Demographic view of Northern Cheyenne women in 1900

Reno L. Charette-LoParco
The University of Montana

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A DEMOGRAPHIC VIEW OF

NORTHERN CHEYENNE WOMEN IN 1900

by

Reno L. Charette- LoParco

B.A. The University of Montana 1990

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

1997

Approved by:

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Chairperson

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Dean, Graduate School

3-25-98
Date
The history and roles of Northern Cheyenne women during the early reservation period from 1884 to 1900 have not been adequately addressed in the current scholarship. New discoveries of Northern Cheyenne women’s experiences during this period of rapid change lie in ethnological methods of quantitative analysis. The combination of personal narratives by women who lived during this era, demographic profiles obtained from census records and the historical record offer new scholarship towards understanding a richer view of Northern Cheyenne women.

Quantitative analysis of the 1900 U.S. 12th Census data first required corrections for age misclassification and matching biological children to their mothers. Secondly, the 1900 crude birth rates (CBR) and total fertility rates (TFR) were compared to earlier censuses collected by the Indian Agents in 1886, 1890, and 1894. The CBR and TFR trends showed a population decline. Additionally, the census data revealed that most households with children in 1900 also included a grandmother. Consequently, the number of grandmothers was compared against the population trends to determine if their presence in a home effected fertility outcomes. Fertility comparisons between pre-reservation mothers and early reservation mothers were based on the reproductive histories of the elder women and those of the reproductive women of 1900. Marriage patterns were examined to reveal the average person’s marital expectations for 1900. Finally, the effects of social conditions on fertility and cultural continuity were examined.

The results of this demographic study have revealed that reservation mothers birthed more babies than the pre-reservation mothers, yet the population was not growing accordingly. The women preferred midwives and sought the physicians treatment only in life threatening cases and as a last resort. The effects of poverty, infectious diseases, malnutrition and deplorable living conditions reduced fertility, increased child mortality, and forced cultural adaptations in the struggle for survival. On the average, women in their current marriages had married at the age of twenty-three and had been married for fourteen years during which they had birthed three children and at least one had died. Young women experienced the most marital shifting from being single to becoming divorced. However, long term monogamous marriages remained the dominant pattern while polygamy significantly declined. The reservation ration system brought with it an increase in households headed by divorced and widowed women which suggests that with the loss of men’s traditional hunting roles the women became more independent.

In response to the early reservation conditions and polices the Northern Cheyenne persisted in their language, incorporated Anglo materials into traditional styles of dress, maintained the authority of grandmothers in parenting and remained culturally distinct.
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At many points along the way, this project seemed insurmountable and I contemplated quitting more than once. Now that the work is done, I wish to acknowledge and thank my friends and family who helped me complete the most challenging project I have ever undertaken.

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Without the help of my family, friends, and academic colleagues I would not have found the inner strength and fortitude to finish this challenging academic endeavor. Ne-aʔéšę́!
PREFACE

A Nation is not conquered
Until the hearts of its women
   Are on the ground.
Then it is done, no matter
   How brave its warriors
Nor how strong its weapons.
Traditional Cheyenne saying
From American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives
Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands
University of Nebraska Press, 1984

I was raised on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, but I am not a tribal member. However, I have a close affinity with the people, the land, and the reservation communities. It is the place I call home. I am fortunate to have known Northern Cheyenne elders, such as John Wooden Legs, Bill Tall Bull, Philip and Elizabeth Rising Sun, Ted Rising Sun, James King Sr., and most importantly, my grandfather Roy Bolson, all who instilled in me a strong sense of pride in growing up on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. Additionally, I have enjoyed the advantages of Northern Cheyenne relatives, mostly women who married into my family, and they have shared their culture with me since my early childhood experiences on the reservation. Yet, I am not Northern Cheyenne and I did not live during the 1900's. Therefore, what I offer is my dedication to responsible scholarship, thorough academic research, accurate calculations and great respect for the Northern Cheyenne people. I hope that my research inspires tribal members to utilize quantitative methods to reveal the hidden histories of their own people.
CHAPTER 1: AMERICAN INDIAN WOMEN: SCHOLARSHIP BEYOND THE STEREOTYPES

Introduction

The plight of the pre-reservation Northern Cheyenne cost them dearly in the lives of their kinsmen, their desire for a secure and peaceful homeland compelled them to endure extreme hardship hoping to retain a portion of their traditional homeland. After the establishment of the Tongue River Reservation in southeastern Montana in 1884, the Northern Cheyenne began the process of change and adaptation to a new lifestyle while striving to preserve their unique heritage and identity as Cheyenne people. The social, cultural, and political process of this adaptation effected every aspect of people's lives. However, the full force of this period of rapid change upon the lives of Cheyenne women remains nebulous. Few personal narratives by women from this period are available to explain the full range of experiences that affected them. Additionally, the historical record and most of the scholarship reveals more of the Northern Cheyenne men's experiences and responses to the early reservation era, 1884 to 1900, than it does those of the women.

The adaptation of Northern Cheyenne women to the reservation and its new lifestyle has been measured to some degree by the U.S. government in census reports, and annual reports to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. However, these data have been viewed as defective and inadequate and until recently has not been a resource for expanding the scholarship on American Indians. A new direction in American Indian history is lead by researchers who have developed ethnological methods of discovering
and correcting the imperfect census data to learn more about a tribal society through quantitative analysis. A view of the Northern Cheyenne women’s experiences is made possible through the combination of demography and the historical record.

A significant portion of American Indian history has not yet been written. Until the roles and contributions of Indian women are uncovered and incorporated into the current scholarship a comprehensive record of American Indian history will not exist. Rayna Green, a leading writer and bibliographer of Indian women, observed:

My review of the literature has left me with the conviction that Native American women have neither been neglected nor forgotten. They have captured hearts and minds, but . . . the level and substance of most passion for them has been selective, stereotyped, and damaging.¹

The roles and contributions of Indian women to their families, and to society far exceed the selective roles of men popular in the current scholarship.

The most pervasive stereotype of American Indian women is the squaw image. The term “squaw” is a degrading reference to the status and value of Indian women. The image associated with the term elicits an image of Indian women as unintelligent beasts of burden, content to live their lives in constant drudgery. Ethnohistorian, David Smits, charged that since first contact with native people, EuroAmericans created the squaw image based on misunderstandings and ethnocentrism. This distorted image has been used since first contact to demonstrate superiority and to rationalize dispossession. Smits noted that by the 19th century, “women’s condition was the single most important criterion for

contrasting savagism with civility." Cultural contrasts during the 19th century were augmented by Victorian morality and by the advent of industrialization that freed middle and upper class Anglo women from many domestic responsibilities. These women became the ladies of leisure. Elaborating on the American women’s status change, Smits observed, “The genteel lady of leisure, who personified civilization’s highest attainments, was smugly contrasted with the “squaw drudge,” the symbol of savagism.” Promoting new scholarship on American Indian women addresses the concerns that after three centuries of contact the historical record is largely void of conveying an understanding of native women’s cultural realities.

Historian Deborah Welch, contended that Indian women have been marginalized in American history by the historian’s obsession “with the roles of Indian men as warriors and chiefs.” Welch attested that other images of Indian women are based on selective, one-dimensional, and often inaccurate characteristics, such as Sacajawea the heroine of western expansion, Hiawatha the mysterious, untamed creature of unearthly qualities, and equally as pervasive, the ever popular Indian princess of film and fiction. The cumulative effects of stereotyping are not only damaging to the truth of history, but are also damaging to the lives of contemporary American Indian women.

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3Smits, 299.
Nancy Butterfield, former editor of *The Indian Voice* and Red Lake Chippewa called attention to the damaging effects of stereotyping American Indian women. She pointed out that not only are the stereotypes prevalent in the non-Indian society today, but their destructive influences have "had a profound personal effect on the lives of Indian women in the way we are seen by the rest of the world and in the way we see ourselves." Butterfield further stated that stereotypes "prevent us from being acknowledged and taken seriously as full and complete human beings."

Other historians including Melissa Meyer and Russell Thornton, a Cherokee sociologist, agreed that Indian history lacks sufficient stories of women's contributions. In Meyer and Thornton's collaboration on *Indians and quantitative methods in history*, they assert that historical literature persists in its traditional conventions because:

> Historians continue to devote more attention to Indian-White conflict, Indian resistance leaders and federal policy than they do to such questions as Indian family life, economic activity, cultural persistence, and political change.

A comprehensive record of American Indian history requires the correction of stereotypes and a richer view of all aspects of Indian women's lives.

For the most part, the history of the Northern Cheyenne people has been observed

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6Nancy Butterfield, 22.

and recorded through the perceptions of White men with supporting evidence obtained from Indian men. In the early 1900's, most observers who maintained records were ethnographers, military officials, Indian agents, and missionaries were men who did not seek the Northern Cheyenne women’s viewpoint. The record keepers made decisions based on their cultural biases regarding the significance of ideas and deeds based on their own perceptions of a woman’s place in society. In particular, White women during this period were not permitted active roles in politics, government, or other positions of authority or leadership outside the domestic realm of their homes. Likewise, the observers did not view Indian women as possessing political power, nor were they preferred as narrators of tribal traditions. Therefore, their perspectives were not collected and recorded. Women’s views were further obscured by the poor reputation of the early American frontiersman that influenced most Indian men to adopt a practice of preventing access to their women kin. Northern Cheyenne men discouraged and prevented White men from direct contact with Indian women as a means of protecting their chastity, a cultural value significant to both genders in Cheyenne culture. Consequently, the history of the Northern Cheyenne is predominately the story of the ideas and deeds of men rather than those of women.

The Indian woman’s story of her history and her role in it is further sabotaged by the prejudicial views of all Indian women held by white society. The stereotypical “squaw” image often subscribed to by many authors has tainted the historical perception of Indian women’s contribution to the formation of their changing society and evolving culture. Northern Cheyenne women did not escape the chains of the “squaw” image.
Their social and political empowerment, dictated by their own culture, has been overlooked. As Katherine Weist suggested in her essay, "Plains Indian Women: An Assessment," the degree to which women had control over their movements, economic production, and their sexual behavior are effective measurements of their changing roles and relationships. Weist further states that "Women’s roles were affected directly and indirectly as the complementary male roles were altered."\(^8\)

The degree to which Northern Cheyenne women had control over their lives during the war years from 1857 to 1879, or how they controlled economic production during the early reservation years of 1884 to 1900, are aspects of tribal history largely unknown beyond the personal stories shared within the tribe. Finally, the changing roles and relationships of Northern Cheyenne women are not discussed in terms of what women view as significant measures of women’s roles. The voice of Northern Cheyenne women, telling their history, has yet to be heard.

Although the historical record, lacks the voice of Northern Cheyenne women, we can piece together fragments of their story of survival, cultural continuity and new roles by analyzing the data collected by ethnographers and census enumerators during the 1880's to 1900. These are the first crucial years of Northern Cheyenne change to reservation life. From other sources we can speculate how Northern Cheyenne women may have felt about their changing roles and their responses to social and political issues by 1900, a midpoint year between the establishment of the reservation and the 1920's when citizenship of all

American Indians had been completed. It is quite likely that Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 may have held views that differed somewhat from the visions of their male counterparts.

The Northern Cheyenne woman's story needs to be adequately identified and evaluated against the conditions of the time, weighing the alternatives she may have considered or preferred, and the statistical record which will help define these conditions and may reflect also the decisions women made and their subsequent consequences. Policy makers of the early 1900's were more concerned with regulating political structures than with controlling domestic realms; however, both American and Northern Cheyenne cultures agreed the domestic realm was the woman's domain. As a result, the past roles of Northern Cheyenne women remained intact longer than those of the men and permitted greater options for women in maintaining cultural continuity. Ultimately, the memories of this era linger in the stories woven through the autobiographical narratives left by a handful of Northern Cheyenne women. Asking new questions of the numerical historical census record is also a logical means of opening an avenue for the voice of Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 to emerge, with all its traditions and changes.
CHAPTER 2: NORTHERN CHEYENNE WOMEN’S ROLES PRIOR TO RESERVATION LIFE

The key to the resiliency of Northern Cheyenne women may be their skill at adapting to change while preserving tradition. The history of the Northern Cheyenne demonstrated that women sustained their families and tribe through their economic industries, and through their adaptation to changes in transportation and dwelling structures. Northern Cheyenne women also learned to use new materials in the manufacturing of customary products while preserving a distinct cultural identity.

Northern Cheyenne women pursued their traditional roles in as many ways as possible. Their hearts were never on the ground long enough to become a conquered people.

Resiliency and Adaptation to Change: 1600's to 1800's

Until the end of the 17th century the Cheyenne, or as they called themselves, Tse-tsehese-staestse meaning the Human Beings, lived between the Great Lakes and Hudson Bay near Lake Superior. This woodland area was traditionally occupied by Algonquian speakers, such as the Cheyenne. Other tribes knew the Cheyenne people as fish eaters, a plentiful food source in the Great Lakes area. The pressures of Anglo expansion on the East Coast caused a ripple effect that pushed eastern and Midwestern tribal groups further west. The Cheyenne, like many other tribes, migrated away from the intra-tribal conflicts that occurred from tribes crowding into the same territory. Consequently, the Cheyenne

moved west leaving their woodland fisherman lifestyle behind.

