely accepted as a sound basis of knowledge about the drawings.

Interpretations of the drawings occupy only five pages in Campbell’s 324-page book, with thirty-two pictures reproduced in small scale. He treated their history cursorily, “These drawings depict thirty-two of the sixty-three war-like exploits performed by Sitting Bull before 1870, when the drawings fell into the hands of a white man. The drawings are here numbered and arranged chronologically, not as in the original series” (Vestal 1957, 316). He gives a specific year and location for the event in each picture, and identifies tribal enemies, mostly Crow. Of their passage from Native hands, he said “some other Indian got hold of the book and sold it to an Army officer, adding a meager inscription” (Vestal 1957, 116). He concludes his treatment by ascribing the drawings to “Chief Four Horns, from whose copies of Sitting Bull’s originals our reproductions are made” (Vestal 1957, 320). With this single unfootnoted sentence the drawings became “the Four Horns copies.”

Campbell used the drawings to support wider research in the community. He developed a standard set of questions: What battle was this? What year was this? Where did it take place? (WSC 104, 8). Sometimes he got clear answers. However, his notes reveal that more often people were uncertain which encounter was depicted in a particular image. The disjunction between Campbell’s notes and his publication is striking.

Surprisingly, Campbell credits Sitting Bull himself as his major source. “For Sitting Bull’s own interpretation of these drawings, given in 1885, I am indebted to the late Seth C. Jones” (Vestal 1957, 323). Campbell’s correspondence files contain a single 1928 letter from Jones. He reported that he had crossed paths with Sitting Bull on two occasions. The first was a brief and distant encounter while he was with the Hayden Survey in the early 1870s. The second one is mentioned by Jones only in a postscript: “PS: In later years I again met Sitting Bull - he was with the Wild West Show. Wm Cody introduced me to Sitting Bull and all the Indians” (WSC 113, 13). While this could have been in 1885, it does not seem possible that Jones would have had copies of the drawings, then at the AMM, on hand for review, nor are there any further notes from Jones. Had he been alive, Jones might well have been puzzled by Campbell’s generous statement of thanks.

Campbell’s photographs of the drawings are annotated with notes in various styles, assembling information from several sources (WSC 104, 8; 110, 6). The most systematic notes are from A.B. Welch, postmaster of Mandan, ND (WSC 107, 1). Others are Campbell’s extracts from meetings of old warriors gathered to review the pictures (WSC 110, 6). Utley, who reviewed Campbell’s notes in preparing his own Sitting Bull biography, offered this, “Although I have cited the pictographs as historical sources in earlier chapters, I remain skeptical of Vestal’s captions” (Utley 1993, 385) (Figure 6).
Campbell’s statement that Four Horns, Sitting Bull’s uncle, was the artist responsible for these works should be met with equal skepticism. I have not found a source for this anywhere in his notes. Campbell regularly extrapolated from small bits of information to flesh out a story, and I suspect that this identification was based on a single statement from One Bull that Four Horns was “a good drawer” (WSC 105, 19). When these drawings were sent to Fort Randall for Sitting Bull’s review, Four Horns was a fellow prisoner there (Pope 2010). Sitting Bull did not, however, turn to him. Instead, his response was that they had been “drawn off by some Indian, he does not know by whom” (NAA MS1929A). Even within a situation of captivity, it seems unlikely that he would acknowledge the validity of the war deeds but deny knowledge of the authorship of the drawings, particularly if the artist was perhaps sitting at his elbow.

After seeing Campbell’s book, Col. Henry M. Morrow visited the BAE offices in 1933 to see the drawings, and to add his own knowledge to the record. Matthew Stirling, chief of the BAE, made a typed memorandum of his visit. Morrow reported that his father had owned a set of identical drawings; he was very familiar with them, although they had since been lost in a fire. His father, also Col. Morrow, together with Kimball “had two copies of this pictographic record made about 1870.” One the colonel retained; the other we know Kimball forwarded to the AMM, and it to the Smithsonian. Although the note of the visit does not say so, Stirling subsequently asserted that “the copies were both drawn on roster sheets of the Thirty-first United States Infantry” (Stirling 1938).

