

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: D.G. MANDELBAUM  
NOTES OF VISIT TO  
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: SWEET GRASS RESERVE  
NEAR NORTH BATTLEFORD  
SASKATCHEWAN  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: NEAR NORTH BATTLEFORD  
SASKATCHEWAN  
TRIBE/NATION: CREE  
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: JULY 7, 1966  
INTERVIEWER: D.G. MANDELBAUM  
INTERPRETER:  
TRANSCRIBER: HEATHER YAWORSKI  
SOURCE: DR. D.G. MANDELBAUM  
DEPT. OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
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Michael and I arrived in the town of Battleford a little after 2 p.m. and went to the Indian Office. I was interested to note that although there had been a good many changes in the town of North Battleford, the town of Battleford itself was very much as I knew it some thirty years ago. There had been very little building, there was still the same air of dusty shabbiness

about the streets, although I noticed that a new national monument which we have not yet visited, is now drawing tourists.

The Indian Agency is now on the second floor of one of the Post Office buildings. We went up and asked for the Superintendent who is a Plains Cree by the name of Gray Eyes. He was not in, but the man in charge of the office was a Mr. Switzer with whom we talked for a few minutes. He showed us an account of the Sundance which had been typed up and was presumably written by Sydney Fine Day. I thought that it might have been taken from my monograph but in glancing through it quickly I did not recognize anything in particular and it may have been done by either Bob Gardiner (this is the young man who is teaching at some college in New Jersey, at this point I'm not certain of the name) or Zenon last year or the year before.

Switzer took us in to see Mr. Anderson who was in a little cubbyhole off to the side and is presumably in charge of the Sweet Grass and Little Pine Reserves. He has been in service for some fifteen years. He wears a hearing aid and I'm not sure how much of our conversation he got. The main theme he had to tell us was that there had been a move against so-called paternalism on the reserve and so officers like him were now living and working away from the reservation. He thought that there would be a swing back in the other direction before long and they would find themselves working back on the reservation again.

His brief discussion of the Indians carried the familiar overtones of resigned helplessness about the Indians being able to follow the model and the directions that the Office of Indian Affairs had set before them. In this sense nothing has changed very much as far as I could see.

We then called on Mrs. Waters in whose house I lived when I worked on the reservation in 1934 and 1935. After that we went out to the Sweet Grass Reserve. The road is much improved, about half of it being paved and the rest in good gravel condition. While the road was not in very bad condition during the thirties, it was not a good all-weather road as this one now is. There was a sign indicating that we were entering the Sweet Grass Reserve and about sixteen miles from Battleford there is a cluster of houses along the road in one of which Sydney Fine Day lives. Sydney Fine Day is either the grandson

or the great-grandson of Fine Day with whom I worked and is the Plains Cree with whom Zenon has had closest relations. As we came to the place where the houses are located, again things looked very familiar. There were, I believe, four houses there, at some distance one from another, separated, oh, perhaps by fifty yards, two of them a little closer together than that, but the usual non-cultivation around them -- no gardens as is the usual farm pattern in this part of the world -- and no particular care for the appearance of the houses. Here again, the constant admonitions of the past sixty or seventy years have not borne much fruit in this generation either. A brief glance at the houses themselves indicates that

the Indians have not wholeheartedly adopted the ways that they were urged to follow. As I note this, I also note that I myself still carry over the indoctrination I got thirty years ago from the Indian Agents and the people who worked with the Indians on the reserve and this is something I'd better watch if I write up anything more on these people.

There was only one old man visible at the furthest house from where we parked at first. I went over to one of the neater looking houses (note: "neater" something which is very much in the forefront of my perspective at this present moment) and I asked a woman who was inside where I could find Sydney Fine Day. She said that she saw his car there so he must be about. I walked over to the farthest house and asked for him and the old man there motioned to one of the middle houses. At that point Sydney Fine Day came out of one of the houses and came to greet me. He had written to me a year or two ago for the monograph which I sent him and Zenon had spoken to him about me. He also says that he thinks he remembers my earlier visit, although he was only some nine years old at the time.

Sydney Fine Day is one of the leaders of the band, although he seems to be at odds with a major faction. He speaks English quite well, indeed very well, and as we were talking he mentioned that he has little time at the moment because he's preparing himself for a meeting of tribal councillors which is to be held soon. This does not seem to be only Plains Cree councillors but councillors from various Indian tribes in western Canada. Sydney introduced me to the old man who is his father and I noted that he shook hands with me and greeted me in the old fashion by saying "wah wah". One of Sydney's older sisters came over with one of her children. She was I think about fifteen years old when I was last on the reserve.

Sydney had been working in the fields, clearing a field for cultivation, digging up roots with a team of horses. The team was still hitched up and he left it there, came in the car with us to where the Sundance encampment was. We went out on the road and about a mile or two up the road, then turned left about a mile to the encampment. On this ride he told me how difficult it was to be a leader of the people, how he had to make his own living, how he had domestic troubles as well, rather he said "one has domestic troubles," and that there were conflicting demands on him.

At the encampment, a kind of meadow, there were only four or five tents pitched and one canvas tipi. This tipi was not painted. We drove around to the tent where Sydney's mother and his sister and her family are staying. His mother greeted me, she speaks English quite well also, and seemed to remember me well. I think that she will make an excellent respondent. His sister and four of his sister's children were about, the husband of this sister is in the penitentiary.

As we drove up there was one man sitting on top of a little knoll. He came down and turned out to be Paul Chicken, whose father I had known, although I don't believe I had talked with

his father as a respondent. After a bit we went into the tent and I showed them the pictures I had brought along with me. Sydney made certain identifications and his mother made others, especially one old man whom I had known whose name I had forgotten. It was Sapostigan and I remembered immediately that the name means "Shooting Through".

At this time five or six men were erecting a large tipi frame toward the centre of the encampment, but Sydney did not want to go up to them as I suggested. My impression was that he is not one very good terms with at least some of the people there and perhaps with a man, Favel, who is giving the Sundance. I noted also as we drove up that there was a small tripod with a bundle suspended from it. It may be a medicine bundle of the old type. However, I did not at this time come close enough to see.

One of old Mrs. Fine Day's sons drove up in a truck with two other young men. She said that this was her baby. I'm not sure whether he is a full brother of Sydney Fine Day. They had an oil drum full of water in the truck which they wrestled down with the aid of a four-by-four.

While we were in the tent looking at the pictures, a radio was going full blast just outside the tent and there were western songs going on it -- something about "standing tall in the saddle".

Sydney told me that the performance of the Sundance had been revived only within the last two or three years after a lapse of about ten years. I asked whether any of the men wore braids still and he said that there were two very young men, one about sixteen years old, who were wearing braids. One of them in preparation for some kind of exposition. Presumably he would have some role in the exposition as a professional Indian.

We left after perhaps forty-five minutes at the encampment. We were told that the main group of people would gather on July 8 and that the dancing would begin in the evening.