Over a period of about two hundred years the Cheyenne migrated through three distinct geographical regions that required different methods of securing a living. An early demonstration of the Cheyenne’s resilient and adaptive characteristics was their domestication and use of dogs as porters of heavy burdens. Other examples include changes in how they constructed their homes. Originally they lived in wigwam homes common to the Great Lakes area. Their first western homes were earth lodges common to tribes living along the Missouri River, and then later, animal skin lodges that accommodated a semi-nomadic lifestyle on the Great Plains. The industries of the Cheyenne also changed as they migrated from one climate and region to another. They had adapted to fishing, woodland hunting, corn planting, and gathering of edible plants throughout their migratory years. Through these experiences their capacity to adapt to change was well tested by the time horses were introduced. Their adaptation of the horse brought significant lifestyle changes resulting in the cultural pinnacle that defined the cultural distinctiveness of the Cheyenne people. The horse enabled them to pursue subsistence ventures into larger territories where they acquired new trading opportunities with Euroamericans and other Plains tribes. These new allies benefited the tribe’s survival by the introduction of metal implements, guns, and a non-agrarian, equestrian lifestyle dependent on hunting buffalo and other animals.

The Time of the Dogs

The Cheyenne migrated west to northern Minnesota near the headwaters of the Mississippi River about 1650. Their lifestyle outside the woodlands of the Great Lakes
region changed considerably. They became closely associated with the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara. Like these neighboring tribes they lived in earth lodges and grew corn, beans and squash.\textsuperscript{10} The women planted and tended the gardens. The Cheyenne also tamed wild dogs for use in transporting goods and incorporated the use of bows and arrows into their culture.\textsuperscript{11} The Cheyenne adapted to their new way of life by their own choices and at their own pace.

\textbf{First Contact with Ve?ho?e}

In 1680 a small group of Cheyenne visited the French explorer LaSalle at Fort Crevecoeur near the present day Peoria, Illinois. LaSalle was the first White man known to have recorded contacted with the Cheyenne at this early point in Indian-White relationships in the west. The Cheyenne may have sought a gun trade with LaSalle in an effort to defend themselves against tribes, such as the Chippewa, who were supplied with guns by both the British and French who competed for the fur trade. However, LaSalle’s account did not document a sale of guns to the Cheyenne. As the vanguard of the fur trade moved westward, some tribes were forced further west as well.\textsuperscript{12} In time, the Cheyenne would name the White man, Ve?ho?e, a word that means spider and also represented the

\textsuperscript{10}Hoebel, 1; Tom Weist, \textit{A History of the Cheyenne People} (Montana Council for Indian Education, 1977) 10 - 12.

\textsuperscript{11}Weist, 12-13.

\textsuperscript{12}Weist, 17.
White man's habits of building fences.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{figure}
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\caption{Plate 1. Howling Wolf's Corn Drawing.}
\end{figure}

Howling Wolf depicts a Cheyenne woman wearing the dress of the 1870's in her summer kitchen. The artist combined elements of two time periods in this drawing to show the Cheyenne history of horticulture occurring during the late 1600's to the mid-1700's (Petersen 41-42).

\textbf{The Time of Corn Planting and First Guns}

From 1700 to 1790 the Cheyenne lived on the Sheyenne River in North Dakota in earth lodges constructed on a bluff and protected by a log stockade and ditch. The Lakota, also known as Sioux, called their settlement, the “Place where the Cheyenne plant.” At this point in time the Cheyenne's culture included ceremonies associated with the growing of corn. The women's roles were as prominent in the corn ceremonies as were their responsibilities in tending the crops.

While living in their Sheyenne River stockade, the Cheyenne obtained their first guns through an event involving an elder woman. Although her name is unknown, her

\textsuperscript{13}The Language Research Department, \textit{English - Cheyenne Student Dictionary}, (Lame Deer, MT: Northern Cheyenne Title VII ESEA Bilingual Education Program, 1976), 121.
quick thinking made her deeds memorable in Cheyenne history. She was alone in the village while her entire community was out on a hunt. During the night Assiniboine threatened to attack the village. Knowing the enemy were unfamiliar with the village, she ran to a nearby cliff with her lighted torch and threw it over the edge. The enemy ran after the light in pursuit and fell to their deaths. The elder woman caught up with her people and told them about the incident. The Cheyenne men returned to the village and found among the dead Assiniboine flintlock rifles, iron tomahawks, and steel knives.\(^\text{14}\)

These were the first guns in the Cheyenne world. When the Cheyenne integrated the use of metal implements into their lifestyle significant cultural changes occurred. However, the harvest of their crops did not satisfy the high prices that European products commanded. The Cheyenne responded by adapting their economic industries to the trading market.

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Plate 2. Howling Wolf’s Drawing of the First Horse.

The Cheyenne traded for their first horses from the Kiowa. The Cheyenne are shown on the right with dog travois and the Kiowa on the left (Peterson 38 - 39).

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\(^{14}\)Weist, 18-19.
The Time of the Horse and So?taaeo?o

By 1760 the Cheyenne were introduced to horses through trade with the Kiowa, an allied tribe. Horses enabled them to actively pursue large game animals on the Plains which made them more successful in trade negotiations for European goods. The Cheyenne supplied horses, wild game, pemmican, wild turnips, furs and buffalo robes for trade.\(^\text{15}\) The market price increased dramatically for tanned furs and buffalo robes which the Cheyenne traded for blankets, knives, tobacco, and beads.\(^\text{16}\) Consequently, the Cheyenne’s desire to acquire European products directly effected the industries and lives of the women. The women began to spend more of their time tanning while decreasing their farming endeavors. The lucrative nature of the fur trade escalated the frequency of polygamous marriages as the work of multiple wives increased each household’s prosperity. The women benefited from the acquisition of European products such as woolens, beads, awls, needles, kettles, and knives. The Cheyenne became expert horsemen and masterful traders, their survival depended on these skills. By 1830, the Cheyenne had enough guns and horses to abandon their permanent villages for a life out on the Plains.\(^\text{17}\)

The lives of Cheyenne women changed by living on the Plains. They no longer tended gardens, or maintained a permanent dwelling. However, they were resilient and adapted to new resources and means of providing for their families. For instance, from the

\(^{15}\)Weist, 21.


\(^{17}\)Hoebel, 2.
Kiowa and Comanche, they learned to dress hides in one piece, rather than two. They became expert tanners and began making their dresses from mountain sheep and deer skins which were lighter weight than moose and elk skins. The women made tipi covers from the heavier and largest elk skins and buffalo cow skins.¹⁸ They made children's clothes from antelope skins that were small and light weight. Life on the Plains was vastly different their former lives in the Great Lakes woodlands or their corn planting days. Nonetheless, the Cheyenne industriously captured a lifestyle that made them very successful.

During this time the Cheyenne met the Soʔtaʔaeʔoʔo, a small tribe, whose language was similar to the Tseʔ-ʔseʔeseʔ-ʔstaʔestse. The Soʔtaʔaeʔoʔo brought with them the teachings of Erect Horn, the prophet who gave them the Sacred Buffalo Hat which is now central to the Cheyenne’s spiritual well-being. The two tribes eventually joined through intermarriage forming the ancestral background of the modern day Cheyenne.¹⁹ From the Great Lakes to the Great Plains, the Cheyenne’s autonomy and resilience guided them through several major adaptations to cultural change over a span of two hundred years.

**Epidemics, Massacres and Political Divisions**

Although early contact with European traders brought benefits to the Cheyenne people, the continual and rapid influx of pioneers who established towns and claimed Indian territory as their own, caused myriad problems for tribal peoples dependent on large


¹⁹Weist, 21-24.
territories to support their nomadic buffalo hunting lifestyles. These encounters lead to conflicts that numerous wars tried to settle. Vestiges of the original conflicts persist today.

Even though the Northern Cheyenne had little contact with emigrants they were plagued with epidemics of measles and whooping cough through 1845. Then three years later, in 1848, a cholera epidemic killed half of the Cheyenne people. The Southern Cheyenne population was decimated by several massacres. On November 29, 1864, Colonel John M. Chivington led the charge against Black Kettle's Southern Cheyenne camped at Sand Creek in Colorado. Chivington's command massacred 137 Cheyenne, most of whom were women and children.20 Black Kettle had trusted the Treaty of Fort Wise promising permanent Indian lands would not be overrun by whites. The Sand Creek Massacre enraged the Northern Cheyenne and their allies who organized their forces in retaliation. In 1865, the Southern Cheyenne signed the Treaty of the Little Arkansas with the U.S. government and obtained a reservation in Oklahoma. The bands that objected to the treaty became the Northern Cheyenne and continued their hunting/trading lifestyle on the Northern Plains.

In November 1868 George Armstrong Custer lead the Seventh Calvary against Black Kettle and killed him and many women and children in the Washita Battle in Oklahoma. By 1875 the Southern Cheyenne were at peace and permanently settled on their reservation.21 The Northern Cheyenne were far from peace with the U.S. government as evidenced by their participation in the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876.

20 Weist, 39-50.

21 Weist, 58.
The War Years

From 1857 to 1879 the Northern Cheyenne fought almost continuously with the U.S. Army in conflicts such as Sand Creek in 1864, raided Colorado and North Platte River settlements in 1865, and attacked travelers on the Bozeman Trail through 1863-1866. They participated in the Fetterman Fight at Fort Phil Kearny in 1866, battle of the Rosebud in 1876, and Little Big Horn battle in 1876. The Cheyenne war years came to an end in 1878 with winter skirmishes related to Morning Star, also known by his Lakota name, Dull Knife and Little Wolf’s long march home to Montana from Oklahoma. According to John Stands In Timber, the trouble started when the first treaty the Cheyenne signed with the United States, the Friendship Treaty of 1825, was not honored by White men. Although the Fetterman Fight at Fort Phil Kearny in 1866 was a major victory for Indian resistance against a United States military command, the event was diminished by the greater conquest at the Little Bighorn. On June 25, 1876, the allied Powder River bands of Northern Cheyenne, Lakota, and Northern Arapaho defeated the Seventh Calvary. General George A. Custer and the soldiers under his command died, some by the bullets from their own guns. The Cheyenne lost six warriors in the Little Big Horn battle. From 1876 to 1879 the Northern Cheyenne fought in small skirmishes against the U.S. Calvary as they eked out a living on the Plains.

The Scattering and Gathering of the People

After the Battle of the Little Big Horn, the Northern Cheyenne bands separated for

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23 Weist, 63 - 68.
summer hunting. The military tracked them throughout the winter months making their lives miserable. The Cheyenne endured the hardships and the military was unsuccessful in conquering them. Then on November 25, 1876, General Ranald Mackenzie attacked and destroyed Morning Star’s camp on the Red Fork of the Powder River. Ehyophsta and Buffalo Wallow Woman, sisters of Bald Faced Bull, were in the part of camp that Mackenzie attacked first. Ehyophsta escaped with only a small piece of robe to cover her. Both sisters gained refuge behind the quickly built breastworks and “sang strong heart songs to encourage the fighting men.”

Thirty Cheyenne were killed, 200 lodges destroyed, and 700 horses were captured. Iron Teeth was with Morning Star’s band when they were attacked. She noted later:

We who could do so ran away, leaving our warm lodges and the rich stores of food. As our family was going out from camp, my husband and our older son kept behind and fought off the soldiers. My husband had a horse, but he was leading it as he walked, so he might shoot better when afoot. I saw him fall, and his horse went away from him. I wanted to go back to him, but my two sons made me go on away with my three daughters. From the hilltops we Cheyenne looked back and saw all of our lodges and everything in them being burned into nothing but smoke and ashes.

Iron Teeth’s personal tragedies were just beginning. Before the Cheyenne found a lasting peace, many women like Iron Teeth would experience great personal loss, unimaginable.

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grief, and severe poverty.

Following Mackenzie's brutal attack of 1876, the Northern Cheyenne found refuge with a band of Oglala camped at Otter Creek east of Ashland, Montana. The Oglala generously gave every married woman enough skins to make a lodge for her family.27 Later the Northern Cheyenne moved to a Lakota village at the present site of Belle Fourche, South Dakota.

On the first of January 1877, Miles' troops fought a group of Northern Cheyenne on Hanging Woman Creek. Kate Big Head was among the Northern Cheyenne and recalled the encounter:

These soldiers caught three of our women and four of our children. That night some of our Cheyenne wolf warriors - what the white people call scouts - heard an Indian woman singing in the soldier camp. "That sounds like a Cheyenne song," they said among themselves. They listened carefully and heard: "Get ready to go with the soldiers. There are too many of them for you to fight. They are feeding us and treating us well."

According to Kate Big Head, the Cheyenne did not surrender after the Hanging Woman Creek incident. Instead, they went to the Bighorn valley and stayed on Rotten Grass Creek, near Lodge Grass, Montana throughout the winter.29

In April of 1877, Two Moons' band of Cheyenne, numbering 350 people, surrendered at Fort Keogh, near present day Miles City, Montana, in exchange for rations. Then thirty men became scouts for the army and served with distinction under Colonel

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28 Thomas Marquis, She Watched Custer's Last Battle (Published by the author, 1933), 8.

29 Thomas Marquis, She Watched Custer's Last Battle, 8.
Nelson Miles. Their enlistment enabled them to remain in the region they hoped would be their permanent home. The Northern Cheyenne scouts were instrumental in the surrender of Chief Joseph's band of Nez Perces during their epic flight to Canada.

