

The Hidatsa

The first known account of the Mandan is that of the French trader, Sieur de la La Verendrye, in the fall of 1738. McKenzie visited the Mandan in 1772. Written accounts came from Lewis and Clark who arrived among the Mandan in the fall of 1804. They furnish only the location and early condition of the archaeological remains both of the Mandan and Arikara. Alexander Henry, a trader for the Northwest Company, came to trade fur with the Mandan in 1806. After Henry Brackenridge and Bradbury came to the area together in 1810. They wrote additional information about the Mandan, but mostly about the Arikara.

The next visitor was the artist, George Catlin, who visited in the spring of 1833. Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied, spent the winter months of 1833-34 among the Mandan. Maximilian may be recognized as the best of the various authorities. (Will, Spinden, pp. 86-88). According to McKenzie and Sieur de la La Verendrye, the nine villages they visited in 1738 and 1772, were the oldest villages. Verendrye described the Mandan as being in full power and prosperity. The Mandan had not yet suffered the losses by disease and war, which caused them to leave these villages.

Lewis and Clark wrote in their journals on March 10, 1805, "The Mandan's formerly lived in six large villages at and above the mouth of the Heart River. " Maximilian says, "After the first alliance with the Hidatsa, the Mandan's lived in eight or nine villages at and above the Heart River." These villages were abandoned between 1772 and 1804. (Will, Spinden, p.90).

The Mandan had a origin narrative of coming out of the earth. In relating their story to Maximilian, they came from the east out of the earth and entered the Missouri at the White Earth River in South Dakota. The eastern origin corresponds with that of the rest of the Siouxan stock to which the Mandan's, both linguistically, and to a considerable extent, culturally belong. The Ohio valley would seem to have served as a point of dispersal where the Plains members of the Siouxan stock are supposed to have moved in four successive migrations. The earliest group to leave consisted apparently of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Crow, and of these the Mandan were probably a number of years ahead of the other tribes.

The Mandan's have vivid recollections of the coming of the Hidatsa many years later and established fixed villages on the Heart River. They describe the Hidatsa

as a wild wandering people whom they taught to build stationary villages and to raise corn, pumpkins and other vegetables, and who soon moved up to the Knife River. (Will, Spinden, p. 97). In the earliest historical accounts the Mandan were firmly established in stationary villages in the neighborhood of the Heart River. Verendrye says they were a large and powerful nation and feared none of their neighbors. Their manufactures were almost necessities among the other tribes, and in trade they were able to dictate their own terms. Their forts were well fortified. The smallest village he visited had one hundred and thirty houses. Verendrye's son visited one of the larger villages, declared that it was twice as large. There were at least one thousand houses in several villages. Lewis and Clark declared that in the two villages of one hundred huts there were three hundred and fifty warriors. At this rate there should have been at least fifteen thousand Mandan in 1738 dwelling prosperously in large and well-fortified towns. (Will, Spinden, p. 99).

The Mandan had created an focal point of trade on the Missouri River. All of the plains tribes came to barter for agricultural good and products. Called the "Marketplace of the Central Plains", the Mandan established what was to be the forerunner of trading posts that came later to the area. There is little information for the next sixty-six years. The Mandan prospered and grew powerful up to 1772. Their remaining history is summed up in their own tradition as related to Lewis and Clark and Maximilian. Formerly they lived happily and prosperously in nine large villages on the Missouri near the mouth of the Heart River. Six or seven of these villages were on the west side and two or three were on the east side of the river. For a great many years they lived there when one day the smallpox came to those on the east side of the river. The survivors then proceeded up the river some forty miles where they settled in one large village. After the smallpox reduced the villages on the west to five, the five went up to where the others were, in the neighborhood of some Arikara, and settle in two villages. A great many Mandan had died and they were no longer strong and fearless. They made an alliance with the Arikara against the Sioux. All this happened before 1796 and is chronicled in Henry and Schoolcraft. Lewis and Clark found the two villages one on each side and about fifteen miles below the Knife River. Both villages consisted of forty to fifty lodges and united could raise about three hundred and fifty men. Lewis and Clark describe them as having united with the Hidatsa and engaging in continual warfare against the Arikara and the Sioux.

The description given by Lewis and Clark agrees with the conditions two years later when Henry visited them. In 1837, smallpox attacked them again, raged for many weeks and left only one hundred and twenty-five survivors. The Mandan's were taken in by the Arikara, with whom they intermarried. They separated, again forming a small village of their own at Fort Berthold. In 1850 there were three

hundred and eighty- five Mandan, largely of mixed blood, living. There are only a few of the full-blooded Mandan left. The culture has changed, the language has changed, and as a nation the Mandan are practically extinct. (Will, Spinden, p. 101). In 1700, the entire section of the Missouri from the Cannonball to the mouth of the Yellowstone was occupied by groups of Mandan, Hidatsa, and Crow. The largest villages were near the mouth of Heart River. The Nuptadi and Nuitadi bands were living on both banks of the Missouri.

The Awigaxa band of Mandan and the Awaxawiband of Hidatsa lived further upstream at the Painted Woods. All these bands practiced agriculture and were less nomadic than the Awatixa band of Hidatsa and the Crow. These groups moved little until the close of the 18th century, when their populations were sharply reduced by smallpox and other epidemics. Each village had an economic unit, hunting and protection for older remaining people, and each had a garden section. The Mandan were divided into bands while living at the Heart River. The bands were Is' tope, meaning "those who tattooed themselves"; Nup'tadi (does not translate), which was the largest linguistic group; Ma'nana'r "those who quarreled"; Nu' itadi "our people"; and Awi' ka-xa (does not translate). These groups combined as the tribe was decimated with each smallpox epidemic. (Bowers, 1950).