1976

Study of the comparative effects of smallpox on four Indian groups

Carol A. Novotne
*The University of Montana*

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A STUDY OF THE COMPARATIVE EFFECTS OF SMALLPOX
ON FOUR INDIAN GROUPS

by

Carol Novotne
B.F.A., University of Montana, 1970

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
University of Montana
1976

Approved by:

[Signatures]
Chairman, Board of Examiners
Dean, Graduate School

Date
March 25, 1976
Novotne, Carol, M.A., June 1976  Anthropology

A Study of the Comparative Effects of Smallpox on Four Indian Groups (64 pp.)

Director: Floyd W. Sharrock

The objectives of this research were to determine what effect smallpox had on the Blackfeet, Shoshoni, Mandan and Hidatsa of the Upper Missouri Basin; and also to determine what importance the adoptive models played in their reconstruction. The epidemics forced all the remaining Indian populations into rapid acculturation and new alliances. In a weakened condition the groups were easy victims to their enemies and, desperate to regain their numbers, each group reorganized through their kinship models.

The Mandan and Hidatsa did not make much use of their adoptive models, but relied on the lineage and clan affiliation for protection and care of survivors; this did not increase their numbers. After the 1837 epidemic, the Mandan were so completely decimated that they became dependent on the Hidatsa and the white man. The final results were an intermixing of the two cultures to form a small group of Mandan-Hidatsa.

The Blackfeet and the Shoshoni were also severely depopulated by both epidemics but they relied on their sororate and levirate models, and nuclear family structures to replace their members.

The conclusions drawn from the comparison of these four groups were that smallpox strengthened the unilateral descent; and that the Mandan and Hidatsa, who did not adopt in replacements for members lost in the epidemics, were unable to regain the strength and lost their individual cultural identity. The Shoshoni and the Blackfeet, who had their nuclear families and adoptive replacement models to increase the population and repel the enemy, remained separate cultural groups.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Indians of the Upper Missouri River Drainage were some of the last Indian cultures in what is now the United States to experience the devastation of contagious disease. It was not until the mid-1700s that white trade was well established. It was also then that these cultures began to experience such calamities as smallpox, cholera, measles, and numerous other diseases previously unknown to them.

Since disease did arrive so late in this area, there is an abundance of written accounts of these first epidemics. These accounts depict the Indian cultures prior to the epidemics, as well as full records of the death and destruction that followed. They also provide the key to understanding the acculturational process that occurred. By comparing these records of early travellers a strong stress factor like smallpox can be examined and its action on native cultures analyzed.

The greatest amount of material obtained was on the smallpox epidemics of 1781 and 1837 and the cholera epidemics of the late 1840s and 1850s. Since many cultures had already experienced drastic changes before 1840, the
former dates were believed to yield the greatest amount of information pertaining to changes in the original structures.

This paper shows a comparison of how smallpox affected the Blackfeet and the Shoshoni (two hunter-gatherer groups) in contrast to how it affected the Mandan and the Hidatsa (two hunter-horticultural groups). The method was simply to utilize the ethnographic data available to answer two primary questions. First, why did the Mandan and the Hidatsa, as separate cultures, both disappear as a result of smallpox, while the smaller nomadic hunting groups were able to survive with little or no apparent cultural change? Second, of what importance were the different kinship structures and adoptive models in facilitating the change and acculturation? The answers to these questions did not at first seem to be culturally oriented, but rather appeared as an economic function of each group. In many accounts of early fur trappers there was reference to the destruction of the Mandan and Hidatsa resulting from remaining penned up within their palisaded villages in which smallpox was raging.

Before 1800, the stability which the growth of crops had given to the horticultural tribes, and which in pre-horse times had made their way of life more secure than that of the nomadic hunters, had become a handicap. The sedentary villages were surrounded by mobile horsemen who attacked and insulted them or made peace to obtain garden produce in exchange for surplus products of the chase, at will. Penned up in their
compact villages, the horticultural tribes of the Missouri suffered heavy losses from the white man's plague.¹

In direct contrast to this, the Shoshoni and Blackfeet units were composed of only a few persons who were able to simply split off from the village and attempt to outrun the disease. When disease struck in the villages, those persons not already afflicted quickly left. The simple splitting up process was described by Wagner, by Thompson, and in the following quote from Rich.

The Indians had, of course, no remedy. They believed their sole hope of safety lay in flight to some area, could they but find one, which the disease had not yet reached. But the incubation period of smallpox runs from ten to fourteen days, so even as they fled, the fugitives carried the infection with them and by their flight simply spread more widely the slaughter the scourge made. Nor was infection the only cause of death. "These Natives are such a Dastardly kind of people," wrote Walker, "That if any of their Relations should be bad with this disorder, they think they need not look for any Recovery, they just throw them away, and so the poor Soul perishes." The sick were thus left to Starve, and, when the small-pox failed to kill, hunger often did its work instead.²

This break up of the units to escape the disease at first was believed to be the major reason for their superior


survival rates. It then appeared that the economic practices of the hunters allowed them to survive while those of the horticulturalists contributed to their cultural extermination. This, on the contrary, was found to be the least important factor involved in the survival of each group.

When smallpox struck in the villages of the Mandan, they remained within the walls of the village until the disease had run its course. This was partially because they were more or less a Clan-Village, and it was the first priority of the clan to care for its members, and partially because they were in constant fear of attack by the Sioux, the Assiniboine, and other enemies. As long as the Mandan remained together, they were fairly free from enemy attack and were able to hunt for food.

The accounts of these epidemics make the villages appear as disease-ridden and give the impression of a person becoming reinfected by the disease, or the disease growing in strength because of this enclosure. It is important to understand that these accounts were reports made in virtual ignorance of infectious disease and its properties. It is now known that once a person has had smallpox, he inherits a lasting immunity and will never be reinfected, no matter how long he remains in contact with victims or bodies. Smallpox does not grow in intensity, but presents itself in one of three types: Variola-Major, Variola-Minor, and
In comparison with this, the small groups that divided up often reduced their chance for survival. The account of the Blackfeet who immediately split up when the disease was first discovered, goes on to tell how those who fled discovered a day or two later that they had carried the disease with them. Once the disease killed off these small handfuls, it left those who would normally have recovered too sick to find food, shelter or protection. Often only the women and a few children would survive with no men to hunt for game; the winter elements soon took a severe toll. When these hunting groups rejoined in the spring their numbers were often as badly decimated as those who remained stationary.

The questions are not answered by placing the main focus on differing economic systems. The Mandan and Hidatsa remained in their villages not because they were "sedentary" and not wholly because of the crops, but mainly because of clan responsibility and the fear of stronger enemies.

A second purpose of this paper was an attempt to clarify the distorted picture of Indian cultures. Smallpox was much more than a disease which depopulated Indian

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groups. Many of the terms, definitions, and pictures we have of Indian cultures have been altered by disease and white contact. Before the horse was introduced a whole style of dress, warfare, politics, etc., was functioning. However, we view most Indian cultures as characterized by mounted riders, naked except for feathers and paint. Like the horse, the effects of disease greatly changed the Indian cultures. We should not think of Indian cultures as beginning after 1700.

Smallpox was probably the single greatest acculturational pressure to befall the Indians and yet its effects have remained relatively unstudied. The only mention of smallpox, or any epidemics for that matter, is to simply acknowledge them and their destruction.

Depopulation owing to European diseases had the first and most devastating social effects. Samuel Hearne, one of the Early Hudson's Bay Company explorers, reported that in one year, sometime before 1873, nine-tenths of the Chipewyan Indian population was wiped out by smallpox.\(^5\)

Disease is mentioned only in connection with depopulation of the Indian cultures, and not with any connection to the cultural devastation.

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CHAPTER II

THE SHOSHONI

Since the Shoshoni have the least complicated social organization of the groups researched for this paper, they have been selected as the starting point. Carling Malouf's terminology was used in referring to the Shoshoni of the Southern Rockies as having a Kin-Clique organization. The Kin-Clique is a form of social organization even simpler than the band. It is composed of a small group of persons, mostly all related. It ranges in size from a single family with a few adhering suitors or followers to 150 members. Rarely does a Kin-Clique reach a size of over 50 persons. When large seasonal gatherings of plant foods or small game hunts occur, several of these Kin-Clique groups would join together for the harvest. Otherwise, the Kin-Clique units remain rather small and separated from each other. The members of these small groups have a highly individual nature and each person looks out for himself and his immediate family. There is little, if any, concept of group

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authority i.e., chief, leader, and even those who have gained prestige have little inclination to lead others.\(^7\) It is extremely difficult for these Kin-Clique groups to think of themselves as being united with anyone beyond their own Kin-Clique.