The main band of 972 Northern Cheyenne, lead by Morning Star, returned to Red Cloud's agency and by the spring of 1877 they were relocated to Oklahoma to live with the Southern Cheyenne. The May through August journey to Fort Reno in Oklahoma took seventy days. The Cheyenne camped in soldier tents and a few canvas tipis. Wooden Leg recalled, "We had not killed for a long time enough buffaloes to renew the old dwelling shelters we liked so well." Many of the people walked, while only the sick and old people rode in the soldiers wagons.

Many of the Cheyenne, mostly children and elders, died in Oklahoma from malnutrition, malaria, measles, and other untreated illnesses that further decimated their numbers and brought them to hopeless desperation. On September 9, 1878, 297 Northern Cheyenne lead by Morning Star, Little Wolf, Wild Hog and Old Crow began their long trek north to their Northern Plains homeland. The fleeing Cheyenne included

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30 Weist, 77.

31 Orlan J. Svingen, "The Administrative History of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, 1877-1900" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toledo, 1982), 26.

32 Svingen, 32.

33 Marquis, Wooden Leg, 310 - 311.

34 Weist, 77.
about ninety-nine young men and 198 women, children, and elders. Their journey home had to somehow maneuver through numerous ranches, homesteaders, telegraph systems, three railroads, and calvary troops. Additionally, the Cheyenne packed very little supplies, possessed few horses, were weakened by illness and hunger and the winter months were rapidly approaching. The effects of the move must have been significant on the women. Imagine how a contemporary woman would respond to the challenge, in the face of death, to run away with her baby while being chased through the snow by the calvary. How did these fleeing women feed, clothe and comfort their infants through all the hardships? What would happen if the babies died along the way? The mother’s might not have had the safety of time to lay their dead children to rest. Fear of being discovered might have prevented them from outwardly mourning their tragic losses. Perhaps their heartbreaking cries of grief had to be muffled and their grieving carried silently inside them. Given the conditions of the time would the women have had

Plate 3: “Her Baby’s Grave.” Northern Cheyenne tree burial, 1907. The inset shows the burial bundle. (Aadland 68).

35Weist, 80 - 81.
any other choice? They chose between likely death in Oklahoma or a perilous chance for life and freedom. In this case, the Northern Cheyenne men and women walked, fought, and endured every trauma together to achieve their common goals for a quality life in a land they loved according to the Cheyenne way. The resilience of the Northern Cheyenne women through warfare and perilous journeys prevented their nation from being conquered.

On October 23, 1878, Morning Star's band was detained, then confined at Fort Robinson by Captain John Burgess Johnson commanding the Third Calvary. Morning Star's band included the elderly woman, Iron Teeth, among twenty-nine other women and about thirty children. Although they were imprisoned, the men were allowed to hunt outside the fort, but they were not allowed to continue on their journey. The U. S. military persisted in the execution of their orders to apprehend the fleeing Cheyenne who would be forced to return to Oklahoma.

After dark on January 9, 1879, the Cheyenne broke out of their internment. Some of the women hid guns inside their clothing which they gave to the men to help them escape. Mothers like, Iron Teeth, risked their own lives and those of their children for a chance at freedom. Iron Teeth lamented:

For a short distance all of the Indians followed one broken trail toward the river, but soon we had to scatter. My son with the little girl (her youngest daughter) on his back ran off in one direction, while the other daughter and I went in another direction. We had no agreed plan for meeting again. I and the daughter with me found a cave and crawled into it. We did not

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36 Weist, 81.
know what had become of the son and his little sister.\textsuperscript{37}

From a mother’s perspective, the unknown fate of Iron Teeth’s children must have been more agonizing to her than the freezing winter conditions. Undoubtedly she feared her children would be the casualties of this brutal war for freedom. She might have braced herself in prayer through this traumatizing tragedy that her family would be spared. In Grinnell’s account of the fleeing women and children from Fort Robinson he described:

A man came upon a group of five women lying under some pines, all apparently dead except Dull Knife’s [Morning Star’s] daughter, who with her back against a tree trunk was just drawing her last breath. He tried to talk to her, but she was too far gone to speak aloud. On her back she had a little child - not her own - shot, and lying about were two or three other children, all of them dead. These women had run, carrying their babies, until they were exhausted, and had then sat down here to rest and get their breath, and had been overtaken by the soldiers and killed as they sat.\textsuperscript{38}

The men could fight back and did so valiantly while the women ran to save the children, the tribe’s future. When they could not outrun their enemies their last hope might have been for a quick painless death. Like the men, they too died with honor. The Cheyenne women who survived these tragic devastations did not give in to their traumatic losses. They endured their painful experiences and continued in their struggle to secure a Cheyenne way of life in a homeland they embraced as their own.

Of the 149 Northern Cheyenne prisoners, sixty-one were killed and many were severely wounded. The survivors joined the Oglalas at the Pine Ridge Agency until their

\textsuperscript{37}Marquis, \textit{The Cheyennes of Montana}, 76.

\textsuperscript{38}Grinnell, \textit{The Fighting Cheyennes}, 422.
transfer to Fort Keogh in November, 1879.  

Little Wolf’s band had camped through the winter at Lost Chokecherry until March of 1879. His band suffered from internal conflicts. In one case, an angry man beat and clubbed his family members. His frightened adult daughter stabbed him with her sheath knife and killed him. She was distraught with grief for having killed her father. According to Cheyenne law, she could have been banished from the tribe for having committed the worst of all crimes, killing another Cheyenne. However, everyone sympathized with her and she was not punished.

In another incident, Buffalo Calf Road Woman’s husband, Black Coyote, refused to give up his horse, as requested by an old chief, for the tired old women who were walking. The old chief whipped Black Coyote for his indolence. Humiliated by the whipping, Black Coyote shot and killed the old chief. Black Coyote, Buffalo Calf Road Woman and her two children and an old woman were banished from the band. In February, Little Wolf’s band reunited with Two Moon’s band at Fort Keogh where he and other men of his band enlisted as scouts.

Last Bull’s band of about thirty-four Cheyenne included Black Coyote and his warrior wife, Buffalo Calf Road Woman. They were not ready to give up their right to freedom and continued to hunt throughout the upper Powder river and upper Tongue

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39Weist, 82-84.

40Marquis, Wooden Leg, 327.

41Marquis, Wooden Leg, 328-329.

42Weist, 84-87.
river area. Last Bull's band lived in the traditional way of hunting buffalo, camping and cherishing the Cheyenne way of life. During one those days the wife of Many Colored Braids served as midwife for the famous woman warrior Buffalo Calf Road Woman who birthed a son. When the small band moved camp, Buffalo Calf Road Woman and her newborn son were transported in a travois bed and the other women set up and took down her lodge at each campsite. "Now there were thirty-five people in our band."43 Later, Black Coyote killed a Fort Keogh soldier and was hanged in Miles City. While he was in jail, his famous warrior wife, Buffalo Calf Road Woman, died.44 Finally, hunger and poverty took their toll and forced the band to surrender at the White River Agency in Nebraska.45

Beginning in 1880 until 1882, Cheyenne families began to settle on Lame Deer and Muddy Creeks, along the Tongue River, and between the mouths of Otter and Hanging Woman Creeks, along the Rosebud Creek. In 1883 the Cheyenne living with the Northern Arapahos moved to the Tongue River area to join the main body of Cheyenne.46

In December of 1881 and September of 1883, the 500 Northern Cheyenne remaining in Oklahoma lead by Little Chief and Wild Hog, were transferred to the Pine Ridge Agency in Dakota Territory.47 They waited until 1891 for their return to the main

43Marquis, Wooden Leg, 301.
44Marquis, Wooden Leg, 328-329.
45Marquis, Wooden Leg, 304.
46Weist, 103.
47Weist, 132.
body of Northern Cheyenne.

In 1884, the last buffalo was killed on Northern Cheyenne lands in the Tongue River region. During this same year, President Chester A. Arthur signed an Executive Order establishing the Tongue River Indian Reservation. Finally, after considerable suffering and constant perseverance they had secured a permanent home in Southeastern, Montana Territory. The first permanent agent for the reservation, Robert L. Upshaw, reported for duty in February, 1886. In his first annual report dated August 24, 1886, Agent Upshaw declared all crops planted by the Northern Cheyenne had failed, they possessed no domestic animals for subsistence, nor were there any wild game animals near enough their lands to hunt. The lack of resources made the Northern Cheyenne completely dependent on government support. From 1896 through 1899, the Northern Cheyenne were one hundred percent dependent on the government rations as their only food supply. They did not consider the ration foods they received as adequate to sustain them. Their normal diet consisted mostly of meat and the rations consisted of beans, coffee, sugar, flour, and small quantities of beef. Usually these rations did not last from one ration day to the next. The amounts distributed were barely adequate to sustain life. Rations were distributed every two weeks and rarely were full ration portions issued.

\[48\] Weist, 114.

\[49\] Weist, 107.

\[50\] Weist, 112.

\[51\] Weist, 114.

\[52\] Svingen, 131.
In 1886 the Office of Indian Affairs established a Cheyenne police force. A system of courts and tribal judges followed in 1889. Traditional law and tribal leaders were disregarded and disempowered as Cheyenne men began working as police and judges.\(^5^3\)

In 1900, President William McKinley extended the reservation’s eastern boundary by Executive Order to include the area settled by Northern Cheyenne along the Tongue River. The Executive Order also changed the name of the reservation to The Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. Additionally, Congress appropriated money to survey and fence the reservation boundaries, buy out the white homesteaders and purchase cattle for the Cheyenne.\(^5^4\)

Unlike the previous two hundred years of gradual cultural change and adaptation to new influences, the thirty three years between 1857 to 1900 brought sudden changes through which the Northern Cheyenne had survived the decimation of war, eradication of their nomadic buffalo hunting lifestyle, starvation, disease, confinement, and forced assimilation. Their resilience has been demonstrated by their continuity as a culturally distinct people.

\(^{5^3}\)Weist, 124.

\(^{5^4}\)Weist, 142.
The autobiographies and biographic narratives tell the personal stories of a handful of women. But what about the hundreds of other women and their stories of coping, fighting for survival, their joys of marriage, motherhood and cultural fulfillment? What can be known of their mark on Cheyenne history? Although the biographies are few in number, a statistical profile of the familial lives of a few Cheyenne women provides a working narrative framework that initiates further questions of the historical record, surviving elders, and tribal historians. Like moccasin tracks along a damp river bed that reveal tribal identity, demography marks the trail of the journey Northern Cheyenne women walked during the early reservation years. The trail they left behind is marked by the domestic roles of women namely, marriage, birthing, child rearing and homemaking. All of which can be tracked through census data.

Quantitative Methods: A New Direction in American Indian History

A new vision in scholarship is most needed in the exploration of Indian women’s roles, contributions, and resilience. Many gaps in the historical record might be filled by new scholarship on Indian women’s roles in their society from the oldest of oral traditions and from further analysis of the historical record and the integration of the memories of contemporary elders. New scholarship on Indian women’s contributions to cultural persistence and adaptations to foreign influences, and their successes shown by their resilience through all of life’s various challenges would contribute a wealth of resources
towards a comprehensive history. To collect Indian women’s history, contemporary historians will have to reconsider their research methods and venture in new directions.

Meyer and Thornton recognize the wealth of information on American Indians collected by the federal government through census rolls, ration lists, allotment schedules, birth and death registers, and personnel and medical records. However, these data sources have not traditionally occupied the paths of historian’s investigations. Meyer and Thornton recommend quantitative methods for historical research since they are logical means to reveal “a new Indian history”55 from the massive stores of government documents detailing the lives of American Indians. Mathematical computing, statistical reasoning and the development of models to generalize and to predict data are examples of quantitative methods useful for historical research. More precisely, quantitative methods include survey research, multivariate analysis, population projections, life table construction, correlation, and linear regression. The leading quantitative approaches to American Indian history focus on population change through demography and epidemiology, but more perspectives are needed if a fuller picture of American Indian women is to emerge with vibrant clarity.

**Expanding the Scope of American Indian Women’s History through Quantitative Analysis**

Quantitative methods of analyzing and evaluating demographic data enables generalization about some of the familial experiences of American Indian women. The most numerous and available sources of Indian demographic and social information are

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55Meyer and Thornton, 5.
U.S. census reports, the Office of Indian Affair’s inspector’s statistical reports, and Indian agent’s census rolls. The 1900 12th U.S. Census included a special schedule for Indian persons that collected specific details about tribal ethnicity. The Indian schedule also collected information from Indian women regarding number of living children, children ever born, and length of current marriage. Both the U.S. and Indian censuses collected name, age, gender, and relationship to head of household. They also asked questions concerning polygyny, grouped individuals by family household units, and recorded literacy achievement.

Quantitative analysis of data significant to women permits estimates of fertility, child spacing, parenting patterns, and generalizations about marriage practices and acculturation. The analysis is useful in predicting the norms for a specific group of women at a given time or in tracking trends over time. Meyer and Thornton cautioned users of quantitative methods to support the accuracy of their findings with qualitative research in the advancement of the scholarship revealing “the historical experiences of the people who left few written records of their own.” Only a few recent scholars of Indian history have employed quantitative methods. The majority of quantitative efforts focused on American Indians come from anthropologists, archaeologists, sociologists and demographers, disciplines that use statistics.