Stirling accepted Campbell’s work whole heartedly, including his attribution to Four Horns. In addition to the Kimball drawings that Campbell had brought to his attention, Stirling was aware of two other sets of Sitting Bull drawings in the BAE collection, both dating to the Fort Randall period. In the Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology for 1932–1933, Stirling reported that he was gathering this material together, including the copy “made by Four Horns” (Stirling 1933). Other than the information from Morrow, Stirling did not attempt any new research. Instead, he offered a solid synthesis of existing archival documentation, accurate transcriptions of the 1876 newspaper accounts, and material gleaned from Campbell’s book (Stirling 1938). Thus, Stirling’s captions for what he termed the Kimball Record contained two elements, speculative information from Kimball’s Index, ca. 1870,
supplemented with speculative information from Campbell’s research, ca. 1930 (Figures 7–9).14

Figure 7. Sitting Bull identified this as a fight with the Arikara or Sahnish (Stirling 1938, 7), left. Another drawing of the same action produced while he was held at Fort Randall (see Stirling 1938, 45) also shows a red horse and a red wearing blanket, but differs in other details, right (NAA 08585200 and 085911).

Figure 8. The men that Campbell consulted identified this as Sitting Bull’s capture of Jumping Bull, the Assiniboine youth he adopted and named, left. It matches closely with the picture of that event that he made at Fort Randall, including the red horse, the clothing, and Sitting Bull’s Strong Heart headdress, right (NAA 08585000 and 08591000).

Figure 9. This drawing compresses into a single scene an encounter with three women, left. In his Fort Randall series Sitting Bull expanded this event into three drawings, each showing the capture of a single woman whom he identified there as Assiniboine (Stirling 1938, 40–41), right. The same black horse and horned, feathered headdress appear in each (NAA 08584400 and 08590100).
While much research published about materials in museums or archives never makes it into institutional catalogs, this case was the exception. Stirling’s publication became the basis for the catalog record, and it has been carried forward until my current work on catalog revision. It is time for critical review.

**A Return to Fort Buford**

Fort Buford was a military post on the upper Missouri River near the confluence with the Yellowstone River in what is now western North Dakota. It was established in 1866 and remained in use until 1895 (Harvey 2002; Larsen 1942; Warner 1987).

James Patterson Kimball (1840–1902) was a career Army surgeon, who reached the rank of colonel. He completed his medical degree in 1865, and served during the final months of the Civil War. In 1867 he joined the regular Army and was assigned to Fort Buford, where he served from August 1867 until August 1870.15 The drawings that he sent to the AMM in August 1870 were his third contribution to their collections. His first shipment of thirty items was received in August 1868; the second, only two items, was sent in July 1869.16 Kimball carefully provided tribal identifications for everything he sent. The first shipment consisted primarily of Assiniboine materials with a range of clothing, tools, and ornaments, plus single entries from the Crow, Blackfeet, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara, mostly arrows. Four entries recorded Sioux material, seven arrows from the Hunkpapa and another set with the note: “Six arrows taken from the dead bodies of a white man and a negro, killed by Sioux Indians, May 13th 1868 near Fort Buford, Dakota Ty,” plus a war club found nearby. The weapons constituted research material for a treatise he was writing on Indian arrow wounds. (By the time it was ready for publication, the Indians had become armed with rifles, and it was never published.) The smaller shipment the next year consisted of a Yanktonai rattle and a “scalp taken by an Assiniboine Indian from the head of a Yanktonnais fallen in battle.” These donations suggest changes in Indian groups around Fort Buford, with Assiniboine interactions giving way to Yanktonai ones, all set against a background of violence.

Henry A. Morrow (1829–1891) (whose son visited the BAE) was also a career military man, who reached the rank of Lt. Col. with the 13th Infantry (the unit to which de Trobriand’s infantry had been assigned when the 31st was abolished). He served mostly in the West, and he was post commander of Fort Buford from May 1869 until June 13, 1870. When Morrow arrived, Kimball was away on an extended leave, but the two men were both there from mid-August 1869 until mid-June 1870, when Morrow was posted on to Wyoming Territory.17

Fort Buford was a site of intense activity, both defensive and diplomatic, during Morrow’s year there, carefully detailed in “Post Returns,” the monthly activity reports submitted by the commanding officer. The Returns from August 1869, for example, report that a haying party was attacked by Hunkpapas with four killed, and that 1,100 Assinibiones visited the post for a month. September Returns note a number of visits by Hidatsa, Mandan, Assiniboine, and Yanktonai bands. These first three tribes had long been in conflict with the Hunkpapa Sioux, but the Yanktonais occupied a more ambiguous position. These “middle Sioux” had not been included in the 1868 Ft. Laramie Treaty, which sought to settle affairs with the hostile Lakota. This left them to suffer land losses to the occupying Americans without any compensation. Several bands of Upper Yanktonais came to Ft. Buford in September 1869 to talk to Col.
Morrow about this problem and to explore formal recognition. He convinced them to winter near the fort, issuing rations as an inducement, while he communicated with his headquarters, urging support for their claims. He noted in his correspondence that they were destitute and might be driven to join the ranks of Hunkpapas like Sitting Bull, Black Moon, and Four Horns out of sheer hunger (D. F. Smith 2008a, 57–58, 2008b, 66).