These groups subsisted by hunting and gathering. The men hunted buffalo, deer, elk, and small plains animals when needed. The women were responsible for processing the kill into food, clothes, and other utensils. The women were also responsible for gathering the roots, berries, and other plant food necessary to supplement their diet. When plant products ran short in mid-winter and meat became hard to get, these small groups would come to trade for corn, often traveling long distances to trade with the Mandan or the Hidatsa on the Upper Missouri.\(^8\) By mid-winter, a rich supply of animal produce had been compiled for trade; buffalo hides, dried meat, leggings, and ornamental robes and necklaces of shells were among the valuable trade items brought in by the Shoshoni. The Mandan often took advantage of these small groups who were in need of their produce,


\(^8\)Thwaites, 6:118, 23:278.
and left the Shoshoni with only their loin cloths. It was not the intent of the author to give an account of the material aspects of the Shoshoni nor to elaborate on the division of labor except where it played a major part in the comparison or was directly affected by smallpox.

The Shoshoni were patrilineal and residence after marriage was rather nebulous; if it was more practical to reside with one's wife's family, then residence would be there. However, after a few years a man could choose to leave to form his own Kin-Clique, to join another group, or even rejoin his father's group.

The Shoshoni ranged over a territory quite immense in comparison to other Indian groups. Perhaps this was an off-shoot of the social organization and previous migrational tendencies. These small groups ranged from the Lower Wyoming border along the Rocky Mountains, over to the territory of the Mandan and even up into Canada.

The Shoshoni were Uto-Aztecan speakers who migrated from the Great Basin into Montana. Their social organization gave them an extremely flexible structure in a hunting economy; its small size allowed easy movement to follow game and few members among whom to divide the game. At the same time, it made them more vulnerable to attack by stronger Indian groups. In 1781, when smallpox first
reached the interior of Montana, an extremely hostile relationship existed between the Shoshoni and the Blackfeet.

The Shoshoni had moved slowly into Blackfeet territory because of the horse. Warfare was a nearly continuous practice between the two groups, each side vowing revenge and renewing the hatred for the other. The Shoshoni were able to compensate for their small numbers with the advantage of maneuverability and shock.

To compensate for the many hazards of their economic and warfare practices, the Shoshoni had many safeguards to their family structure. These were in the form of social obligations to care for the needy members of the Kin-Clique or in more well-defined adoptive models. The sororate and levirate substitution models were also incorporated as a precaution against having too many single spouse families adding to the burden of the whole group. These replacement methods were common to most all the hunting and gathering groups. Among the Blackfeet these models were elaborated on and their importance to the group, as well as the Kin-Clique organization, will be explained. However, before examining the purpose of these adoptive models the chapter on the Blackfeet will be presented to avoid the repetition of the exact functions of the sororate and the levirate and other social obligations that operated in the same manner in both hunting groups.
When smallpox first struck the Shoshoni their camps were reported totally lifeless. Those who were healthy enough to travel took their families and fled; but few escaped and Shoshoni numbers were reduced by more than one-half. When the disease had run its course, the survivors returned to a former site and made an attempt at reorganizing their people.®

The biggest effect of smallpox on the Shoshoni was an overall change in the social organization. They moved from a Kin-Clique toward a larger, more complex social organization. This process started with the 1781 epidemic and was completed and well established before the second epidemic in 1837. Numerous accounts show that in 1845 the Shoshoni were massing into large groups and uniting into larger villages. Population figures at this time were very subjective, depending on the person making the observations and whether they counted individuals, souls, lodges, or estimated using the number of young warriors as a basis for their figures. ¹⁰ Their population estimates ranged from 600 to 2500 in 1845.¹¹ These large populations of Shoshoni were located along the Montana Rockies. Their

®Thompson, pp. 336-338.


¹¹Thwaites, 30:247.
migration, hunting, and protection of the village became more clearly united efforts. This type of unity rarely took place in the Kin-Clique social organization prior to the epidemics.
CHAPTER III

THE BLACKFEET

The Blackfeet were a strong group of hunter-gatherers feared by their neighbors as aggressive warriors. Like the Shoshoni, they followed the bison herds. The hunting was man's occupation while the women were left to supplement the meat diet by collecting plant produce.

In the early 1700s the Blackfeet ranged from Canada down along the flanks of the Rockies just inside the Montana border. They were Algonkian speakers forced westward by the colonization of the East. The Blackfeet had a social organization more complex than the Kin-Clique of the Shoshoni, consisting of numbers ranging from 150 up to 400. The exact size at this time was unknown; however, after 1781 the total population of the Blackfeet was only 400 souls.

Authority or leadership occurred in the form of prestige and precept, or demonstrated by excelling as a

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12 In the late 1600s and the early 1700s the Blackfeet had just obtained the horse, at this time they were still mostly in Canada and around the Glacier Park area as described by Thwaites, 5:225.

It was not until the Blackfeet began trading with the Chipawa and the Cree that they were able to dominate the more mobile Shoshoni. It was from these trading partners that they obtained the gun and were subsequently able to steal the horse from the Shoshoni. With this new weapon they were able to equalize the balance of power and earn their reputation as warriors to be feared.

The Blackfeet were bilateral and placed a great deal of importance on the nuclear family. Not only was descent reckoned through the male, he was also the provider and protector of his family. Without him the family was in jeopardy. It was through his deeds and influence that his wife and family were recognized, and it was also through him that the family maintained its position within the group. His social prestige was shared by his family and relatives.

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I have deliberately attempted not to elaborate on the politics and the leadership of the Blackfeet at this time, mainly because the eventual change to chief leadership was not produced by smallpox. A successful warrior was looked upon as experienced and therefore worth emulating. His example was followed not by force, but out of respect for his accomplishments. This changed as white contact grew. It was normal practice of the white traders to seek out the chief of a village to bargain with, and once he was established trading would be done only through that person for that village. The concept of chief was totally European and it was imposed in order to deal with a social structure unfamiliar to the traders.
If the father was killed the family was left without a provider, but there were several ways a family was protected in such cases. Usually a widow would just remarry. If she did not remarry, or until she did, she was cared for by other members of the group. A great deal of social prestige was gained by sharing with the old, the sick, and the widowed; meat was always divided among the needy. Another way open to a fatherless (or motherless) family was to replace that member through the social obligation of the sororate and levirate. For example, the brother of the dead man had a strong obligation to marry his brother's widow and care for that family. If the mother died, the obligation of her role fell on her unmarried sister. This was also the case among the Shoshoni.

The functions of a wife in a hunting and gathering economy were essential since the man was the provider and the woman acted as the processor. If the family was to succeed, both the husband and the wife needed to work in harmony. Since a wife was so important, especially if a man wanted his independence, most young men would marry shortly after they obtained the proper status. Once a man proved himself to be an able hunter and warrior, he was

\footnote{The term for father's brother was father and he was closely tied to the family of his brother.}
qualified for marriage which was arranged by the families involved. A person could marry anyone not in father's patrilineage. Cross-cousin marriage was the preferred form since it allowed a consistent exchange pattern. This exchange allowed all the sisters of one family to remain more or less together without breaking any taboos. It also united the patrilineal groups in closer cooperation. The importance and influence of the nuclear family was extended, not reduced, when daughters married in this manner and new relationships and ties were established with other families.

The important point here is that the whole kinship system incorporated checks and balances to insure the continuance of the family and, indirectly, the form of social organization. The marriage patterns, the sororate and levirate, and other social obligations were all part of a system designed to maintain the social organization in a hunting and gathering economy.

When smallpox broke out among the Blackfeet for the first time in 1781 these safeguards to the family structure were forced to include extreme measures. Never before had any really contagious disease been experienced by the Blackfeet and now the whole group was threatened. The adoptive

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models set up to protect the family were not proving effective for so great a disaster. Previously only a few warriors had been lost in raids and were easily replaced by the levirate, but now there were hundreds of dead: men, women, and children.

David Thompson gave a first hand account of how one group of Piegan, one of the three major groups of the Blackfeet, enlarged upon their adoptive models to overcome the problem of reducing the devastating loss. In 1781 the Piegan were on the Red Deer River which joins with the Bow River to form the South Saskatchewan. An excellent account of the continuing spread of smallpox and the resulting peace and intermixing of traditional enemies for repopulation is stated by Thompson.