Defects in the Data and Difficulties of Analyzing Another Culture’s Perspective

Although the U.S. government’s untapped collection of American Indian data offer historians new directions in Indian history, there are inherent difficulties in using

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56 Meyer and Thornton, 23.
these data sources. In her description of the data, Sheila Johansson, a demographer from University of California Berkeley, stated "all phases of native American demographic history are characterized by defective and inadequate data which makes straightforward description or analysis perilous."57

The defects that Johansson referred to include discrepancies in age reporting, underenumeration, population inflation, and incomplete population data. Difficulties are also encountered when discerning the effects of the cultural biases and ethnocentrism of the enumerators in the collection of the data. Furthermore, data collection was filtered through interpreters and translators who may have compromised accuracy. For example, the classification of relatives from Cheyenne kinship to Anglo kinship designations presented a significant margin for error if the interpreter was not fully aware of a particular family's genealogy. Table 1, "Comparison of Kinship Terms" on page 31, illustrates the differences and similarities of kinship classifications between Northern Cheyenne terms and Anglo terms. It is highly probable that numerous mistakes occurred in classifying relatives creating unintentional distortion of the census data. For instance, a young girl living with her mother and brother could be the biological offspring of the mother or the mother's sister's daughter. Similarly, the girl could be a biological sibling to the brother or his sister because their mothers were sisters. The various combinations of kinship, like this example, were filtered through language and cultural interpretations that likely distorted the data.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF KINSHIP TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHEYENNE KINSHIP TERMS/ ROLES</th>
<th>ANGLO AMERICAN KINSHIP TERMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A man’s children call him, father</td>
<td>A man’s children call him, father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man has a father role to his brother’s children</td>
<td>A father’s brother is called uncle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man’s sister is called aunt by his children</td>
<td>A father’s sister is called aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A father’s brother’s wife is called aunt by his children</td>
<td>A father’s brother’s wife is called aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman’s children call her, mother</td>
<td>A woman’s children call her, mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman has a mother role with her sister’s children. These children call her, mother</td>
<td>A mother’s sister is called aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman has an aunt role with her brother’s children. These children call her, aunt</td>
<td>A brother’s sister is called aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both genders call their male siblings, brother</td>
<td>Both genders call their male siblings, brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both genders refer to their parent’s sibling’s male children as brother</td>
<td>The parent’s sibling’s children are cousins (further identified as 1st, 2nd, or 3rd cousin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman’s role is non-verbal with her brothers and male relatives</td>
<td>No similar role definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both genders call their female siblings, sister</td>
<td>Both genders call their female siblings, sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both genders refer to their parent’s sibling’s female children as sister</td>
<td>The parent’s sibling’s children are cousins (further identified as 1st, 2nd, or 3rd cousin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nisson = a woman’s female kin group of sisters accumulated either by female siblings or female “cousins”</td>
<td>No similar kin structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some discrepancies in the data resulted from tribal resentment and fear. The rules


59Sooktis, 29.
and regulations governing American Indians during the early reservation period prohibited polygyny that was punishable by incarceration. Consequently, fear prevented individuals from identifying themselves as polygamists. Some tribes, like the Navajo, employed passive resistance tactics against the dominate society by thwarting government attempts to collect an accurate census of their tribal population.

Another problem in American Indian demographics arises in linking individuals from one census to another. It is an arduous task to track individual American Indians over time because their names changed. Their names were changed according to cultural custom as well as U.S. government imposed name changes imperative to individual land allotment. Within a cultural context, American Indian men changed their Indian names more than once, a practice especially common among the Plains tribes. Among Plains Indian women the same name might be shared by several other women in the tribe. The problem in tracking individuals through time is further exasperated by the intrusion of Anglo names assigned by Indian Agents who then discontinued recording the original Indian names. Tracking individuals from one census to another is mired in the uncertainties of a positive identification.

Despite the defects in the data, census records remain viable resources for expanding the scholarship on American Indians. Undaunted by the data problems, anthropologist Gregory Campbell argued, "These problems are both discoverable and correctable, especially if the investigator has ethnological knowledge of the group under
examination."60 Campbell and fellow anthropologist, John Moore, refuted debate against demographic analysis of American Indian census records. They reminded researchers that "imperfect or biased census data are all that exist, and the researcher must develop techniques of dealing with them if anything at all is to be learned about a tribal society in the documented period."61 The path of new directions in American Indian history may not pass through straightforward descriptions, but is found through myriad methodologies of arduous scholarship and quantitative analysis.

Interpretation of another culture's experiences at a time distant from a person's own life experiences presents difficulties in accurately interpreting statistical data within the context of cultural perspective and place in history. However, with these limitations in mind, and a strong desire to know more about the Northern Cheyenne, especially the women, this writer remained inspired to pursue the perilous paths in search of new scholarship.

**Demographic Research of the Northern Cheyenne**

Anthropologists Gregory Campbell and John Moore are leaders in the demography of the Cheyenne and their techniques define directions for future study. Campbell's research models methodically corrected the census data used in his Northern Cheyenne data bases. He cross-referenced three Indian censuses, 1886, 1890, and 1895 against the 1900 12th U.S. Census to correct age misclassification. He also referred to

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past studies that demonstrated age misclassification among Northern Cheyenne usually fell “within a four year age-range from the actual age.” Campbell corrected age discrepancies by grouping women and their children into five-year cohorts. Campbell’s methods of correcting age misclassifications were used in this study.

In calculating fertility patterns, Campbell sorted and matched children to their biological mothers. Both U.S. and Indian censuses reported each family member’s relationship to the head of household. Consequently, Campbell determined the head of household’s step children to be the biological children of the wife and they were included in the fertility calculations. He further acknowledged that children usually lived with their mothers for fifteen years. As a result, he set the parameters at ages fifteen to thirty-four for calculating the effective fertility. Campbell also excluded all adopted children from the fertility calculations. New visions of the lives of Northern Cheyenne women resulted from Campbell’s data base study. Campbell revealed that “a perpetual cycle of high fertility coupled with high infant mortality would result, producing biologically stressed, but reproductively active women; and infants at high risk for contracting an infectious disease and dying.” Campbell’s methods of matching children to their mothers and excluding adopted children from the fertility calculations were included in the design of this study. His conclusions, garnished from cross-checking, methodical adjustments, and ethnological knowledge, have expanded the scholarship in Indian history, particularly in Northern Cheyenne women’s history.

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John Moore and Campbell’s collaborative study on Southern Cheyenne demographics demonstrated an ethnohistorical approach in correcting census distortions. Moore and Campbell’s Southern Cheyenne data base is characterized by linkages across three benchmark censuses that included special questionnaires and settlement descriptions. Their work utilized the 1880 Bureau of American Ethnology census, the 1891-1892 allotment census, and the 1900 12th Census. Moore and Campbell created compound criteria in linking individuals across the three censuses. Three criteria determined a successful link. For example, a successful link involved an individual tracked by the same name or a very similar translation, “having an age within three years of that dictated by the time between the censuses,” and having the same family structure.64

The Southern Cheyenne study also utilized the data correction techniques Campbell used in his Northern Cheyenne data base. Although their methods minimized the distortions inherent in the census data, they cautioned, “we can assign no mathematical certainty to the probability of a particular linkage.”65 However, their findings were supported by interviews of the study group descendants, construction of a Cheyenne name dictionary for alternate translations of traditional names, and comparisons against the historical record. Campbell and Moore’s synthesis of qualitative and quantitative analysis resulted in improved tribal censuses that reconstructed extended families, identified bands and subbands, clarified kinship terms and adoption practices,

64 Moore and Campbell, 22.

65 Moore and Campbell, 21-22.
polygynous families. The ethnohistorical and quantitative methods developed in Campbell and Moore’s demography of Cheyenne tribal groups provided the starting point used in this study focused only on Northern Cheyenne women in 1900.

**Sketching the Portrait of Northern Cheyenne Women in 1900**

This study will build on the works of Campbell and Moore who have developed demographic research methods particular to study of the Cheyenne. A statistical view of Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 will be examined in a cross-sectional demographic study focused on marriage patterns, parenting, and characteristics of elder women. Like Campbell and Moore, this study designed a data base from the information provided by the U.S. 1900 census and was cross-referenced with the Indian Agent’s 1900 census rolls. However, this study did not track trends over time to the same extent as Campbell and Moore’s work. Rather, the demographic work of this study examined the characteristics of Northern Cheyenne women for the year 1900.

The 1900 U.S. 12th Census is a logical choice for obtaining early reservation demographic data, especially for the Northern Cheyenne who were enumerated by the U.S. Census for the first time since their Tongue River Reservation had been established. The 1900 census included special Indian schedules that collected data pertinent to Indian women. The U.S. census enumerators gathered information on marriage, fertility, tribal ethnicity, occupation, residence, and literacy. Demographers, Shelia Johansson and Samuel Preston, commented “earlier national censuses did not include Native Americans living on their reservations or in a “tribal situation,” nor did they provide direct
information on fertility histories of women.\textsuperscript{66} They further acknowledged that no earlier censuses survived that contained as much demographic information as the 1900 12th U.S. Census. Additionally, the 1900 12th U.S. Census is the earliest available decennial census schedules for Native Americans. Furthermore, the government did not tabulate the data or publish reports from the special Indian schedules collected in 1900. Therefore, the baseline census selected for this study focused on the special Indian schedules in the 1900 12th U.S. Census enumerating the Northern Cheyenne.

On the other hand, the 1900 Indian Agent census provided minimum demographic information. The Indian Agent gathered name, age, relationship to head of household and separated family groups into household units in his census. The Indian Agent and his interpreter collected the data one month after the 1900 12th U.S. Census enumerators had collected their data. The census collected by the Indian Agent provided summary calculations useful in cross-checking qualitative results obtained from the 1900 12th U.S. Census. Both censuses are characterized by the same margin for error resulting from cultural and political misunderstandings, and language barriers between the enumerators and the Northern Cheyenne people. However, the two censuses differed only slightly in their calculations of total population, gender division and age distribution which would not significantly alter percentages determined in demographic analysis.

The total population reported by J.C. Clifford, Tongue River Agent, in his Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for fiscal year ending June 30, 1900, a

source Campbell does not use, included twenty-one more individuals than the U.S. 12th Census. Clifford counted 1,379 Northern Cheyenne that included 656 males and 723 females. It may be possible the difference in population is attributable to a combination of factors. For example, infants born after June 1, 1900 were not included in the U.S. census enumeration, but may have been counted by Agent Clifford. Additionally, the 1900 12th U.S. Census did not account for persons not in the home on the day of the enumeration, while Agent Clifford might have counted persons away from the reservation. The slight differences in population count are not statistically significant. The Indian Agent’s higher enumeration count might be attributable to his motivation to increase his social, political and fiscal authority, or simply due to human error. The U.S. census enumerator had nothing to gain from distorting the total count of Northern Cheyenne. However, both censuses are nearly the same, especially in enumerating women age eighteen and older.

Although discrepancies can be identified in the total population count, Agent Clifford’s report of Northern Cheyenne vital statistics remains useful in measuring total mortality. The 1900 U.S. 12th Census did not collect data on the number of persons who died throughout the year. Consequently, Clifford’s record is the only documented source. He reported that thirty-eight Northern Cheyenne had died in 1900. By the June 30, 1901 reporting period the vital statistics showed: 672 males, 724 females totaling 1,396 persons and an increase of seventeen over the last year. Additionally there were
two marriages and no divorces, fifty-six births and thirty-eight deaths.\textsuperscript{67}

The most significant difference between the two census reports is shown in the number of divorces and new marriages. The Indian Agent refused to acknowledge new marriages and he ignored divorces performed outside the dominant culture’s legalization process. The Indian Agent’s cultural and political views governing his reporting of divorces and new marriages are evident and distorted the census data for these entries. Fortunately, for this study, the 1900 U.S. 12th Census provided a second opinion. The following table illustrates the comparisons.

In general this study, like Campbell, relies on the wealth of information available from the 1900 U.S. 12th Census rather than the Indian Agent’s census data. Campbell’s work focused on the effect of economic underdevelopment on health measured by age-specific birth rates, birth intervals calculated by the ages of surviving children, the correlation of birth and death rates, age-sex structures, and the trend of population change. This study built on his work by exploring several factors regarding marital status, the frequency of naming patterns, the comparisons between reproductive women and the reproductive history of the elder women, family composition such as the frequency of grandmothers raising grandchildren and female heads of household, and the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>U.S. 12TH CENSUS 1900</th>
<th>1900 INDIAN AGENT CENSUS</th>
<th>DIFFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>1358</td>
<td>1379</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Births</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total males</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men age 18+</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total females</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women age 14+</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women age 18+</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of houses</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># new marriages</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of divorces</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
rate of English literacy among Northern Cheyenne women in 1900.

The Northern Cheyenne data base used in this study was developed from the questions collected in the special Indian schedules. Specifically, the database variables included household group number, individual identification number, head of household designation, births, living children, marital status and number of years married, gender, relationship to head of household, occupation, place of birth, dwelling type, date of birth, literacy, and ethnic background for mother, father and self. These variables were combined in various calculations to estimate information such as age at marriage, and birth rates for a given age cohort. Campbell’s method of age correction was used in sorting the total population into age cohorts at five year intervals. This study recalculated the age-sex structures and age-specific birth rates that Campbell used in his work. The results of his work and this study were similar, but presented differently. Campell calculated age-specific birth rates by four year age cohorts in relationship to the total population growth. This study calculated age-specific birth rates by four year age cohorts for comparison within the reproductive group and with the elder women’s reproductive history. Campbell and this study used the same data sources to answer different questions and each study revealed valuable information that contributes to the overall clarity of the Northern Cheyenne women’s experience in 1900.