This history of Kimball and Morrow helps to establish much about these drawings. First, although they may have been shipped to the AMM in August 1870, they must have been obtained between mid-August 1869 and mid-June of 1870, when both men were at Ft. Buford. Kimball had established a pattern of shipping the materials he had assembled over the year to the AMM in July or August. This earlier acquisition date would have given him time to interview people he thought knowledgeable (both Indians and interpreters) and to prepare the accompanying Index. Narrowing the time of acquisition is significant as it might help to identify the unnamed Yanktonai from whom they were obtained.

Positioning the drawings within the history of Fort Buford at this particular time also provides context; the source was not a solitary Yanktonai who dropped by to trade. Morrow’s correspondence names specific bands of Upper Yanktonai who spent the winter of 1869–70 near Ft. Buford (D. F. Smith 2008a, 58). It is likely that he belonged to one of these bands, or at least that Kimball assumed he did. The New York Herald reported, “When cross-questioned regarding ownership of the book, the Indian shuffled and prevaricated so as to confirm the belief that he had stolen it from Sitting Bull himself” (Anonymous 1876). The derogatory language was added by the newspaper, but Kimball evidently had inquired about the source of the drawings and had received no clear answer. An evasive reply might well be consistent with a desire to conceal from this Army officer a friendly relationship with the hostile Hunkpapa. The movement of supposedly neutral Yanktonais in and out of the camps of Sitting Bull and Four Horns was a concern that Morrow stressed repeatedly in correspondence. In whatever way this Yanktonai man had acquired the drawings, he knew enough to accurately identify which image represented Sitting Bull’s first coup, almost the only point in Kimball’s Index that Sitting Bull was willing to confirm years later.

Aside from the question of who brought the drawings to Fort Buford, a second question is who actually drew the pictures? The existence of the now-lost Morrow set complicates the story, positing two identical sets in circulation. Various scholars, accepting Four Horns’ authorship, have tried to make sense of this. Utley left it that Four Horns made two copies for unknown reasons, and that both ended up at Ft. Buford. Evan Maurer saw the two sets as indicative of production for sale (Maurer 1992). Janet Berlo extended this to note that the drawings represent an early example of “deliberate intercultural commerce in Plains graphic art” (Berlo 1996, 35).

An alternate possibility is that the Yanktonai seller, not Four Horns, was actually the producer. He might have arrived with just one set of drawings, perhaps the “book” to which Kimball referred, but he found two eager purchasers. Unwilling to part with the book, he offered to produce “copies” (again Kimball’s term). If Kimball’s and Morrow’s sets were on identical roster paper, as Stirling reported, it is likely that they were produced at the same time and place. To me, it further suggests that they were produced at Fort Buford. The fort seems a more likely source for a large stash of outdated rosters from a unit formerly posted there, than does some hypothesized raid. Officers
of the fort could also have provided the array of colored pencils as well as pen and ink. If this is correct, the dashing hand so much admired by art historians (Maurer 1992) is not that of Four Horns but probably of an as yet unidentified member of an Upper Yanktonai band.¹⁹

Native Perspectives

These drawings emerged at a moment of critical shift in Lakota history, what Pekka Hämäläinen has called “a radical political reform” (Hämäläinen 2019, 304). It was a time when Four Horns, a keen political strategist, proposed a change in the structure of leadership, the naming of a supreme war chief to coordinate action to meet the American threat. He put forward his nephew Sitting Bull to assume that new role. Many factors must have been presented in support of his qualification for such a role—generosity, diplomatic skills, spiritual power—but the most essential qualification was his outstanding war record. The basic impetus for pictorial art among the Lakota was the display of coups, their presentation for public review and validation (McLaughlin 2013).²⁰ Ultimately, any drawings that Sitting Bull produced, as well as any copies of them, such as those that ended up at the Smithsonian, were bound up in that political moment. As Berlo expressed it, drawing was “a campaign of political propaganda” within Lakota society (Berlo 1996, 198).