While we have these weapons, the Snake Indians have none, but what few they sometimes take from one of our small camps which they have destroyed, and they have no Traders among them. We thus continued to advance through the fine plains to the Stag River when death came over us all, and swept away more than half of us by the Small pox, of which we knew nothing until it brought death among us. We caught it from the Snake Indians. Our Scouts were out for our security, when some returned and informed us of a considerable camp which was too large to attack and something very suspicious about it; from a high knowl they had a good view of the camp, but saw none of the men hunting, or going about; there were a few Horses, but no one came to them, and a herd of Bisons (were)

\[17\] Novotne, pp. 17, 18, 22, 61, 116-117.
feeding close to the camp with other herds near. This somewhat alarmed us as a stratagem of War; and our Warriors thought this was strong enough to offer a desperate resistance, the other would come to their assistance and overpower us as had been once done by them, and in which we lost many of our men.

The council ordered the Scouts to return and go beyond this camp, and be sure there was no other. In the mean time we advanced our camp; the scouts returned and said no other tents were near, and the camp appeared in the same state as before. Our Scouts had been going too much about their camp and were seen; they expected what would follow, and all those that could walk, as soon as night came on, went away. Next morning at the dawn of day, we attacked the Tents, and with our sharp flat daggers and knives, cut through the tents and entered for the fight; but our war whoop instantly stopt, our eyes were appalled with terror; there was no one to fight with but the dead and the dying, each a mass of corruption. We did not touch them, but left the tents, and held a council on what was to be done. We all thought the Bad Spirit had made himself master of the camp and destroyed them. It was agreed to take some of the best of the tents, and any other plunder that was clean and good, which we did, and also took away the few Horses they had, and returned to our camp.

The second day after this dreadful disease broke out in our camp, and spread from one tent to another as if the Bad Spirit carried it. We had no belief that one Man could give it to another, any more than a wounded Man could give his wound to another. We did not suffer so much as those that were near the river, into which they rushed and died. We had only a little brook, and about one third of us died, but in some of the other camps there were tents in which every one died. When at length it left us, and we moved about to find our people, it was no longer with the song and the dance; but with tears, shrieks, and howlings of despair for those who would never return to us. War was no longer thought of, and we had enough to do to hunt and make provision for our families, for in our sickness we had consumed all our dried provisions; but the Bisons and Red Deer were gone, we did not see one half of what was before, whither they had gone we could not tell, we believed the Good Spirit had forsaken us, and allowed the Bad Spirit to become our Master. What little we could spare we offered to the Bad Spirit to let us alone and go to our enemies. To
the Good Spirit we offered feathers, branches of trees, and sweet smelling grass. Our hearts were low and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people. To hunt for our families was our sole occupation and kill Beavers, Wolves and Foxes to trade our necessaries; and we thought of War no more, and perhaps would have made peace with them for they had suffered dreadfully as well as us and had left all this fine country of the Bow River to us. 18

The dates in David Thompson's Narrative place this occurrence in 1786, while Saskatchewan Journals put it at 1781. The 1781 year is cited more often as the correct time of this occurrence.

Humbled by the plague, the Piegan considered making peace with the Shoshoni, little knowing that their enemies had suffered even more severe losses than they. The weakened and fearful Shoshoni withdrew southward, leaving the rich Bow River country to the Piegan. This peace continued for two to three years until a raiding party of Snakes (Shoshoni) struck the Piegan camp, killing all the inhabitants.

We were quiet for about two or three winters, and although we several times saw their young men on the scout we took no notice of them, as we all require young men, to look about the country that our families may sleep in safety and that we may know where to hunt. But the snake Indians are a bad people, even their allies the Saleesh and Kootenaes cannot trust them, and do not camp with them, no one believes what they say, and (they) are very treacherous; every one says they are rightly named Snake People, for their tongue is forked like that of a Rattle Snake, from which they have their name. I think it was about the third falling of the leaves of the trees, that five of our tents pitched away to the valleys of the Rocky

18 Thompson, pp. 336-338.
Mountains, up a branch of this River (the Bow) to hunt the Big Horn Deer (Mountain Sheep) as their horns make fine large bowls, and are easily cleaned; they were to return on the first snow. All was quiet and we waited for them until the snow lay on the ground, when we got alarmed for their safety; and about thirty warriors set off to seek them. It was only two days march, and in the evening they came to the camp, it had been destroyed by a large party of Snake Indians, who left their marks of snakes heads painted black on sticks they had set up. The bodies were all there with the Women and Children, but scalped and partly devoured by the Wolves and Dogs.

The party on their return related the fate of our people, and other camps on hearing the news came and joined us. A War Tent was made and the Chiefs and Warriors assembled, the red pipes were filled with Tobacco, but before being lighted an old Chief arose, and beckoning to the Man who had the fire to keep back, addressed us, saying, I am an old man, my hair is white and (I) have seen much; formerly we were healthy and strong and many of us, now we are few to what we were, and the great sickness may come again. We were fond of War, even our Women flattered us to war, and nothing was thought of but scalps for singing and dancing. Now think of what has happened to us all, by destroying each other and doing the work of the Bad Spirit; the Great Spirit became angry with our making the ground red with blood: he called to the Bad Spirit to punish and destroy us, but in doing so not to let one spot of the ground, to be red with blood, and the Bad Spirit did it as we all know. Now we must revenge the death of our people and make the Snake Indians feel the effects of our guns, and other weapons; but the young women must all be saved, and if any has a babe at the breast it must not be taken from her, nor hurt; all the Boys and Lads that have no weapons must not be killed, but brought to our camps, and be adopted amongst us, to be our people, and make us more numerous and stronger than we are. Thus the Great Spirit will see that when we make war we kill only those who are dangerous to us, and make no more ground red with blood than we can help, and the Bad Spirit will have no more power on us. Everyone signified his assent to the old Chief, and since that time, it has sometimes been acted on, but more with the Women than the Boys, and while it weakens our enemies makes us stronger. A red pipe was now lighted and the
same old Chief taking it, gave three whiffs to the Great Spirit praying him to be kind to them and not forsake them, then three whiffs to the Sun, the same to the Sky, the Earth and the four Winds; the Pipe was passed round, and other pipes lighted.¹⁹

This rather long quote clearly shows that the women and children of their most hated enemies, the Shoshoni, were adopted by the Blackfeet to help replenish their own ranks. These captured women and children were placed within the Blackfeet culture according to the previously established adoptive models. The sororate and levirate models were used for placement of these captives in families needing a mother or children. The Blackfeet had never before needed to adopt people in such large numbers, but smallpox forced them to enlarge upon their previous models to replenish the population as quickly as possible. The longer they remained with insufficient force to repel their enemies the more untenable their position.

The Shoshoni also used the adoptive replacement models but from all indications not to the same extent as the Blackfeet. The Shoshoni had always been small in number and when the remaining Kin-Cliques regrouped following the epidemic, they more or less rounded out their new groups. After this regrouping there were fewer Kin-Cliques but they averaged about the same size as they had before the epidemic.

¹⁹Thompson, pp. 338-339.
There are few references to the sororate-levirate models being used by the Shoshoni, and when found they never indicate the large scale adoption used by the Blackfeet. This does not preclude that they may have used their adoptive models to the same extent as the Blackfeet, but only that such evidence was never recorded. This may be explained by the inclination of few trappers and traders in 1781 to consider the accounts of the Shoshoni, whom they considered as treacherous, to be trustworthy.
CHAPTER IV

THE MANDAN

The Mandan were first contacted in 1691 by an agent of Hudson's Bay Company when they were located near the Heart River in North Dakota. They were described as peaceful and friendly toward the white man. The original size is hard to determine since statistics differ from source to source, but Thwaites in *Early Western Travels* writes:

> The Mandan were one of the most famous of the Western tribes, because of their strategic position at the most northerly point of the Missouri River, not far from British fur-trading region of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan rivers....Lewis and Clark wintered among the Mandan (1804-05), and found them in two villages not far from the site of Bismark, North Dakota. They then numbered about two thousand, but had been much more numerous, for remains of nine abandoned villages were noted by the explorers.\(^2\)

It is estimated that the Mandan lost two-thirds of their population to the smallpox epidemic of 1781.

The Mandan were hunting-horticulturist; that is, they had a dual economy composed of both hunting—a male occupation—and crop-growing—primarily a female occupation. Despite stereotypic classification of the Mandan as sedentary horticulturists, they were active hunters who relied heavily on the bison. They also moved seasonally to

\(^2\)Thwaites, 5:114, 22:34, 27:166.

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one of several winter locations in which game was plentiful for winter needs.