Like Campbell and Moore’s ethnohistorical approach, the quantitative methods of this study were compared against personal narratives of Northern Cheyenne’s analogous to the 1900 reservation experience. While Campbell and Moore relied on interviews with descendants, this study employed traditional historical research methods that revealed
qualitative evidence from earlier personal narratives of Northern Cheyenne women recorded in the past. Other supporting evidence was found in the Commissioner of Indian Affairs annual reports, the published works of John Stands In Timber, Thomas Marquis, George Bird Grinnell, and numerous other historical texts describing the roles and contributions of Northern Cheyenne women.

Although some procedures employed in this study replicated Campbell and Moore's work, this work also has differences by examining common characteristics of women's lives during the early reservation period. For example, how old were they when they married, how many children would they have, who helped with parenting, and what characterized the lives of the elderly grandmothers? The two 1900 censuses provided the demographic data used to estimate the answers to these questions. The historical sources and personal narratives gave shape to the statistical portrait of these women in 1900. The final analysis revealed the average Northern Cheyenne woman in 1900 was named White Cow Woman who had married at age twenty-three and had been married for fourteen years. She had birthed three babies at home and experienced the loss of at least one, and she raised her two children with the help of an adult female relative. The average elder woman had birthed five babies at home and by the time she reached her golden years she and fifty-seven percent of her age group had lost half of the children they birthed. In this case, the elder women's children were well into their adult years themselves. The interesting statistic is the large number of elder women in the tribe. In 1900, more elder women had been widowed than men. These widowed grandmothers usually lived with their daughters and helped raise their grandchildren. Marriage, children, and growing old
characterized the lives of Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 like women of all cultures through all time.

**Identity by Name**

All too often Indian women are nameless in history texts. Unlike the stories of men, their names are skimmed over in the interests of other frontier issues. Patricia Albers and William James discuss postcards and photos of Indian people in their article, “Illusion and Illumination: Visual Images of American Indian Women in the West,” they conclude “the identities of Indian women rarely spoke for themselves as pictures of Indian men did ... Instead they were given abstract labels, such as “squaw,” “maiden,” or “princess,” or their identity was submerged in that of a man’s: a husband, father, or brother.” However, within Cheyenne culture and for historic accuracy women’s names reveal something important about their identity.

According to Rubie Sooktis, a Northern Cheyenne ethnohistorian, a name is a tribute to a relative and representative of the value and respect given to that individual. She noted:

The name is traditionally taken from the father’s side of the family...[However], There are some cases when the mother’s side of the family will give the child his name. A woman had the right to name her brother’s or male cousins’ children. [In summary,] a person, male or female, can be named after two people and have two names. A Cheyenne name can be given to 4 living people. A person “must be able to give the name away again without losing the meaning, value and respect for the name and for the person whose memory lives on through the name.” Both parents have equal rights in choosing the child’s name, one does not have

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Grinnell’s earlier research asserts a much stricter naming custom. He reported, “A woman’s daughter might not be named after the relations of the mother, but after some relative of the father. In fact, children were almost always named after their father’s relatives.” Additionally, naming customs included stages of name changes. For example, an infant might be known by a nickname until about the age of five when his or her formal name became commonly used. A family might also change a son’s name after a creditable act, such as counting coup. By tribal custom, a woman kept her own name after marriage, she did not take on her husband’s name as her surname. Iron Teeth’s example was common, “I was married to Red Pipe when I was twenty-one years old. But my name was not changed. The Indian women of the old times did not lose their own names on account of marriage. In my girlhood I was called Mah-i-ti-wo-nee-ni - Iron Teeth. All through my life I have been known to my people by this same name.”

Consequently, the women’s names on the 1900 U.S. 12th Census, if interpreted accurately, should have followed the customs described by Grinnell, Sooktis and Iron Teeth. The database for this study included each woman’s name. The name category

69 Sooktis, 3-4.

70 George Bird Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Ways of Life vol. 1 (1923; reprint, University of Nebreska Press, 1972), 107.


72 Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians vol. 1, 123.

was further sorted by gender, and frequently used female names such as White Cow, and were arranged by age. The name-age patterns were compared to the cultural naming customs described by Rubie Sooktis. The most common female names recorded in the 1900 U.S. 12th Census are listed in the following table.

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAMES</th>
<th>AGE RANGE</th>
<th>TOTAL # OF WOMEN WITH THE SAME NAME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Cow Woman</td>
<td>2 years to 70</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Woman</td>
<td>.50 years to 46</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage Woman</td>
<td>5 years to 65</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking Woman</td>
<td>.25 years to 73</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns Woman</td>
<td>2 years to 61</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In selecting and sorting female names all versions of a name were included in the count. For instance, if a name in the census appeared as Sage and also as Sage Woman both versions were counted as Sage Woman. In the grammar of Cheyenne language most female names end with the silent “e” consistent with the word for woman, he’e’, that also ends with a silent “e”. This coorelation might be a linguistic coincidence because Cheyenne women’s names can have other endings as well. However, it is possible that through the translation process, the interpreter may have dropped the word for woman.
from some of the names. Both singular and plural forms of a name were included in the accounting of most frequent names. For example, both Burn and Burns were counted in the tally of women named Burns Woman. Overall, there are 257 female individuals with unique names, while 116 names are shared with at least one other female. Although twenty-four girls and women share the name White Cow Woman, on an average three to four females will have the same name. In a broad sense, the naming customs described by Rubie Sooktis and Grinnell apply to the 1900 Northern Cheyenne women's names.

For comparison, an analysis of women's English names is derived from the 1900 Indian Census taken by Indian Agent, J.C. Clifford in July 1900. English names were assigned by Indian Agent, John Tully to all Northern Cheyenne tribal members in 1891. This naming policy occurred seven years after the reservation was established and nine years prior to the 1900 Indian Census. In Clifford's census report, he acknowledges each person by their assigned English name. The most frequent English female name for all age groups was Mary. The second name most frequently assigned name for all age groups was Nellie or Nelly. This name also ranked as the leading name in five different age cohorts. Although a few five year old's were named Nellie, the majority of the women named Nellie or Nelly were age nine or older. Perhaps this name had some importance to Indian Agent, John Tully who named this age group nine years before. Table 4 shows the frequency of shared English names at higher rates than the Indian names shown in Table 3.

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74Richard Little Bear, Dull Knife Memorial College Vice President for Cultural Affairs, telephone interview, March 5, 1998.
The critics of Indian census data have reported the frequency of shared names as a major problem obstructing straightforward description. In this case, the Indian naming customs created fewer duplication problems than the assigned English names. Furthermore, all women older than seventy-five, numbering twenty-nine individuals, reported a name not shared by anyone else. Additionally, eleven of the 713 women on the Indian Census were reported by their translated Indian name while 672 of 710 women on the 1900 U.S. 12th Census reported their translated Indian name.

**TABLE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAMES</th>
<th>AGE RANGE</th>
<th>TOTAL # OF WOMEN WITH THE SAME NAME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>3 years to 82</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nellie or Nelly</td>
<td>3 years to 85</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>.50 years to 90</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennie</td>
<td>2 years to 90</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>8 years to 90</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>5 years to 61</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>1 year to 83</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The name Mary, claimed by four women, was the most frequently claimed English name among Northern Cheyenne women enumerated on the U.S. 12th Census. Both Nellie (or Nelly) and Anna were names claimed by two Northern Cheyenne women and only one woman declared her name as Nora. The majority of the Northern Cheyenne
women self reported their Indian name, not their English name when enumerated for the U.S. 12th Census. From the frequency of self reported names it seems fair to state that English names assigned by the Indian Agent were not completely adopted by the Northern Cheyenne women in 1900.

Age and Gender Distribution

The individuals enumerated on the 1900 U.S. 12th Census self-reported the demographic information requested. Considering language translation problems, it is reasonable to ask if the appropriate responses were given regarding birth date and age. Fortunately, the Cheyenne numerical system, like the American numerical system, operates on a base ten system. Therefore, computing age should not have been a problem for the Cheyenne speaker or a skilled interpreter. However, human error is always a factor that tarnishes absolute certainty.

The issue of age accuracy was tested by Thomas Marquis in his early reservation research. He observed:

Somebody might think the old Indians do not know their ages. But they do. In 1922, when I first met Iron Shirt, I asked him his age. He replied promptly - 91. A year later I asked him again, as if he never had told me. Again he replied promptly - 92. At other times I made this test, and on each occasion his statement conformed to correct computation...I have made other tests of like character, with other old Cheyennes, and have not met with any instance of mistaken calculation.

The 1900 U.S. 12th Census included a man named Iron Shirt whose date of birth

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was June 1830 and he was seventy years old. This same man would have turned ninety-
two in June 1922. If this is the same individual Thomas Marquis tested for knowledge of
his age, then perhaps Marquis visited Iron Shirt prior to June which would confirm his
age of ninety-one.

According to Gregory Campbell’s work with census data his “past studies of
Cheyenne census material have shown that age misclassification, either through age
heaping or misreporting, tended to fall within a four year age-range from the actual
age.”77 For the purposes of gaining a general knowledge about the Northern Cheyenne
people from the 1900 census, the problem in accurate age recording has been set aside.
The goal of this research is in seeking information about the lifestyle led by the women of
the tribe. Consequently, exact age is less important than understanding how age groups
may have experienced certain things in common.

The U.S. census enumerator counted 1358 Northern Cheyenne in 1900. Of the
total population 714 tribal members were female and 644 were male. Figure 1 “1900
Northern Cheyenne Population: By Age Cohorts” on page 50 illustrates the five year age
cohorts and the total number of people in each cohort from infants to the eldest person.
Infants to four year old’s comprised the largest five year age cohort. Tribal members
under eighteen years old totaled six hundred and one hundred ten elders ranged from
sixty to ninety-four years old. Figure 1 reveals the majority of tribal constituents were
very young, mostly persons under twenty-five years old.

To examine the opportunities for marriage the total number of single persons in

77Campbell, “Changing Patterns of Health,” 341.
each age-gender cohort were compared for an estimation of available partners for each cohort. The gender totals for each age category illustrated in Figure 2 "Age-Gender Cohorts: Northern Cheyenne Population in 1900" on page 51 show that enough marriageable partners existed within the Northern Cheyenne population to ensure that most women would have a chance to fulfill their mother roles in the tribe.

Figure 3, "Single Northern Cheyenne Men and Women in 1900: Potential Marriageable Partners," on page 52, portrays how combinations of census data revealed informative results that enable reasonable predictions about future outcomes. In this case, Figure 3 shows there are more single men than there are women. Although there were plenty of single men to ensure that every single woman would find a husband, a
reduction in birth rates might be expected within the next generation if the men were

Figure 2: Age-Gender Cohorts

Northern Cheyenne Population in 1900

without partners. The gender inequity in the number of single adults indicates that women married at a younger age than the men. After the age of twenty-four the number of single men drops dramatically as they begin their married years. Under tribal customs prior to the reservation period, a higher population of women would facilitate polygyny, especially during the peak of the fur trade.

The results of sorting the female population by age provided estimations of the number of women in age appropriate roles such as marriage, parenting, leadership and healing. For example, elderly women are more likely to have respected reputation as a healer, while younger women might be more likely to produce most of the tribes children,
and middle aged women may have lead the professional guilds. These questions will be examined in further detail throughout the following sections on health, marriage, fertility, and parenting.

**Figure 3: Single Northern Cheyenne Men and Women in 1900**

Unmarried Women

Historically, Cheyenne women were known for their chastity. The Tongue River Reservation Indian Agent, R. L. Upshaw, reported in 1889 that:

The habits of the women as to chastity are almost universally good; better than white people. This fact is known throughout this country, and is in great contrast with the morals of some of the neighboring tribes. The physician informs me that he has never had a single case of gonorrhea or
syphilis among them.\textsuperscript{78}

At the time of Grinnell’s association with the Northern Cheyenne, 1890 - 1923, he noted that most of the women still wore the chastity rope. Young women wore a protective rope wrapped around the waist and around the thighs as a chastity belt. It was always worn at night and when away from home. Any man disrespecting the chastity rope brought on cause for a fatal reaction from the male relatives of the injured girl.\textsuperscript{79}

In Truman Michelson’s “Narrative of a Southern Cheyenne Woman” the narrator explains, “My mother furnished me rawhide twine and a piece of hide to use as a diaper which was securely tied around my hips and pudendum. This was done to preserve my virtue against the attacks of an over anxious young man.”\textsuperscript{80} According to the data in the 1900 U.S. 12th Census, no single women had birthed a child. Therefore, the cultural value and respect for chastity among Northern Cheyenne women had been continued to 1900.

Commonly, single Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 were fifteen to nineteen years old and did not have a household of their own. As shown in Table 5, “The Unmarried Northern Cheyenne Men and Women in 1900,” on page 57, more than half of


\textsuperscript{79}Grinnell, \textit{The Cheyenne Indians}, vol 1, 134.

\textsuperscript{80}Truman Michelson, “The Narrative of a Southern Cheyenne Woman,” \textit{Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections} 87 (1932), 4.
all the women in the 15 - 19 age cohort were single. Additionally, the greatest change of marital status occurred among women in the 15 - 19 age cohort. In particular, they accounted for half of the new marriages in 1900. Table 6, “The Northern Cheyenne Monogamous Marriage Patterns in 1900”, on page 63, shows the marital activity of 15 - 19 year old women compared to the older women. In Grinnell’s account of Cheyenne marriage customs he concluded that the marriageable age for girls occurred soon after her first menses while the marriageable age for their male counterparts occurred after they had been to war which demonstrated they had grown up.81 However, Grinnell acknowledged that young men courted their girlfriends one to five years before they proposed marriage through a representative.82 Grinnell’s observations are substantiated by the 1900 U.S. 12th Census information shown in Table 6. The average age of husbands for the women’s age cohort 15 to 19 was twenty-four years old, eight years older than the women’s average marriageable age of sixteen. The youngest women, ages fifteen to thirty-four, represented seventy-two percent of the twenty five divorces reported in 1900. Beyond the age of thirty-nine no women reported they were single. Instead, they reported they were divorced or widowed.