As these drawings passed through various hands, from Hunkpapa to Yanktonai to military collector to museum, their meaning shifted from a political act to a different kind of document, reshaped by the understandings of those who received them. As the earliest firmly dated Sioux drawings, they have been viewed as the first evidence of a souvenir market (Berlo 1996, 35). This may be how Morrow considered them. For Kimball, they presumably functioned like other materials that he forwarded to the AMM, documents to better understand the Native people with whom the Army was contending and ultimately seeking to control. These explanations privilege the perspectives of the collectors. What of the Native interlocutors?

An intriguing suggestion comes from a surprising source. De Cost Smith was an artist who spent some time among the Lakotas in the 1880s. Many years later he published a distinctly unscholarly book titled Indian Experiences (Smith 1943, 194). In it he proposed that the drawings came directly from Sitting Bull, who “wishing to obtain proper credit for the many harrowing outrages from which Fort Buford had suffered, sent a book of drawings by himself, depicting his feats of arms” (1943, 174). Smith may have been merely wagering a guess, or he may have been remembering something he was told years before, but the idea does have a certain resonance. It takes the drawings seriously as embedded in the military and political maneuvering taking place around Fort Buford, and it shifts attention to potential Native understandings of the drawings. Kimball himself noted that Sitting Bull sent threatening messages in to the fort from time to time (J. P. Kimball 1929, 76). In Native eyes, whether Hunkpapa or Yanktonai, these drawings with their many pictures of attacks on Whites would have carried such a message. In this view the Yanktonai man can be seen as an emissary sent to deliver a message in visual form, a war record fully displayed—including many taunting scenes of attacks on Whites at Buford or other forts of the region, attacks that were going to continue unless the soldiers withdrew from the region.
Conclusion

Attention to the cultural meaning of art in Plains society provides insight on how the drawings might have arrived at Fort Buford. It allows us to go beyond the bare report that they “fell into the hands” of an officer there, and it recasts the Yanktonai from an Indian who “shuffled and prevaricated” to a courier dispatched with a message. That message was a boast and a threat.

Attending to the physical evidence of the drawings themselves, on the other hand, helps us better parse various confusing statements describing them as “copies.” The use of many identical loose roster sheets points to production at Fort Buford, as does the range of colored pencils. Morrow’s report of two identical copies reinforces that.

A deeper examination of the purported documentation both adds to and challenges information. Research on Kimball and Morrow offers much about events around Fort Buford and the complexity of interactions with Native people there. Exploration of Campbell’s notes shows how little there is to support his identification of Four Horns as the artist. It also reveals how tenuous is his identification of many individual events. The shape of Campbell’s narrative reflects his desires for dates and places while ignoring many of the culturally informed comments that his Lakota consultants offered.

The re-examination of these drawings in the NAA reveals how the interpretive potential of museum materials increases in proportion to the level of documentation. It also illustrates the evidence that can be gained when drawings are approached as material objects as well as images. Even the most well-known materials in museum collections can yield new insights if approached with a critical review of what is and can be known of their origins.

Museums (and those who use museum collections) often lament the quality of their records, both the limited amount of associated information and the silenced voices of those who made and used the materials. This study should encourage us all to optimism. Layers of accrued assumptions can be deconstructed, historical facts established, and cultural knowledge applied. Such work is surely the future challenge for museum anthropology.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express appreciation to Daisy Njoku of the National Anthropological Archives for assistance with images and for locating relevant correspondence. I would also like to thank Janet Berlo and Arni Brownstone for their comments on a draft of the paper and for the thoughtful consultation that they, Imre Nagy, and Janet Cowan provided on the difficult task of identifying media from digital images while original materials were not accessible during the pandemic. The paper benefitted greatly from input from anonymous reviewers and especially from the editors of the volume, Jason Jackson and Michael Jordan.

Notes

1. A massive bibliography would be required to cover the many places that they are cited and often illustrated. In addition to the major sources cited in the text of this article, addi-
tional instances of particular note are found in: Feest et al. (1999); Feest (2009); D. M. Johnson (1969); LaPointe (2009); Philbrick (2010) and Risch (2000).