The garden produce not only supplemented their diet, but also allowed the Mandan to benefit from a more or less stable food supply. Corn could also be traded for a wealth of material that the Mandan did not produce. This was a great advantage to the Mandan; they grew strong and powerful, manipulating their enemies through the use of the corn trade. This trade began to decline after 1781 when smallpox destroyed their numbers.

Within a period of only 56 years the Mandan went from being the strongest Indian group on the upper Missouri to the point of being nearly exterminated. Yet a great deal more than just depopulation had taken place. Whole patterns of life were changed and the culture underwent extreme stress in a struggle for survival.

Since trade contact was well established with the Mandan long before smallpox first hit, an abundance of written material allows not only a picture of the destruction of the epidemics and the chaos that followed, but also a

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\(^{21}\) As population estimates vary, so do estimates of fatalities from smallpox. See George Catlin, North American Indians (161 Broadway: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), 2:257; and Novotné, pp. 38, 40-42.
rare insight into the lifeways before smallpox. This material on the Mandan is the only existing written record showing the aboriginal lifeway and the post-epidemic effects and, therefore, is presented here in detail. A brief account of those cultural traits that were distinctly changed as a result of the epidemics will be given attention. In this manner a picture of the original patterns of descent, inheritance, marriage, family structure, clan importance, etc., can be compared with the changes in the culture produced by smallpox.

The following research on the Mandan is divided into three parts: (1) the lifeways prior to disease, (2) epidemics of 1781 and 1837, and (3) effects produced by these epidemics. By dividing this material into three sections it can be better organized and more clearly stated. Since the two major epidemics were only 56 years apart, less than two generations, it is hard to separate the results of each. The first epidemic produced major changes in almost every area of the Mandan social structure. The second epidemic seemed only to compound the desperate measures undertaken as a result of the first epidemic. The specific dates will be given for the change or alteration being discussed, but both epidemics will be considered together to avoid redundancy.
Mandan Lifeways Prior to Contagious Disease

The Mandan were the most numerous of all the upper Missouri groups and certainly considered themselves to be so. It was difficult for them to accept the idea that the white man composed a group of persons more numerous than they. The name Mandan means "people or men," suggesting they considered themselves far superior to any other group in every way. Their only true allies were the Hidatsa, with whom they shared many cultural traits. Co-residence with the Hidatsa occurred, especially for hunting or raiding of common enemies. Intermarriage between the Hidatsa and Mandan took place as a political function for renewing alliance bonds. The Mandan carefully maintained their cultural identity, by guarding against others speaking their language or knowing their sacred rituals. They spoke thirteen languages but the Hidatsa, their only allies, knew only a few words of Mandan. The Mandan had only one real ally, but they had a wealth of enemies as a result of fleecing trade partners in hard times, as well as their cocky attitude.

Their size allowed their dominance over many smaller hunting groups. Their closest enemy geographically was the Assiniboine, allies with the Cree. The Mandan knew the Assiniboine as poor warriors, much inferior to the Sioux who were also great antagonists of the Mandan, but who were
often too far away to be considered a significant threat. It was not until after 1837 that the Sioux pushed north into Mandan territory and became their most feared enemy.

One of the earliest dates on the location of the Mandan before the epidemics came from La Verendrye who remained among the Mandan for several weeks in 1738-39. At this time there were five villages along the Missouri. In 1757 Bougainville spoke of seven fortified villages. In 1797-1798 David Thompson reported the same number. Maximilian based his statistics on a narrative of an aged man who stated that the Mandan were once a numerous people but had lately become diseased. They had once inhabited as many as thirteen villages and perhaps more. All these villages were located between the Little Missouri and the Heart River. It is quite clear that the Mandan controlled the northern Missouri in strength and trade until 1781.

The Mandan were composed of thirteen clans. The clans were divided between moieties with mutual obligations but possessing its own eagle trapping territory. The most important functions of the moiety were the regulation of

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marriage, the care of the dead of the opposite moieties, and the division of meat.

The clans had names corresponding to the name of the villages. In other words, a village might be considered a Clan-Village. Each distinct local village was composed of one clan, and a man would identify himself as being a descendant of a specific village. Maximilian gives supporting evidence for clans and Clan-Villages in 1832.

They call themselves Numangkake (i.e., men), and if they wish to particularize their descent, they add the name of the village whence they came originally. Some, for instance, called themselves Sipuske-Numangkake, the men of the pheasant or prairie hens, from the village Sipuske-Mikte, pheasant village; others Moto-Numangkake, the men of the bear, from the village of the Mato-Mikte, bear village, etc. etc. ²³

These clans and functions were also observed by Charbonneau, and later by Morgan and Lowie. ²⁴ Clan affiliation was important for a man and far outweighed any other social organization unit to which he belonged. For a man the family took second place to the clan since he was loosely attached to the family and his children were part of his wife's lineage and clan. "The father would explain that

²³Thwaites, 23:253.

the members of his own clan were the son's 'fathers' and that he should seek their advice also.\textsuperscript{25} This quote shows the position the father's clan had in relation to father's progeny. Even if the father moved away, father's clan still had responsibilities to his children.

Clans and moieties were exogamous. Clans were ranked, some considered to be far superior to others because of their right to hold specific important ceremonies such as the WaxikEna or the OKipa ceremony. Each clan had important clan ceremonial bundles that were exchanged in these ceremonies. However, the clan's most important function was to protect and care for clan members. The clan was responsible for all its members. It punished those who broke the rules. Hunting was done with other clan members and much instruction in the hunt, as well as in warfare, was received through the clan. The clan was responsible for retrieving the skull of a dead son if his father was a member of their clan.\textsuperscript{26}

It was the duty of the clan to assist its own members. It was the clan's duty to care for its old people having no blood children. During the smallpox epidemic of 1837, women went through the Village and gathered the orphans of their clan, who were taken into their lodges to be reared. Old people were invited too to be fed and clothed by younger members of their own


\textsuperscript{26}Bowers, pp. 19, 30, 32-33.
When returning from a successful hunt, young men would offer meat to the old people who met them at the outskirts of the village. One was expected to offer meat to old people of the same clan without being asked for it.

The Mandan were matrilocal and matrilineal. Descent was reckoned through the female with the oldest living grandmother as the head of the lineage (and later in time, as head of the household). Her property was inherited by her oldest sister. This property consisted of garden plots and household items prior to 1781.

According to pre-epidemic cultural patterns, marriage was arranged by the parents of the bride and the prospective in-laws. Although moieties were exogamous, it was considered better to marry within one's moiety than to marry outside the Mandan. Bride price was paid and the new husband lived within the lodge of his wife's parents. Once a son-in-law had proved himself to be a good hunter, or fathered a child, he could become a member in good standing in his mother's clan and move into a lodge of his own. The original residence patterns are believed to be as related in Maximilian where reference was given to separate lodges per family, which was composed of a man and his wife. After marriage they lived with the husband's father-in-law and then later moved to their own earth hut. Reference to the fact that

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27 Bowers, p. 31.

28 Bowers, p. 31.
the son-in-law lived with his wife's parents is also established in many records, "The master of the hut was absent, but his wife, daughter, and son-in-law, received us very kindly."^{29}

The term "family" is hard to define for the Mandan culture since the position of father was rather detached. Father was included as a member of the extended family which also included mother and her daughters, but excluded her sons of marriageable age. Once a son qualified for marriage he was ousted, and lived with members of his father's clan which was often in another village. Once he had begun showing interest in a particular female, her parents would arrange a marriage and the son-in-law would live with his wife's parents on a trial basis.

The daughters were always considered part of the lineage and the family, if the term family can be said to really apply to the Mandan.^{30} Father, however, was in a rather precarious position and took very little part in raising his children. Only occasionally did he teach his son a few important aspects of hunting and warfare, the

^{29}Thwaites, 23:278; 24:267, 280; 24:37, 40.

^{30}Paul Bohannan discusses the term "nuclear family" and it's uses in relation to the consanguine kinship group without the affines included. Bohannan, Social Anthropology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), pp. 72-74.
largest share of instruction came from mother's brother. The grandparents were part of the children's lineage and clan and played an influential role in the child's development; they were also responsible for discipline. Inheritance, as previously mentioned, was from mother's brother to his sister's children which kept all ritual and important sacred bundles within the clan.

Father was also easily divorced in the pre-epidemic period. He needed only anger the spouse or her lineage. Divorce was easy and common and so was remarriage. Yet the father's clan still held special obligations toward those children fathered by a member of their clan, even if mother was remarried many times.