There were very few divorced women in 1900. Figure 3 on page 52 illustrates that women had ample opportunity to remarry because there were enough potential male

81Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians, vol 1, 134.
82Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians, vol 1, 137.
partners in the total population. Furthermore, in Belle Highwalking's narrative, she reveals that her father "married many women, six that I know of. He did not treat them well so they would leave him." 83 According to Carol Clark's research on Cheyenne customs, a woman found public and family support for divorce if her husband abused her. A wife might also be willingly absconded from her husband and become another man's wife after an exchange of gifts. Additionally, a wife could divorce her husband by returning to her parent's home. 84 Unlike White women during the same era, Northern Cheyenne women possessed greater control over their personal lives made evident by their right to initiate divorce. Their freedom was demonstrated by their ability to divorce when they viewed it as necessary. Belle Highwalking exerted her authority over her son-in-law. "My daughter, Theresa, has been married two times. Her first husband didn't treat her very well so I removed him." 85 Table 5 on page 57, shows the highest rate of divorce among the younger women while the total number of divorces reduced significantly among older women. Compared to 287 married women only twenty-five divorces were reported by the Northern Cheyenne women in 1900. The low divorce rate suggests that some marital shifting occurred among the youngest couples yet, they likely


85 Highwalking, 11.
shared the ideal goal of a long term marriage as demonstrated by the older couples.
### TABLE 5

THE UNMARRIED NORTHERN CHEYENNE MEN AND WOMEN IN 1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age cohorts of unmarried men and women</th>
<th>Total per cohort</th>
<th>Total single</th>
<th>Total divorced</th>
<th>Total widowed</th>
<th>Total # heads household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages are based on 446 total women. * Includes one 12 year old single male head of household. W - Widowed, D - Divorced, S - Single.
Although nearly half of all Northern Cheyenne women age fifteen and older were married in 1900, widowed women nearly doubled the number of single women and accounted for eighty-three of the total 446 adult women. Forty-three widows were heads of their households in 1900. Conversely, only five men were widowed and they were not heads of their household. Table 5 on page 57 shows that sixty-nine percent of the widows were elder women older than fifty-four and most likely in age cohorts, 65 - 69, 70 - 74, and 80 - 84. Carol Niethammer described the customs of widowhood prior to the reservation period, “A Cheyenne widow who was really bereft might also gash her forehead and go off to live alone and destitute in the brush. Sometimes a woman isolated herself for a full year, after which her relatives gradually began camping close to her, slowly reincorporating her into the life of her family and community.” However, by 1900 most of the Cheyenne widowed women headed their own household and lived in houses where they most likely expressed their grieving without living “destitute in the brush.” The fifty widowed women at or above sixty years old could not expect to remarry because only three men of similar age were not married.

**Monogamous Women**

Generally, Cheyenne marriages became long term relationships, especially by middle age. Grinnell observed the ideal marriage:

The man and the woman were partners, sharing equally in the work of the family, and often in a deep and lasting affection which each bore toward the other - an affection which, beginning in youth with love and marriage, lasted often to the end of life. I have seen many examples of such

attachment, seldom expressed in words, but shown in the daily conduct of life, where in all his occupations the man’s favorite companion was the wife he had courted as a girl and by whose side he had made his struggle for success and now at last had grown old.87

The 1900 12th U.S. Census affirms Grinnell’s observations regarding the length of marriage. Among the married women in 1900, the average number of years married ranged between 1.5 years among the youngest women to forty-four years among the elder women. The average length of marriage for all Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 was 14.7 years. However, questions about former marriages were not part of the census enumeration. As a result, the averages in Table 6 on page 63 pertain only to the current marriage. The steady rise in average age married for all women shows that remarriage was quite likely for Northern Cheyenne women until they were in their early forty’s.

The number of married women was greatest among women ages fifteen to fifty-four. This group accounts for 251 of 287 marriages in the Northern Cheyenne population in 1900. Among the married couples, women ages fifteen to thirty-nine were likely to have a husband who was six to nine years older. The age difference correlates with Grinnell’s earlier observation that men were generally older than their brides and courtship normally lasted several years before the couple married. However, women from the age of forty to seventy-nine were more likely to have a husband whose age was similar to their own. The age similarity among the middle aged couples suggests that marital shifting occurred among the youngest couples and eventually they engaged in long term marriages with a partner closer to their age. This study shows that the youngest married couples

87Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians, vol 1, 128.
had the highest rate of divorce during the early reservation years. Although federal
government regulations and policies attempted to control the solominization of marriages,
tribal marriage customs continued as well as tribal divorce customs addressing abuse,
dissatisfaction and wife absconding. Furthermore, long term marriages remained the ideal
as demonstrated by fifty-three married Northern Cheyenne persons in 1900 that had been
married 30 years or more.

In this study, married women without their husband’s enumerated as members of
the household were classified as female heads of household. It is possible that some of the
missing husbands could have been enumerated with another household while visiting.
However, the census data does not provide enough information for an explanation.
Another possibility could be that some of the missing husbands may have been off the
reservation during the enumeration process. Tongue River Agent, J. C. Clifford, wrote in
his June 30, 1900 annual report, “Porcupine and eight others are now off the reservation
without authority.”88 It’s also possible that at least six of the twelve married female heads
of household might have been the wives of polygamous men, however, the six men
claiming a polygamous marriage did not identify a second wife. In any event, only a few
Northern Cheyenne women were heads of household in 1900. Of 446 adult women, only
sixty-one were heads of household because their husbands were missing, or they were
divorced or widowed.

Table 6 indicates twenty-five new marriages in 1900 that contradicts the agent’s

88U.S. Department of the Interior, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Annual Reports
(Washington: GPO, 1900), 273.
annual report for the same year. Clifford, reported no marriages and no divorces.

However, the Northern Cheyenne people self reported seven marriages of less than one year and eighteen marriages of one year to the U.S. census enumerator. Consequently, the agent was not recognizing new marriages outside his attempt to regulate the marriage process as established by Western law and custom.

The federal government’s general laws, rules and regulations relating to Indian Affairs in 1890 stipulated that “The clerk and deputy clerks of the said United States court shall have the power within their respective divisions to issue marriage licenses or certificates and to solemnize marriages”. The law also acknowledged the legitimacy of all previous marriages occurring by tribal customs. The U.S. government sought to create a change in marriage customs through regulating the young Indian people. Indian couples that did not seek authorization to marry from the Indian Agent were arrested.

Belle Highwalking’s newly wed experience may describe the typical concerns of other women during the early 1900’s. When she initially married Floyd Highwalking, she chose him as her husband simply by going away with him. The actual wedding occurred by tribal custom a short time afterward. However, she clearly remembered the impact of the White man’s law.

We had both policemen and a court on the reservation in those days, and they put people in jail if they lived together without getting married...A couple of days after we had been living in Lame Deer, the police called both Floyd and me into court. Floyd went in first...I went in after he came out. There was a circle of policemen and a judge, and they asked me questions. They asked, “Are you after this boy?” I answered, “Yes.” they asked, “Do you want to marry this boy?” and I answered “Yes.” All I

89U.S. 51st Congress, Session I, CH. 182. 1890. p 52.
could say was "yes." This was all that they asked. We didn’t go to jail.90

Belle and Floyd were married for fifty-two years at the time of Floyd’s death in 1964.91

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Plate 4. BELLE AND FLOYD HIGHWALKING.

The Highwalking family in the early 1900's; Belle, Floyd, May and George (Highwalking 12).

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90Highwalking, 14.

91Highwalking, 61 - 62.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age cohorts of wives</th>
<th>All adult women</th>
<th>All married women</th>
<th>Avg age at marriage</th>
<th>Avg # of years married</th>
<th>Total # married female heads of household</th>
<th>Husband's avg age per wife’s age cohort</th>
<th>All women married in 1900</th>
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<td>23.6 pop average</td>
<td>14.7 pop average</td>
<td>12 marriages, husband not enumerated</td>
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Polygamous Marriages

Of 287 marriages nine households declared a polygamous marriage. Only the men claimed polygamous marriages when questioned by the interpreter and the census enumerator in 1900. Every wife responded “no” to the question, perhaps because of the way it was asked. The instructions to the enumerator regarding polygamy read, “If the Indian man is living with more than one wife, or if the Indian woman is a plural wife or has more than one husband, write “yes”. If not, write “no”.” Misunderstanding of the three-part question or fear of the laws prohibiting polygamous marriage may explain why the women denied polygamy.

The average age of wives in a polygamous household was forty-two years while the average age of wives in monogamous households was nineteen years younger at twenty-three years of age. The second wife of a polygamous marriage was seven to fifteen years younger than the first wife and the average age of her children were five years younger than the first wife’s children. Additionally, the average polygamous marriage of twenty-three years was greater by nine years than monogamous marriages averaging fourteen years. By 1900, the Northern Cheyenne’s had resided on their reservation for sixteen years. The length of polygamous marriages suggest that polygamy was carried over to the reservation period, but did not continue with any regularity. The low number of polygamous marriages indicate that polygamy was nearing extinction among the Northern Cheyenne in 1900. The demise of polygamy may in part be

92U.S. Census Office, 12th Census, Population Schedules, Custer County, Tongue River Reservation, Enumeration District 208, Reel 910, (1900).
attributable to the extreme poverty of the people and the disempowerment of the men. Reservation life ended the men’s methods of achieving status and increased authority through warrior deeds and buffalo hunting which had permitted them a means of supporting additional wives. However, the U.S. government enforced laws that prohibited polygamous marriages. Fear of prosecution might explain why only 9 polygamous marriages were reported.

Some of the old men found a way to circumvent the law prohibiting polygamy. They chose to live part time with each wife in her own household. This practice might explain the unusually high number of female heads of household on the U.S. census. Some of these women may have been the wives of a husband’s alternate household. In the early 1930's, Wooden Leg identified only one Cheyenne man in a polygamous marriage. Wooden Leg described the arrangement of wives. “They are extremely old, are sisters, and they have been his two wives for sixty or more years. He stays a part of the time with one of them and a part of the time with the other. The sister-wives visit each other, but they have different homes, several miles apart.”

In Grinnell’s description of polygamy among the Northern Cheyennes, “five wives was the largest number of women married to one man. Younger sisters were the potential wives of an older sister’s husband. Men seldom married a second wife who was not related to the first. To do otherwise caused trouble and the first wife was likely to leave her husband.” In John H. Moore’s demographic research of the Northern

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93 Marquis, Wooden Leg, 369.
94 Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians, vol 1, 153.
Cheyenne, he concluded that “Polygyny tended to run in certain prestigious families.”

In the 1891 annual report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Indian Agent, John Tully, concluded that “the men most competent to act [as judges in the Court of Indian Offenses] are polygamists, which is forbidden.” Moore conceded that council chiefs were most often polygynous and their households centered on the trade and the production of robes used in trade. Subsequently, their leadership and economic backgrounds developed their respectable reputation.

Wooden Leg was a judge during Eddy’s term as Indian Agent for the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Wooden Leg considered giving up his position as judge when Eddy told him he would have to send away one of his wives. Wooden Leg struggled with the decision, but decided to comply when he could see no way around the order prohibiting polygamy.

I made up my mind to be the first one to send away my extra wife, then I should talk to the other Cheyennes about the matter. I took plenty of time to think about how I should let my wives know about what was coming. Then I allowed the released one some further time to make arrangements as to where she should go. The first wife, the older one, had two daughters. The younger wife had no children. It seemed this younger one ought to leave me. I was in very low spirits.

In Belle Highwalking’s experience, she initially felt uncomfortable about


98Marquis, Wooden Leg, 367.
polygamy. "Floyd's father had two wives and, when I first saw them, I felt very funny. These women were sisters. Each wife had a bed on the opposite side of the house, and the old man would spend one night with one wife and the next night with the other. I finally got used to it."99 Belle's unfamiliarity with polygamy in the early 1900's suggests the practice was fading.

The Rise and Fall of Birth Rates from 1886 to 1900

The total population of the Northern Cheyenne steadily increased from 794 in 1886 to 1,193 in 1894. However, the increased population occurred from the gathering of scattered kinsman rather than a high birth rate. For example, in 1891, 276 Northern Cheyennes were transferred from Pine Ridge to the Tongue River Reservation. By 1900 the tribal population of 1,358 had grown by births rather than resettlement of kinsman from other reservations.