At the intersection of my work in this paper on the study of Native American material culture and the focus of this special double issue of *Museum Anthropology Review*, I recall that while I was in graduate school, I had the pleasure of working with my fellow University of Oklahoma student Dan Swan. We were both contracted by the Oklahoma Historical Society to organize materials in the museum collection. Working alongside Dan was a wonderful learning opportunity for me. At that point, I had more museum experience than he, while he had much deeper experience than I of working with Native communities in Oklahoma. His insights on the cultural significance of objects, both past and present, shifted the work beyond quotidian choices of storage equipment and archival supplies, to a constant awareness of the people who produced this cultural heritage. In the decades since, I think he’s become pretty knowledgeable about the proper use of acid free paper, but he has continued to be a leader in connecting museums and the materials they steward with the Native communities where they originated.

2. See Turner (2020) for an extended discussion of colonial legacies in museum documentation.

3. NAA MS 1929A. Rather than attending to differences in museum and archival practice, I am glossing both under the general term “catalog.” Following archival practice, the catalog record for these drawings has been reformatted recently as a formal finding aid, but the basic information made available remains the same.

4. Finding Aid for NAA MS 1929A. Revised information as well as images of the drawings, Index, and correspondence are available here: https://sova.si.edu/record/NAA.MS1929A.

5. The BAE was merged into the Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History in the 1960s and the Bureau's archives became the foundation for the current NAA.

6. While the drawings were of Sitting Bull, we can be certain that they were not drawn by him, based on comparison to his other drawings. For discussion of stylistic differences between the Fort Buford drawings and ones he later produced while held at Fort Randall, see Maurer (1992, 212). For documentation of the later drawings, see Greene (2009) and (2015).

7. On July 13, 1876 the *New York Daily Graphic* ran an article with illustrations of drawings by a man named Sitting Bull, but he was an Oglala of the same name, not the Hunkpapa leader (Cowdrey 2014).

8. When I saw these, I took them at first for previously unknown drawings, but over-laying them with the correlate NAA images quickly revealed their nature.

9. BAE Letters Received, Box 14, NAA.


11. Jones was an artist and a family member, whom Campbell addressed in correspondence as “Uncle Corbie.” His papers, including some materials relating to the Hayden Survey, are archived at the Autry Center’s Braun Research Center, formerly a component of the Southwest Museum (Seth C. Jones Biographical Collection). They contain no reference to Sitting Bull.

12. Similarly, Campbell accorded recognition to White Bull only posthumously as the man who killed Custer (DeMallie 1984).

13. One set NAA MS1929B is still there; the other was a loan, now in the collection of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. See Greene (2009; 2015).

14. Stirling did not attempt to correlate the 1870 and 1882 drawings, but a few that can be readily matched help to explain some of the discussion recorded in Campbell’s notes. Men whom he interviewed were often unable to provide the exact information
for which he asked, and their talk seemed to wander off-topic into discussion about horses and headdresses. In fact, they may have been working toward identification of events through these and similar elements; a fresh analysis of their comments might reveal much about historical memory.

15. Information on Kimball is drawn from Returns from US Military Posts, Ft. Buford (National Archives RG 94), materials in the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States Biographical Sketch Collection at the National Library of Medicine, and two publications (M. Kimball 1917; J. Kimball 1929).

16. Contributions are detailed in the AMM register for Section VI (Miscellaneous). Much of the AMM’s ethnographic material was transferred to the Smithsonian in late 1869.

17. Information on Morrow is drawn from Returns from US Military Posts, Ft. Buford (National Archives RG 94), from (Larsen 1942; McCrady 2006; Miller et al. 2008), and from the Find a Grave website (http://findagrave.com).

18. Johnson (W. F. Johnson 1891), who had read Kimball’s text at the AMM, converted Kimball’s statement about suspicious behavior into a statement that the man “confessed frankly” that he had stolen the drawings from Sitting Bull. While this jibed with White ideas about “shifty” Indian character, theft from such a powerful leader would have been a dangerous act in Native society, had it occurred.

19. The difficulty of drawing a sharp line between Yanktonai and Hunkpapa artists is demonstrated by the case of the artist known as Siyo Sapa, or Black Prairie Chicken. Commonly described as a Yanktonai, Penney (2019) has argued that he was actually a Hunkpapa follower of Sitting Bull, who found it expedient to change his affiliation and take up residence at Fort Peck after Sitting Bull’s return from Canada.

20. I have argued elsewhere that drawings produced by Sitting Bull during the Fort Randall captivity functioned not only to display his war deeds but also the spiritual validation that made them possible (Greene 2015).

References Cited


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