Polygamy, which fit well into the hunting horticulturist economy, occurred prior to the first epidemic. It provided more women with husbands and created a higher birth rate as well as allowed the production of the large amount of goods needed by a prosperous man. If a man was to give away gifts and spread his influence through his wives and relatives, it was their responsibility to furnish him with the goods necessary to be so extravagant. In order to keep the lineage and the clan affiliation straight and exist in harmony, most polygamous marriages were sororal. A prosperous and prestigious man had first marital rights to the younger sisters of his first wife. Unfortunately there is
no evidence as to what type of residence accommodated these polygamous unions prior to 1781.\textsuperscript{31}

The term "matrilineal extended family" is used to describe the family structure of the Mandan before 1837 and probably was the same family system that appeared before 1781. The extended family was a small economical unit which centered mainly around the mother. The father's position was weak, divorce was common, and often many males took on that role of father in a single family. The son was excluded from the family at marriageable age, at which time he left for another Clan-Village to seek a wife. The daughters brought in their prospective husbands, but only for a trial period and then they moved out into their own lodges. As the new family units were set up, the grandparents were given the choice of moving in with one of her daughter's families. The extended family then might consist of one or more grandparents, the mother, father, and the children depending upon their age and marital status.

Before 1837 the lineage was the most important affiliation for a Mandan woman. As with her clan, she was born into her lineage and would always remain a part of it, as would her children and grandchildren. Her lineage attachment far outweighed her extended family ties since her

\textsuperscript{31}Thwaites, 23:278; Catlin, p. 133; Bowers, p. 50.
husband was an outsider from another clan and lineage; her major source of protection and belonging was primarily issued from her lineage and secondly from her clan.

The lineage had many functions, many of which were minor social ceremonial functions; others dealt with inheritance of property and possessions within the lineage. The most important function of both the clan and the lineage was to protect its members. Revenge was enacted by clans and/or lineages, and differences and arguments settled by lineages. All the orphans, the sick, and the old were cared for by the lineages to which they belonged. This was often a great burden and when the pressure became too great for the lineage, the clan took over these duties. A widow or divorcee could count on her lineage to accept her willingly and care for her as long as need be. There was no immediate pressure put on a widow to remarry.

The adoption of small children taken prisoner on raids increased the clan. This, however, was very rare and only one mention of adoption of this type was found after 1837. This type of adoption is believed to have been infrequent, as warring parties rarely met in heavy conflict. Most battles were in retaliation for raids or horse-stealing, amounting to little more than a light skirmish. The Mandan after 1837 hardly had the power to attack a village, much less make

32Bowers, p. 74.
off with any women and children. Maximilian stated that few prisoners were ever adopted, or even left alive, due to the revenge of widowed women on the prisoners when they met at the outskirts of the village.\(^33\)

The two most common methods of adoption have been amply recorded. The first was the adopting of a "son" to a medicine man for purposes of carrying on his powers, or adoption of a "son" or "father" when a person entered a new society or group.\(^34\) The other common form of adoption was usually between Clan-Villages in order to promote unity. This was purely political and it occurred many times between the Mandan and the Hidatsa for the purpose of securing peace and renewing alliances.

The sororate and levirate were other forms of adoption in which a relative (brother or sister) replaced the deceased if she or he died leaving the burden of a family. This has already been elaborated on in the section on the Blackfeet and Shoshoni.

Marrying a brother's widow was considered the honorable way of providing for his children, in which case man lived between two lodges. A women having several brothers rarely married her deceased husband's brother, as it frequently meant sharing a husband with women of a different clan and household (lineage). In the

\(^33\)Thwaites, 23:351.

\(^34\)Thwaites, 23:320.
event of separation or death the children were provided for by the mother's household (lineage), with the father's household (lineage) generally disregarding them.\textsuperscript{35}

Rather then give up the advantages and protection of her clan a woman would remain unmarried.

Both the levirate and the sororate were permissible. When a man married to the older sister died, a younger brother had first chance to marry the widow, which he could do with only a token payment. Such marriages were highly regarded. This was rarely done, since, with a shortage of men, the younger brother was usually already married to several women. When a wife died, the husband could claim one of her younger sisters as a wife, and she seldom refused, especially, if her sister had small children.\textsuperscript{36}

These quotes show the problems involved in the sororate and the levirate forms of adoption.

\textbf{The Epidemics of 1781 and 1837}

Accounts of the 1781 epidemic among the Mandan are quite scarce. However, they depict the same sort of horror found in the 1837 epidemic, the greatest difference being the widespread ignorance of the disease during the first epidemic. By 1837 the Indians had learned to disperse from the source of infection. This, of course, did not alleviate the disease if it was already among them. Prior to 1837 smallpox was thought to be punishment for all their wars and bloodshed and they simply waited out the end of the

\textsuperscript{35}Bowers, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{36}Bowers, p. 83.
plague. By 1837 most of the Indian groups realized that the disease was introduced by whites, resulting in hatred and revenge.

Only two sources on the destruction of smallpox will be quoted since the fact of the holocaust does not need elaborate documentation. Maximilian wrote on the destruction of the Mandan on June 6, 1837.

NEW ORLEANS, June 6, 1838. The southern parts of the United States, particularly Florida, Alabama, and Louisiana, are as healthy as can be wished; there has been no appearance of the yellow fever, and even at the Havannah only a few isolated cases have occurred. During the autumn, winter, and spring, the small-pox has carried off many victims among the whites, and thousands of the Indians; but it has now wholly disappeared in the territory of the Union, in consequence of a general vaccination of persons of all ages. On the other hand, we have, from the trading posts on the western frontier of the Missouri, the most frightful accounts of the ravages of the small-pox among the Indians. The destroying angel has visited the unfortunate sons of the wilderness with terrors never before known, and has converted the extensive hunting grounds, as well as the peaceful settlements of those tribes, into desolate and boundless cemeteries. The number of the victims within a few months is estimated at 30,000, and the pestilence is still spreading. The warlike spirit which but lately animated the several Indian tribes, and but a few months ago gave reason to apprehend the breaking-out of a sanguinary war, is broken. The mighty warriors are now the prey of the greedy wolves of the prairie, and the few survivors, in mute despair, throw themselves on the pity of the Whites, who, however, can do but little to help them. The vast preparations for the protection of the western frontier are superfluous: another arm has undertaken the defence of the white inhabitants of the frontier; and the funeral torch, that lights the red man to his dreary grave, has become the auspicious star of the advancing settler, and of the roving trader of the white race.
The disease first broke out about the 15th of June, 1837, in the village of the Mandans (a few miles below the American fort, Leavenworth) from which it spread, in all directions, with unexampled fury. The character of the disease was as appalling as the rapidity of the propagation. Among the remotest tribes of the Assiniboins from fifty to one hundred died daily. The patient, when first seized, complains of dreadful pains in the head and back, and in a few hours he is dead; the body immediately turns black, and swells to thrice its natural size. In vain were hospitals fitted up in Fort Union, and the whole stock of medicine exhausted. For many weeks together our workmen did nothing but collect the dead bodies and bury them in large pits; but since the ground is frozen we are obliged to throw them in the river. The ravages of the disorder were most frightful among the Mandans, where it first broke out. That once powerful tribe, which by accumulated disasters, had already been reduced to 1500 souls, was exterminated, with the exception of thirty persons. Their neighbours, the Bigbellied Indians, and the Ricarees, were out on a hunting excursion at the time of the breaking-out of the disorder, so that it did not reach them till a month later; yet half the tribe was already destroyed on the 1st of October, and the disease continued to spread. Very few of those who were attacked recovered their health; but when they saw all their relations buried, and the pestilence still raging with unabated fury among the remainder of their countrymen, life became a burden to them, and they put an end to their wretched existence, either with their knives and muskets, or by precipitating themselves from the summit of the rock near their settlement. The prairie all around is a vast field of death, covered with unburied corpses, and spread, for miles, pestilence and infection. The Bigbellied Indians and the Ricarees, lately amounting to 4000 souls, were reduced to less than half. The Assiniboins, 9000 in number, roaming over a hunting territory to the north of the Missouri, as far as the trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, are, in the literal sense of the expression, nearly exterminated. They, as well as the Crows and Blackfeet, endeavoured to fly in all directions, but the disease everywhere pursued them. At last every feeling of mutual compassion and tenderness seems to have disappeared. Every one avoided the others. Women and children wandered about in the prairie seeking a scanty existence. The accounts of the situation of the
Blackfeet are awful. The inmates of above 100 of their tents are already swept away. They are the bravest and the most crafty of all the Indians, dangerous and implacable to their enemies, but faithful and kind to their friends. But very lately we are seriously apprehended that a terrible war with them was at hand, and that they would unite the whole of their remaining strength against the whites. Every day brought accounts of new armaments, and of a loudly expressed spirit of vengeance towards the whites: but the small-pox cast them down, the brave as well as the feeble; and those who were once seized by this infection never recovered. It is affirmed that several bands of warriors, who were on their march to attack the fort, all perished by the way, so that not one survived to convey the intelligence to their tribe. Thus, in the course of a few weeks, their strength and their courage were broken, and nothing was to be heard but the frightful wailings of death in the camp. Every thought of war was dispelled, and the few that are left are as humble as famished dogs. No language can picture the scene of desolation which the country presents. In whatever direction we go, we see nothing but melancholy wrecks of human life. The tents are still standing on every hill, but no rising smoke announces the presence of human beings, and no sounds but the croaking of the raven and the howling of the wolf interrupt the fearful silence. The above accounts do not complete the terrible intelligence which we receive. There is scarcely a doubt that the pestilence will spread to the tribes in and beyond the Rocky Mountains, as well as to the Indians in the direction of Santa Fe and Mexico. It seems to be irrevocably written in the book of fate, that the race of red men shall be wholly extirpated in the land in which they ruled the undisputed masters, till the rapacity of the whites brought to their shores the murderous fire-arms, the enervating ardent spirits, and all-destructive pestilence of the small-pox. According to the most recent accounts, the number of the Indians who have been swept away by the small-pox, on the western frontier of the United States, amounts to more than 60,000.  