Campbell measured population change from 1886 to 1903 by comparing crude birth rates with crude death rates which revealed a steady decline in population growth. The approach of this study focused on the trends of total fertility rates (TFR) compared to the crude birth rates (CBR) of the Northern Cheyenne population in relation to the number of women in their reproductive years and the number of grandmothers to assist them. The crude birth rate (CBR) is a measure of natality calculated by dividing the total population by the number of children under one year of age and expressed per 1,000. The total fertility rate (TFR) is a measure of fertility calculated by dividing the total number of live births by the number of women ages fifteen to forty-four and expressed

99Highwalking, 15.
per 1,000. Data calculated from three Indian census records including 1886, 1890, 1894 and the 1900 U. S. 12th Census indicated a trend of high then low fertility intervals.\textsuperscript{100}

Although, the total number of reproductive Northern Cheyenne women rose steadily from 186 in 1886 to 272 in 1900, the number of live births, the crude birth rates (CBR) and the total fertility rates (TFR) fluctuated in an alternating pattern of high and low results. Specifically, 1886 was a high birth rate year with a CBR of 45.34 attributed to thirty-six live births from 186 women in their reproductive years (ages 15 to 44) at a TFR of 193.54. 1890 resulted in a low birth rate year of twenty-six live births with a CBR of 28.79 and a TFR of 124.40 from 209 women in their reproductive years. Four years later, the 1894 census marked a high birth rate year with forty-five live births and CBR of 37.72, reaching levels near the 1886 figures. The TFR for 1886 also increased at 183.67 for 245 women of reproductive age. 1900 was a low birth rate year with forty-three live births, a CBR of 31.66, a TFR of 158.08 for 272 women of reproductive age. According to Campbell, disease and poverty caused a decline in Northern Cheyenne population. He wrote, “by 1900, the Northern Cheyennes experienced a 5.5 percent population decrease. This decline can be directly attributed to the growing severity of prevalent infectious disease and to the growing state of poverty on the reservation.”\textsuperscript{101} Despite an apparent decline in population trends by 1900, the ratio of children to Northern Cheyenne married women was 1.65. Compared to the Crow, a neighboring tribe to the

\textsuperscript{100}Reno Charette, “The Fertility of Northern Cheyenne Women: from 1886 to 1894,” Graduate research paper, University of Montana, 1992.

\textsuperscript{101}Campbell, “Changing Patterns of Health,” 351.
Northern Cheyenne, the ratio of children to married women was lower at 1.46. The numbers are disparingly low, but improve when married women with no children are removed from the calculations. Northern Cheyenne elder women averaged 2.62 living children in 1900 while the younger women in their reproductive years averaged 2.41 living children. Hoxie's calculations included childless women and he did not report mother to child ratios. However, since the child to woman ratio was lower for the Crow than for the Northern Cheyenne it can be expected the child to mother ratio was lower as well. By comparison, the Northern Cheyenne mothers might have had greater fertility than the neighboring Crow women. These kinds of quantitative comparisons should be approached with caution as they reveal only slim segments of the total picture. Social and cultural factors, among others, contribute to the trends of population growth and decline. For example, the ratio of grandmothers to infant grandchildren is a cultural parenting factor worthy of further investigation.

The population of grandmothers is significant, for their support activities nurtured each child's chance to reach maturity. From a cultural perspective, the elderly women assumed many of the daily child care responsibilities enabling the younger women to accomplish the household tasks. In 1886, there were ninety-two women forty-five years old and older to assist with child care for thirty-six infants. In other words, two grandmothers for every baby. Although there were three elder women for each of the twenty-six infants born in 1890, this year marked the lowest population growth of the

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four sample census reports. In 1894, 150 elder women match each infant born three to one. However, by 1900 the forty-three infants and 174 elder women at a ratio of four to one failed to show population growth. Figure 4, “Crude Birth Rate and Total Fertility Rate for Northern Cheyenne Women Compared to the Total number of Elder Women,” illustrates intervals of population growth and decline while the number of grandmothers steady increased.

The year of greatest population growth, 1886, also marked the least number of elder women. Conversely, by 1900 the fertility rate had seriously declined while the number of elder women increased. This correlation contradicted the predicted outcomes based on
cultural traditions of child care practices that included the parenting benefits of a grandmother’s care. The central paradox here is an ideal cultural parenting environment in which the infants can not survive at the same rate as their grandmothers. What factors helped the grandmothers survive while painfully their grandchildren perished?

The reasons for the survival of the eldest while the youngest succumb to the highest mortality rates are many and include numerous interrelated issues. One perspective is an immunity to disease. The elderly Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 had survived a measles and whooping cough epidemic in 1845, a cholera epidemic in 1849, a second measles epidemic in 1897, and high rates of tuberculosis from 1896 to 1900. The survivors of these deadly diseases gained immunity from future outbreaks. Remarkably, the grandmothers of 1900 had survived the turbulent war years of 1860 to 1879. However, other influences, such as poverty, poor health and diseases profoundly affected the population growth during the early reservation years.

**Elder Women**

The legacy of the Northern Cheyenne grandmothers in 1900 began with the birth of Young Beaver in 1806 at time of Lewis and Clark’s visit. She survived to become the eldest Northern Cheyenne in 1900. The span of history and life style change the elder women witnessed covered nearly 100 years. Born during the early 1800's, twenty-three

grandmothers experienced their earliest childhood while the Cheyenne acted as middlemen in the trade of Plains goods. By 1825 twenty-three girls who became the grandmothers of 1900 witnessed the signing of the Friendship Treaty. In 1900, sixty-three Northern Cheyenne grandmothers had been children when the tribe initially separated into Northern and Southern bands. By the middle 1800's 174 of the elder women on the 1900 U.S. 12th Census had been exposed to measles, whooping cough and cholera that killed half of the tribe in 1849. The resilience of the Northern Cheyenne elder women is remarkable in light of the events they survived. However, their greatest accomplishment is demonstrated by their resilience in cultural continuity through periods of extreme stress and prosperity.

Pre-reservation Northern Cheyenne women would have achieved status through the women's quilling society. Their mastery of quill work equated with the bravery and success in war by men. For example, the divisions of mastery within the quilling society ranged from quilling moccasins, the lowest division to quilling lodge linings, back-rests and possible sacks as the highest. The other divisions, in order of increased importance, consisted of quilled baby cradles, quilled stars for ornamenting lodges, and quilled buffalo robes.\textsuperscript{104} The elder Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 were likely to have retained their measures of status as defined by the women's quilling society. Subsequently, the elder women taught the younger women the skills and roles expected of Northern Cheyenne women.

The 170 elder women of 1900 represented thirty-nine percent of the adult females.

\textsuperscript{104}Grinnell, \textit{The Cheyenne Indians}, vol 1, 159-161.
in the Northern Cheyenne tribe. Table 7, "The Northern Cheyenne Elder Women’s Reproductive History," on page 75 depicts the reproductive history of elder women forty-five years old and older. These elder women birthed a total of 905 children within the group’s total seventy-four reproductive years beginning in 1825 and ending in 1899. Generally, the reproductive careers of women began at age fifteen and ended at age forty-four. The eldest of this age group entered their reproductive years in 1825 and the youngest members in 1870. Within this span of forty-five years, the eldest members of this age group may also be the mothers of the youngest in the group.

The elder women’s reproductive years spanned three diverse time periods. The first time period included twenty-five Northern Cheyenne women, ages eighty to ninety-four, who had completed their reproductive years prior to conflict with the U.S. government in 1857. These eldest Northern Cheyenne women of 1900 averaged 5.2 children each and birthed a total of 130 children. The second time period, included 103 women, ages fifty to seventy-nine, who entered and completed the majority of their reproductive years during the war years of 1857 to 1879 when the Northern Cheyenne and the U.S. government warred against each other almost continually. This group of women averaged 5.1 children each and birthed a total of 531 children. Additionally, seventy eight of these elder women completed their reproductive years prior to 1884 when the reservation was established. Finally, the last group of women finished their reproductive years during the earliest years on the reservation from 1884 to 1899. This group of forty two women, ages forty-five to forty-nine, were the youngest of the elder women’s age group and they ended their last eleven to fifteen reproductive years while
living on the reservation. They averaged 5.8 children each and birthed a total of 244 children. The reproductive history of the early reservation mothers shows they birthed more children than the mothers of the pre-conflict years or the war-years.

The total group of elder women, ages forty-five to ninety-four, averaged five children each and outlived at least two of their children. By 1900, 446 of the elder women’s children were still living and 459 had died. The census data did not include the child’s age at death. Therefore, what appears as a fifty percent mortality rate is misleading. Some of the elder women’s children may have lived to their advanced years as high as age seventy prior to their deaths.

Compared to the 197 women in their reproductive years, ages fifteen to forty-four, the elder women had experienced far less infertility. Specifically, four elder women reported they had never birthed a child, while twenty-six of the reproductive women reported no children ever born. In the cohorts for women ages twenty-five to forty-four, a total of 155, nearly every woman had birthed at least one child, except for nine women who hadn’t birthed at all. Understandably, the youngest age cohort of sixty-six women, ages fifteen to nineteen, had the highest infertility report. However, they also had over twenty years ahead of them in which to birth their children.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Elder Women's age cohorts</th>
<th>Total # of mothers</th>
<th>% of female population</th>
<th>Avg # of children birthed</th>
<th>Total # births</th>
<th>Total # children living</th>
<th>Total child mortality</th>
<th>Avg # of children that died per mother</th>
<th>Total # of mothers loosing 50% or more of all children birthed</th>
<th>Total # of women with no children ever born</th>
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</tr>
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<td>905</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reproductive Women

In calculating the birth rate mothers were matched to their biological children. Both the age of the mother and the ages of the children were used to determine the birthing patterns for each age cohort of reproductive women. Adopted children and the mother’s stepchildren were counted separately and excluded from birth rate calculations. However, a step child to the male head of household would have been the biological child of the wife and were included in the birth rate calculations.105 The U.S. 12th Census was conducted among the Northern Cheyennes June 2 through June 22, 1900 and did not include new born infants born June 1, or thereafter.

The 1900 CBR and TFR figures are significantly less than those in 1886 only two years after the reservation had been established. In 1886, the CBR was highest at 45.34 with 36 live births and the TFR was 193.54. The CBR for Northern Cheyenne’s in 1900 was lower than 1886 at 31.04 live births per 1,000 of the total population. The TFR for Northern Cheyenne reproductive women in 1900 was 158.08 for every 1,000 women. Table 8 shows the birthing activity for each age cohort of the Northern Cheyenne reproductive women in 1900. Women ages twenty to twenty-four birthed thirty percent of the infants born in 1900. However, age specific birth rates of the total births per total women in each age cohort indicate for every thousand births which age cohort produced the greatest number of births. In this case, the Northern Cheyenne women ages forty to forty-four achieved the highest age specific birth rate of 1433.33 compared to the youngest women ages fifteen to nineteen with the lowest age specific birth rate of 651.51.

105Campbell, “Change Patterns of Health,” 341.
Demographers and historians use census records enumerating births to calculate population growth estimates. However, some Northern Cheyenne mothers kept their own birth records that revealed vital statistics that were often missing from census records. Iron Teeth described how she kept a birth record of her children:

This hide-scraper I have is made from the horn of an elk my husband killed, just after we were married...Besides using them in tanning, the women made marks on them to keep track of the ages of their children. The five rows of notches on this one are the age-records of my five children. Each year I have added a notch to each row, for the living ones. Any time, I can count up the notches and know the age of any of my children.¹⁰⁶

Plate 5. IRON TEETH AND HER ELK HORN SCRAPER (Marquis 81).

The birth years and ages at death for Iron Teeth’s deceased children could be calculated using the ages of the living children. Individual birth records would validate census records and provide information otherwise not available. Families that have their grandmother’s birth records are well equipped for demographic studies of their own family history.

¹⁰⁶Marquis, The Cheyennes of Montana, 80.
According to Campbell the Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 experienced a high incidence of sterility. He points to pulmonary tuberculosis accompanied by genital tuberculosis as the probable causes of increased sterility. The combined effects of tuberculosis causes “fifty to sixty-six percent of all pregnancies [to] terminate as ectopic pregnancies or by spontaneous abortion.” He stated further that:

The role disease had in lowering the reproductive performance of Northern Cheyenne women is illustrated by the percentage of women in their reproductive careers, ages 15 to 45, listed on the U.S. 1900 census who reported no children ever born. Of those women listed, 7.2 percent were childless. Comparatively, a sterility rate of 3% is considered high in [contemporary] developing nations.\textsuperscript{107}

Although a high number of child care providers, especially grandmothers, were available to ensure the well being of every infant born, the effect of disease and malnutrition suppressed fertility and caused the decline in population growth as evidenced by the fluctuating high and low CBR and TFR values. Campbell explained the health and fertility correlation for women, noting:

The most significant impact of ill-health and malnutrition is the suppression of fertility through a decline in milk quality, a lengthening of postpartum amenorrhea, and an increase in spontaneous abortion and interuterine mortality. Undernourishment diseases such as iron deficiency anemia among others, often resulted in irregular menstrual cycles and an increase in spontaneous abortions. Furthermore, the delay in the onset of fertility or the cessation of fertility is dependent upon the level of fat storage.\textsuperscript{108}

Consequently, reservation conditions created an environment for diseases and malnutrition that increased the rate of sterility and suppressed fertility among women.

\textsuperscript{107}Campbell, "Changing Patterns of Health," 347.

\textsuperscript{108}Campbell, "Changing Patterns of Health," 345.
which prevented increased birth rates and population growth.

The largest Northern Cheyenne families in 1900 were raised by mothers whose reproductive careers originated prior to the reservation years. Table 8, "Northern Cheyenne Women in Their Reproductive Years" on page 81, shows that women age thirty and older averaged three children each while women younger averaged families of one to two children. The younger women, ages fifteen to thirty, birthed sixty-six percent of the newborns in 1900. Consequently, the birth rate for women over thirty years old had slowed in comparison to the younger women.