Catlin, in the late 1830s related a very personal account of the death of the famous Chief Four Bears.  

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37 Thwaites, 23:33-36.
From the Trader who was present at the destruction of the Mandans I had many most wonderful incidents of this dreadful scene, but I dread to recite them. Amongst them, however, there is one that I must briefly describe, relative to the death of that noble gentleman of whom I have already said so much, and to whom I became so much attached—Man-to-toh-pa, or "the Four Bears." This fine fellow sat in his wigwam and watched every one of his family die about him, his wives and his little children, after he had recovered from the disease himself: when he walked out, around the village, and wept over the final destruction of his tribe; his braves and warriors, whose sinewy arms alone he could depend on for a continuance of their existence, all laid low; when he came back to his lodge, where he covered his whole family in a pile, with a number of robes, and wrapping another around himself, went out upon a hill at the little distance, where he lay several days, despite all the solicitations of the Traders, resolved to starve himself to death. He remained there till the sixth day, when he had just strength enough to creep back to the village, when he entered the horrid gloom of his own wigwam, and laying his body alongside the group of his family, drew his robe over him and died on the ninth day of his fatal abstinence.

So have perished the friendly and hospitable Mandans, from the best accounts I could get; and although it may be possible that some few individuals may yet be remaining, I think it is not probable; and one thing is certain, even if such be the case, that, as a nation, the Mandans are extinct, having no longer an existence.

There is yet a melancholy part of the tale to be told, relating to the ravages of this frightful disease in that country on the same occasion, as it spread to other contiguous tribes, to the Minatarees, the Kisteneaus, the Blackfeet, the Chayennes and Crows; amongst whom 25,000 perished in the course of four or five months, which most appalling facts I got from Major Pilcher, now Superintendent of Indian affairs at St. Louis, from Mr. M'Kenzie, and others.30

The families that were broken by smallpox attempted to reunite with their lineage, only to find that often their

30Catlin, p. 295.
lineage no longer existed or was too decimated to offer assistance. The next societal level was the clan. Villages that were the worst hit would gather together under the strongest clan and the orphans from each clan were sorted out and adopted by the women of the clans. When the clans were reorganizing, many men left their families to return to their own clan. Their wives and children, if they had survived, were being cared for by their clan. A man's first duty was to his clan members and to his sister's children.

For some unknown reason, in both epidemics the women appeared to have a higher survival rate than the men. Many accounts gave statistics as lopsided as two-thirds or three-fourths of the village being composed of women and children. Once regrouping under the clans occurred there were attempts at moving to new locations. After the 1781 epidemic these moves created the deserted villages Lewis and Clark reported in their journals. But in 1837, the hostilities of the Sioux and other groups prevented the Mandan from moving to new villages.

Originally there had been thirteen clans; three became extinct in 1781, and six more were lost in 1837. The four remaining were divided into two per moiety. The moiety was stripped of its original functions and eventually became

\[39\text{Thwaites, 5:114.}\]
completely defunct. These effects will be elaborated upon in the next section.

The Effects of Smallpox on the Mandan

After 1781 the Mandan gathered together the remains of their once powerful villages. Those villages that were worst hit joined with others that were badly decimated. Some Mandan moved in with nearby Hidatsa villages.

The village, which was once composed of a single clan, now contained many clans gathered into one village for protection and reorganization. Each clan gathered its members and pooled its resources to recover and give aid to families and members who returned from other villages. Bowers related those obligations.

It was the duty of the clan to assist its own members. It was the clan's duty to care for its old people having no blood children. During the smallpox epidemic of 1837, women went through the villages and gathered the orphans of their clan, who were taken into their lodges to be reared. Old people were invited in to be fed and clothed by younger members of their own clan.\(^{40}\)

In another quote this importance was again emphasized.

The clan provided for those who had no close blood relatives. Many families were broken up by the smallpox epidemic of 1837. The orphans were taken in by the females according to clan affiliation and reared as their own children.\(^{41}\)

\(^{40}\)Bowers, p. 31.

\(^{41}\)Bowers, pp. 99-100.
The smallpox epidemic of 1781 produced the same effects; the clans were immediately activated to care for all their members. Three clans became extinct and others were assimilated into larger clans that could offer them protection. Without a clan a person was a nomad, with no protection and no comfort. Even though the Clan-Village no longer existed after 1837, the identity and the purpose of the clan was strengthened after the epidemics.

According to the sacred myths the moiety and clan system was as follows prior to the smallpox epidemics:

**West-Side Moiety (Buffalo)**
- Waxi kEna (Tell Bad News)
- Tami sik (no meaning)
- Tami xixiks (Bad Strap)
  (Three extinct clans whose names are not now remembered)

**East-Side Moiety (Corn)**
- Sipuska numak (Prairie Chicken People)
- Ipoka numak (Speckled Eagle People)
- Mato domak (Bear People)
- MasE domak (Red Hill People)
- Amaka domak (Badger People)
- HoxExaka numak (Crow People)
- Manakasa numak (People in Grove)

Prior to the first smallpox epidemic there were thirteen named clans, six dying out as a result of that epidemic. The three above clans of the west-side moiety survived together with the Prairie Chicken, Speckled Eagle, Crow, and Bear clans of the opposite moiety. The Bad Straps were assimilated into the Tamisik clan, while the Crow and Bear clans either died out or were assimilated with the Prairie Chickens after the smallpox epidemic of 1837.

Of the ten clans listed above, four survived the smallpox epidemic of 1837. They were WaxikEna, Tamisik,
Prairie Chicken, and Speckled Eagle. Scattercorn's father, Moves Slowly, an officer in the Okipa, would call the name of each Nuptadi clan on the last day, and those impersonating the bulls would bellow as each was named. He had heard that the officers from the other village would formerly call the names of thirteen clans, but while at Fort Clark they dropped six extinct clans from the rites.\textsuperscript{42}

One of the most profound effects of smallpox was the creation of a new family structure. The extended family was easily pulled apart in the face of the strange and terrible force of smallpox. Since father was a part of another clan his first duties were to his clan and he returned to his clan to offer his aid, knowing that his wife and children would be cared for in the same manner by her lineage and clan. Usually the family was already split by death; a man who lost his wife simply returned to his own clan. The clan quite clearly was the most stable and important societal organization of the Mandan.

The sororate and levirate replacement models were used prior to the epidemic but little can be found to document their enactment to alleviate the immediate problems following these epidemics. After the 1781 epidemic many men returned to the Clan-Villages to aid their own clan, thus reducing the potential of the sororate or levirate, and after 1837 there were so few Mandan remaining that the sororate and levirate could not have been used for lack of persons qualifying. In many records it appears that the ranks of

\textsuperscript{42}Bowers, pp. 113-114.
middle age adult males were the worst hit. Polygamy, once practical only for prestige, was now a necessity. Lack of man power also meant less protection from their enemies. The shortage of men was also given as a reason for the loss of moieties' exogamy.

The Mandan claim that moieties were exogamous until after 1837 and that it was more convenient to go through the ceremonies with the wives when they were of opposite moieties, giving as the basis for the breakdown of the moieties the shortage of men. People preferred to marry into the moiety to marrying outside the tribe. ⁴³

Marriage within the clan was not permitted. The moieties began to break down in all their functions, except perhaps in the area of ceremonial practices and ownership of eagle trapping property. Prior to the epidemics the moieties had divided the meat, regulated marriage, performed many social ceremonies and countless small social services, such as burying the dead of the other moieties. After the epidemic all social functions had been stripped from the moieties and added to the duties of the clans.

The clans became the major force in maintaining the religious and ceremonial practices. If it were not for the clan taking over the ceremonial bundles from many of the extinct societies a great percentage of their original sacred practices would have been lost. The clan became the owner of, as well as the keeper of, all sacred rites and bundles.

⁴³ Bowers, p. 83.
Before the epidemics these bundles were owned by a society or even a highly prestigious person. Those clans that died out often took with them their special secret bundles or practices. Little is known about these ceremonies other than the fact that no attempt was ever made to revive them. Bowers wrote on the importance of keeping inheritance of tribal bundles within the clan.

A household that held an important tribal bundle inherited with a clan endeavored and generally succeeded in selecting a son-in-law who was of the same clan as the daughter's father. It was also believed that a man and his son-in-law got along better when they were of the same clan. In a large measure, the Mandan were successful in preserving most of their rich ceremonialism through the smallpox epidemic of 1837 because of the character of the formal training of those who were to inherit the traditional rights and responsibilities for the ceremonies and because of a system of preferred marriage in which the parents of both households selected their children's mates. It can be definitely said that the bulk of Mandan tribal lore was preserved by a small number of families, that their status was high in the village, and that they endeavored by selective marriages to keep the bundles and the associated ceremonies within their group.

The Mandan taught their children that they should marry by the same method as their parents married. This protected the loss of sacred bundles to other clans and kept inheritance within the household.

The patterns of personal property inheritance had also changed. Before the epidemic a man left his property to his sister's children, thus keeping important names, dances and songs within his clan. Personal property included not only

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'Bowers, pp. 75-76.'
material objects but also incorporeal items such as names, songs, dances, and special powers. This form of property was quite distinctly different from the sacred bundles. After 1837 so few persons remained that inheritance to any of a man's blood sons was also accepted. Many accounts tell of a prestigious man willing to sell his names and secret powers to any young man, related or not, to see them preserved. 

Personal inheritance patterns shifted to cross cut clans while specific clan inheritance was limited to preserving secret rites and clan importance by a class system of inheritance.

The household, and inheritance of household goods, changed due to a change in residence. What was once an "extended family" now became a "joint family." Instead of a father, mother, daughters and sons-in-law composing the family, after 1837 it became a group of related families all living in one lodge and functioning as one household. The oldest grandmother acted as head of the household and from her the inheritance of garden plot and household materials passed down to her eldest sister, and so on down the female line. The position of father was not strengthened in its attachment to the joint family structure since they were still outside the lineage and clan of the wife.

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45 Thwaites, 23:320; Bowers, pp. 27, 55, and 75.

46 Thwaites, 23:274; Bowers, pp. 26, 49-50.
The Mandan economy had shifted from one of hunting and horticulture to reliance upon the Hidatsa and the white man. The depopulation after 1837 had left the Mandan unable to plant crops or hunt for fear of attack by their hated enemies, the Sioux. The Mandan trade had declined because of the new location of Fort Clark and Fort Vanderburgh, which eliminated their importance as middlemen. Fur trade and exchange was done directly between the Indians and the forts. All that was left for the Mandan to do was to reside with the Hidatsa and eventually inter-marry.  

The Hidatsa were reduced from 1000 to 500, the Arikara to 500 and total population of these two groups plus the Mandan was less than 3000. Ewers shows their condition by 1860.

In 1837 his (Catlin) beloved Mandans were more than decimated by a smallpox epidemic brought upriver from St. Louis on a fur company steamboat, and nearly all of the other tribes on the Upper Missouri lost many of their members in that same plague. The cultural superiority of the farming tribes was lost forever. By the early 1860's all of them--Arikaras, Hidatsa, and Mandans--were huddled together in the village Like-a-Fishhook (near Fort Berthold), where they lived in constant fear of the numerous and aggressive Sioux.

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48 Ewers, p. 335.
What remained of the Mandan were huddled together near Fort Clark (later moving to Fort Berthold) and relied on the Hidatsa for protection. This dependence led to their acculturation and intermarriage until slowly their numbers decreased. The Hidatsa were still at war with the Assiniboine and the poor Mandan were dragged into every battle. The Arikara simply moved into the old Mandan villages and took control, dominating the remaining inhabitants. The Mandan had a traditional hatred of the Arikara, and even after they were forced to live with them there was rarely an instance of recorded marriage between them. The Hidatsa tolerated the Arikara but knew that they were no match for the strength of the Arikara. The Arikara still had immunity from an early small localized epidemic in 1802-1803; this allowed their immunity while all the other groups suffered in 1837. The Arikara now held the upper hand in this Missouri region and they pressured the smaller groups like the Mandan who had formerly been their masters.
CHAPTER V

THE HIDATSA

The name, Minitarees, by which this tribe is now generally known, was given by the Mandan, and signifies, "those who came over the water." The French give them singular designation of Gros Ventres, which is no more appropriate to them than to any other Indian tribes; the Anglo-Americans also frequently use this name. This people was formally a part of the nation of the Crows, from which it is said they separated, in consequence of a dispute about a buffalo that had been killed, and removed to the Missouri.

The name Hidatsa is believed to have been an effect of smallpox of 1837. When one village called the Hidatsa was located on the Knife River in North Dakota it was struck by smallpox and survivors from other surrounding villages moved into the Hidatsa village, taking its name. The name Hidatsa means willows, as described by Prince Maximilian who said that Hidatsa or the village on the Knife River farthest from the Missouri was called the "Ela h-sa" or village of the great willows and from this Matthews states, "It is plain that 'Ela h-sa' is but a form of Hidatsa, for

\(^{49}\) Thwaites, 23:369.

the aspirate is often pronounced or heard indistinctly; d and b are interchangeable with one another..." Although most source material for this paper and for previous research by the author used the term Minitaree, current anthropological acceptance favors the name Hidatsa, which has been utilized throughout this paper to avoid confusion.

In economy and trade, as well as technology, the Hidatsa resembled the Mandan. Both groups were from the Siouian stock and, although related linguistically, these languages were not mutually intelligible. The Mandan guarded their culture, and even though they spoke the Hidatsa dialect, they would not let their language be known to outsiders. This was the same for the ceremonies and secret rituals. When smallpox wiped out the major portion of the Mandan, cultural assimilation was forced on them and the Hidatsa were the only refuge. Eventually many Mandan words were mixed with the Hidatsa language, as well as a mixing of ceremonial practices. What was once the Akupikii ceremony of the Hidatsa became the same as the Okippe corn ceremonies of the Mandan, and even the names of the ceremony were adopted. Games were also adopted, as were customs and dress.

Matthews, pp. 35-36.

Thwaites, 23:385, 5:114.

Thwaites, 23:368, 377.
In physical appearance the Hidatsa were more robust. Their complexions were generally darker than the Mandan who were known for their light skin, blue to gray eye color, and light brown hair. The Hidatsa wore little in the way of tailored clothing and usually had a great deal of tattooing and adornment. Their necklaces were often mentioned as being made of a large number of bear claws which were highly prized among the Indians. They painted their bodies in the same manner as the Mandan, portraying some feat of daring or special significant power.

The Hidatsa were matrilocal and matrilineal and it is a safe assumption to make that the kinship structure functioned in about the same manner as it did for the Mandan. The wooden lodges were described as resembling the ones built by the Mandan; but as far as residence and family structures, no early specific evidence was found. Since they were matrilocal the father lived with his wife's clan and the children of the family were also part of the wife's clan. The Hidatsa were divided into moieties which corresponded in name to those of the Mandan. Many of the Hidatsa clans had the same name as clans of the Mandan and were in fact names given the separate villages by the Mandan. Lowie felt that since the clans were villages, a person particularized his descent by relating from which village he had

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5a Lowie, p. 8.
He would say "I am from the people of the mountain." This was believed a "clear cut" statement that the Mandan and the Hidatsa clans developed from distinct local groups.  

Like the Mandan the Hidatsa were neither sedentary nor strictly horticultural. They moved seasonally and hunted the bison as soon as their crops were planted. They returned in the autumn to harvest and as soon as the harvest ended would leave for the prairie and the bison herds. This dual economy ended in 1837 but began to slowly subside after the 1781 smallpox epidemic. After 1837, movement was limited and, therefore, so was hunting.

At present the Minitarees live constantly in their village, and do not roam about as they formerly did, when, like the Pawnees and other nations, they went in pursuit of the herds of buffaloes as soon as their fields were sown, returned in the autumn for the harvest, after which they again went into the prairie. In these wanderings they made use of leather tents, some of which are still standing by the side of their permanent dwellings.

The term permanent was in reference to the dwelling structures and not in reference to the people. As for seasonal migration this ended as a result of the loss of Hidatsa warriors in 1837, coupled with the pressure of strong enemies.

55 Thwaites, 23:328.
56 Lowie, p. 8
57 Thwaites, 23:368, 370.
58 Thwaites, 23:368.
The list of enemies is rather long, especially in comparison with their number of allies. As allies they counted only two, the Mandan and the Crow. Their traditional enemies were the Assiniboine, Cree, Pawnee, Arikara, and Arapaho. The newer immigrants into their territory were much more powerful adversaries: the Sioux, the Cheyenne, and the Blackfeet. The Sioux had been pushed into Montana by the white migration and, having received some vaccination prior to 1837, consequently survived the epidemic in strength and dominated most all other groups after 1837.

Far less is known and recorded about the Hidatsa than the Mandan. The earliest reference came from Matthews who did some fine ethnographic work among the Hidatsa at Fort Berthold for his book, Ethnography and Philology of the Hidatsa Indians in 1877. In 1796 there were three villages: the Hidatsa which has been previously mentioned; the Amitiha, half a mile above the mouth of the Knife River; and the Amahami or Mahaha at the mouth of the Knife River. Their close neighbors were the Mandan who were divided into three separate villages.

59 Thwaites, 23:383.

60 These villages in 1804 were found reduced to two. Smallpox of 1802-1803 had little effect on the Mandan and Hidatsa since both had been struck hard in 1781, only 20 years or so earlier and immunity still persisted. Forced by the Arikara, the Mandan had regrouped slowly and this was the reason for their reduction in 1804 into two villages.
Lewis and Clark gave evidence that in 1764 the people of Amahamis and Amitiha dwelt farther south than the Mandan, on and around the Heart River. This area was also mentioned in connection with the Rees (Arikara). When smallpox first hit it was contacted from the Mandan and all three villages on the Heart River were badly decimated. These three villages, along with some Mandan, relocated on the Knife River in 1796.

During the years 1804, 1832, 1833 and 1834, we have the evidence of travelers that the three Knife River villages remained just where they stood in 1796, and it is said by the Indians that there was no change until some time after the epidemic of 1837, when the survivors of the three villages formed themselves in one on Knife River.

The one village was the village of the Prairie-Chickens, the Mandan name of which was Sipuska or Hidatsa. After 1837 the other villages regrouped and moved into the villages of the Prairie-Chickens and the name Hidatsa was applied to them all, as previously mentioned.

The Hidatsa were divided into seven matrilineal clans grouped into moieties like the Mandan. One moiety was called the four clan moiety and the other was called the three clan moiety. These clans were listed by Lowie and are comparable to those clans found by Morgan. They are the Prairie-

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61 Thwaites, 23:234; Novotne, p. 151.
62 Matthews, p. 40.
Chickens, Unknown Animal, Water, Hill-People, Lodge, Knife, and the Bonnet or Cap people. 63

Owing to the ravages of the smallpox epidemic the three villages were consolidated into one, and accordingly it is impossible nowadays to get first-hand data as to the relations of the three villages when the represented distinct communities. 64

Research indicates that as many as five separate groups of people merged to form the Hidatsa that Lowie and Morgan examined. 65

Matthews wrote of a group of people who called themselves Amahami or Ahnahaways who, being only few in number, joined the Hidatsa after 1837. 66 The Amahamis (mountain or hill people, a Clan-Village of the Hidatsa) and the Amitiha were also consolidated into the Hidatsa village after that epidemic, along with the remains of some Mandan villages. Some smaller groups of the Crow also joined the village.

What were once individual distinct Clan-Villages were now the multi-clan unit called the Hidatsa; and within one village different clans, as well as different "tribes or groups" had to exist. The system of moieties regulating marriages broke down in favor of a simple clan exogamy rule.

63 Lowie, p. 19; Morgan, p. 163.
64 Lowie, p. 17.
65 Lowie, p. 17; Morgan, p. 163.
66 Matthews, p. 15.
Intermarriage was a natural outcome of the new residence, especially between the Mandan and Hidatsa clans.

To write further on the changes within the social system of the Hidatsa would involve a great deal of speculation. The only safe assumption is that the "family" structure did not break down as completely as it did among the Mandan. Since the clans of the Hidatsa, as well as other Indian groups, were all consolidated in one area, families would not necessarily have to disperse in order to be close to a particular clan as had the Mandan in 1781. However, in 1837 so few Mandan survived the epidemic that the majority of the families were already destroyed. The surviving Mandan then joined with the remaining Hidatsa in the village of the Hidatsa.  

The Hidatsa village, after this absorption took place, made use of the adoptive procedure along with the sororate and the levirate. In this manner they struggled for, and succeeded in, regaining a significant population and for these reasons the term tribe was applied to the Hidatsa. The term tribe is indeed misleading. "They now reside on the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota, which they share with the Mandan and the Arikaras. According to the

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census of 1910 they number 547." In that same census of 1910 only 197 were Mandan, tracing their descent back through their mothers in typical matrilineal fashion.

Before the first epidemic the Hidatsa numbered about 5000 and at the time Lewis and Clark arrived their population was down to 2500. After the 1837 epidemic there was reported fewer than 1000 souls of all combined Hidatsa villages.

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68 Lowie, p. 17.

69 Matthew, p. 16.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this paper the objective was proposed in two questions. First, why did the Mandan and Hidatsa disappear as separate cultures as a result of smallpox, while the hunting groups survived with little or no apparent cultural change? The hunting groups survived in better condition, but certainly had not escaped without any cultural changes. The second question dealt with the importance of the adoptive models in their reconstruction. The Blackfeet and the Shoshoni had both used their adoptive systems to replace their depleted populations. This was illustrated by David Thompson noting that the Blackfeet adopted Shoshoni women and children, incorporating them into their culture. The Shoshoni also used this adoption to reconstruct their families after smallpox.

The Mandan did not use their adoptive models, but rather relied on their lineage and clan affiliation to rebuild. This was the major reason for their disappearance. Since the extended family was a weak structure, it easily gave way to the more stable lineage. When the lineage had disappeared or was so badly decimated that it could not function,
the clan became responsible for its member's survival which resulted in a new residence pattern, the emergence of the joint family and the strengthening of the matrilineage. Eventually the Mandan dual economy crumbled under the devastation of two epidemics and new and powerful enemies, leading to their dependence on the Hidatsa and the white man. The overall result was the shift from a separate cultural group to a small intermixed handful of "Mandan-Hidatsa."

The Hidatsa reacted in about the same manner as the Mandan by relying on the clan and lineage structures to survive. Their Clan-Villages became consolidated into one (the Hidatsa village) which allowed the seemingly better recovery in comparison with the Mandan.

There is a correlation between the fact that both the Mandan and the Hidatsa were matrilineal-matrilocal, and that their reaction was a return to their lineage and clans. The same correlation can be drawn for the Shoshoni and the Blackfeet. These groups relied on their adoptive models and family structures to rebuild. What was really examined in this paper was not the economic systems of the two "hunting" groups versus the economic system of two horticultural groups, but rather the result of a strong acculturational force and its effect on the social structures of two matrilineal groups—the Mandan and Hidatsa—in comparison
to the Blackfeet's bilateral system and the Shoshoni patrilineal system. From these comparisons three positive observations can be made.

1. In each case, smallpox had one consistent effect—it strengthened the unilineal descent of each group.

2. Each group appeared to turn to their more stable and reliable structures in time of great crisis. In the matrilineal group the clan proved to be the strongest in the continuance of the culture. In the patrilineal group, the nuclear family was desperately replaced and relied upon as the most stable unit.

3. In each group, the existence of the adoptive model was established prior to the epidemics. Yet only in the patrilineal and bilateral groups were the adoptive models put into effect. They had no other alternatives but to rebuild their families and did so in their own cultural patterns. These adoptive models were not an innovation, but an effective safeguard that was used in a time of great crisis.
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