Quantitative analysis of U.S. census data corrected by age grouping, matching biological children to their mothers and cross referenced against the historic record delineated a demographic profile of Northern Cheyenne women in their journey through various stages of fulfilling their roles in their family and for their tribe. From the youngest women to the oldest, a cross-sectional view of their names, marriage patterns, fertility rates and the correlation of age to these descriptive factors provided an insight to their resilience through the early reservation period.

This study has shown that in 1900 Northern Cheyenne women self reported their Indian names rather than their assigned English names. Furthermore, it appears that cultural naming practices were retained and in comparison to their English names far less repetition occurred among Indian names. The women’s preference for their Indian names demonstrated one aspect of cultural perseverance.

Quantitative analysis demonstrated that cultural marriage and divorce customs persisted in 1900 despite the imposition of federal rules and regulations. Although some
marital shifting occurred among the youngest couples, the low divorce rate and high
marriage rate suggests the Northern Cheyenne in 1900 endeavored to achieve the cultural
ideal of a long term relationship. However, among unmarried women the data indicated a
higher rate of widowhood than among the men. This imbalance was most likely caused
by an insufficient number of men in the population. Additionally, the ration system
enabled single women to head their own households and sustain themselves by the same
one-hundred percent dependency on rations as their married counterparts. However,
until a more comprehensive study is done on their standard of living the seemingly high
number of female heads of household should be considered carefully.

The most revealing sign of a thriving population lies in the study of their fertility.
The quantitative analysis in this study revealed that pre-reservation women had
experienced a higher rate of fertility than women whose reproductive careers had
commenced during the early reservation years. Furthermore, while the household
provided a rich parenting environment for children the number of live births declined and
the child mortality rate remained high. Specifically, the high ratio of grandmothers to
infants correlated with a decline in the birth rate rather than growth. As dismal as these
numbers make reservation life seem for the Northern Cheyenne, the Crows did not fare as
well.

The importance of qualitative analysis in validating the quantitative results is
explicitly clear in understanding how the Northern Cheyenne survived through
disparaging circumstances while maintaining cultural continuity. The roles of women in
these endeavors are examined in the next chapter discussing the social profile of 1900.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age cohorts of Reproductive Women</th>
<th>Total women</th>
<th>Total mothers</th>
<th>Total births</th>
<th>Total living children</th>
<th>Avg # of living children per mother’s age cohort</th>
<th>Women who birthed infants in 1900</th>
<th>Married, divorced, or widowed women with no children ever born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 19</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 24</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 34</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - 44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4: PROFILE OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS ON THE NORTHERN CHEYENNE RESERVATION 1884 TO 1902

Personal narratives, demography, and other historical records shape a framework portraying characteristics likely shared by Northern Cheyenne women in 1900. The combination of demographic averages, female role experiences, and significant symbols of the time form a profile of the average Northern Cheyenne woman in 1900.

Parenting Networks

Vine Deloria Jr. suggested that Indian women were especially skilled in creating a community of women or a support network. A women’s support network shared in both responsibility and pleasure in the day-to-day tasks of life. Lest Indian women be seen as terribly solemn, Deloria emphasized that humor is a central characteristic of Indian women, both traditionally and in contemporary life, and that it tempers the burden of responsibility they bear individually and collectively.¹⁰⁹

John Moore recognized the Cheyenne institutionalization of coparenting in his demographic work on the Southern Cheyennes in Oklahoma. Moore’s attention to Cheyenne language helped him discover that “the term nako, or mother, [applied to] ... all members of the mother’s nisson - all her uterine cousins of the same generation.”¹¹⁰


¹¹⁰ Moore, The Cheyenne Nation, 281.
Further, Moore found that when a woman referred to her *nisson*, she meant the collection of her biological sisters and the daughters of her mother’s sisters and other women of her generation connected through female links.\(^{111}\) This female nisson group could be relied upon for assistance in parenting and other domestic tasks.

In the day to day tasks of raising children, Northern Cheyenne mothers were likely to have had the help of grandmothers in the home effectively involved in child rearing responsibilities. Table 9, “Northern Cheyenne Parenting Network in 1900” on page 85, shows the distribution of adult females providing parenting roles for each age cohort of Northern Cheyenne children. All children whether adopted, boarders, relatives and offspring were included in this analysis. The youngest children were more likely to have a grandmother helping to raise them than the older children. Additionally, the youngest children had the greatest benefit of married parents.

Seventy-four children lived in one of the forty households headed by a single parent. A single parent household included both male and female parents whose spouse was deceased, divorced, or missing on the 1900 census. Thirty-seven of the single parent households were headed by women and three by men. The responsibility of child rearing was commonly and primarily the Northern Cheyenne woman’s role in 1900.

The grandmother role, as defined by Rubie Sooktis, meant that a woman would be a grandmother to her own grandchildren, to her brothers and sisters grandchildren, and

\(^{111}\)Moore, *The Cheyenne Nation*, 267.
to her cousins grandchildren.\textsuperscript{112}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Plate6.jpg}
\end{center}

\textbf{Plate 6: Cheyenne Children at Play in 1907.}

Little girls learned the roles of women through playing house with miniatures of real household equipment (Aadland 101).

\textsuperscript{112}Sooktis, 29.
## TABLE 9

**NORTHERN CHEYENNE PARENTING NETWORKS IN 1900**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children's Age Cohort</th>
<th>Total children per cohort</th>
<th>No parent or Grandma</th>
<th>Raised by Grandma</th>
<th>Single parent</th>
<th>Single parent &amp; a Grandma</th>
<th>Two parents</th>
<th>Two parents &amp; a Grandma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 9</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.53</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 14</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10.38</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>15 - 17*</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excludes individuals that are married.
About 1892, Belle Highwalking's mother died after giving birth to her. Belle's
grandmother raised her as was often the case among Northern Cheyenne families. Belle
recounted the circumstances of her childhood parenting. "Several people must have asked
for me but my grandmother wouldn't agree to it. My grandmother told them, 'I will raise
her the best I can. I will not give my grandchild away' ... She would take me to someone
who was nursing a child and this person would nurse me too. Also, I was raised on a
milk that was sweet and had a bird picture on the can."13 This type of adoption is
characterized by the acknowledgment that the grandmother does not become the mother.
Instead, Northern Cheyenne grandmothers assumed the primary role of parenting in
addition to their generational relationship as grandmothers.

Adopting children was commonly practiced among the Northern Cheyenne
through their early history and the reservation period. Indian Agent, R. L. Upshaw,
reported in 1889 that "all orphaned children are adopted at once and treated as their own
offspring by those adopting them."14 Consequently, in some cases biological
impossibilities were discovered when a child's age was deducted from the mother's age.
Additionally, Cheyenne kinship terms frequently implied parental relationships that were
biologically improbable. The Cheyennes utilized adoption for three reasons, (1)
redistribution of children of sisters, (2) care providers for the elderly, and (3) to gain and

13Highwalking, 1.
14U.S. Department of the Interior, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Annual Reports
(1889), 235.
preserve political power. 115

Table 9 on page 85 reveals that 110 children were partially raised by a
grandmothers living in the home. This living arrangement may have increased during the
reservation period as permanent homes replaced moveable dwellings and subsequently
required adaptations to cultural norms. By Cheyenne tradition, son-in-laws avoided eye
contact with their mother-in-laws and they never spoke to their mother-in-laws. Grinnell
remarked that the in-law avoidance custom was dying out between 1890 to 1923 as
evidenced by the number of mothers living with their married daughters. However,
tradition permitted an avenue to remove the restrictions of mother-in-law avoidance. A
mother-in-law could give her son-in-law a quilled robe to remove the restrictions of
avoidance.116 Transition to the reservation era created circumstances like those in which
grandmothers lives with their married daughter’s in a permanent home. These factors
influenced some aspects of cultural change yet, cultural continuity persisted through these
changes by the close relationships between grandmothers and their grandchildren.

Grandmothers were the relative most frequently living with a Northern Cheyenne
family. However the typical Northern Cheyenne home often included extended family
members. As pointed out by Moore and Campbell, the redistribution of sister’s children
might explain the high incidence of nieces living with their aunt and uncle’s family rather
than their own. According to Cheyenne kinship terms, see Table 1 “Comparison of
Kinship Terms” on page 31, it was customary for a niece to call her mother’s sister by the

115Moore and Campbell, 29.
term, mother. Therefore, a niece’s residence in her aunt/mother’s home was not unusual and perhaps helpful to parenting tasks. The head of household’s father, brother, and brother-in-law also dominated the list of usual extended relatives sharing a home.

Northern Cheyenne grandmothers, whether living in or out of their grandchildren’s homes, were significantly involved in parenting. They made decisions about their grandchildren’s best interests and personally executed plans to rectify problems. School attendance was probably their greatest concern. Although Little Wolf and Morning Star signed the 1868 Treaty at Fort Laramie, the Northern Cheyennes were generally against the treaty that required, among other things that they “pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school.”117 Elderly women, loyal to tribal sentiment, violated treaty stipulations that Cheyenne children would attend school by stealing their grandchildren from both the day and boarding schools. The tribal police were sent to arrest them in an effort to eradicate this behavior. In the Crime Reports of the 1901 Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, fifteen women were arrested by Indian police and reported as “Outraging women.” Further, Agent Clifford reported “I have had to use the police less this year than last in keeping the children in school. The old grandmothers are the worst obstructions that the police have to encounter in getting the children in school. A view of the inside of the agency guardhouse has the desired effect upon the nerves of the old

women and generally breaks up their interference with our school." The fifteen "outraging women" were probably the grandmothers Agent Cliffors jailed for taking their grandchildren out of school.

**Women's Health Issues**

In 1900, the majority of Northern Cheyenne women were not seeing the white male doctors for gynecological or obstetrical reasons. The exceptions were two women who sought treatment from the agency physician for life threatening obstetrical conditions; postpartum hemorrhage and retained placenta. As a point of comparison, Hoxie reported that among the Crow the largest population losses were among young women due to tuberculosis and childbirth deaths. Early reservation records available for the Northern Cheyenne do not list specific causes of death, such as childbirth. According to the medical records, women sought the white physician's treatment for tuberculosis, bronchitis, pertussis, conjunctivitis, ulcers, abscess, influenza, enteritis catarrhal, acute gastritis, acute diarrhea, acute dysentery, and arthritis. The physicians assigned to the Tongue River Reservation during the early reservation years were Frank D. Merritt, and W.K. Callohon. The two physicians treated ninety-one more men than the 151 women who sought treatment. Their treatment records are summarized in Table

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120Hoxie, 290.
10, "Northern Cheyenne Treated by Physicians in 1900".

**TABLE 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUARTER</th>
<th>MALES (population of 640)</th>
<th>FEMALES (population of 723)</th>
<th>TOTAL (population of 1363)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Quarter</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Quarter</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Quarter</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter ending June 30, 1900</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Quarter 1901</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>242</strong></td>
<td><strong>151</strong></td>
<td><strong>393</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Small pox Vaccinations in March, 1900, 1093 persons were immunized, including 600 women.

Midwives were the preferred attendants for Northern Cheyenne women giving birth in 1900. Belle Highwalking began her mothering years sometime between 1912 and 1916 in keeping with the old ways. "I never went to the hospital to have babies. I always had them at home...I was ill after I had my first child. Floyd’s grandmother was called and also Black White Man, and they doctored me." Traditionally, the Northern Cheyenne birthing process was attended by female relatives or midwives. Sometimes a birthing lodge was used, although most births took place in the family lodge. The laboring mother knelt on a hay-covered robe while clutching a vertical pole set firmly in

121 Tongue River Agency 1900 Quarterly Reports of the Sanitary Report of Sick and Injured.

122 Highwalking, 16 - 17.
the ground. The midwife braced her back against a frame of poles facing the laboring mother and embraced the mother. Another midwife received the baby and removed it from the rear. The midwife wrapped the placenta in a bundle and tied in a tree.\footnote{Hoebel, 91.}

According to Campbell, “Many Northern Cheyenne people continued to secretly seek out their own medical practitioners, despite the threat of persecution. Reservation physicians often were not consulted or sought out as a last resort. In either case, many chronic and infectious diseases debilitated the Northern Cheyennes.”\footnote{Campbell, “Changing Patterns of Health,” 343.} Campbell’s views are supported by Wooden Leg’s description of health care policies during the early reservation period. Wooden Leg observed:

\begin{quote}
We had good medicine men in the old times. It may be they did not know as much about sickness as the white men doctors know, but our doctors knew more about Indians and how to talk to them. Our people then did not die young so much as they do now...Our Indian doctors are put into jail if they make medicine for our sick people. Whoever of us may become sick or injured must have the agency white man doctor or none at all. But he can not always come, and there are some who do not like him.\footnote{Marquis, Wooden Leg, 365.}
\end{quote}

Wooden Leg believed the sick person should have the right to choose which doctor would treat them.

**The Rations System**

Every woman and child enumerated on the U.S. 12th Census was one hundred
percent dependent on rations in 1900. The few adult men employed as policeman, cattle
herders, farm laborers, or the blacksmith were partially dependent on rations. No women
were employed outside the home. The distribution of rations made it feasible for female
heads of household to survive like every other family even though their households lacked
an adult male provider. Furthermore, the wild game had been depleted by 1900 so the
men’s role of hunting no longer provided the family’s subsistence.

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1900 annual report calculated that 1,354
Northern Cheyennes received rations at the cost of $47.00 per capita, the highest cost of
rations at any of the nineteen agencies distributing rations in 1900.126 Furthermore, the
1900 annual report defined the maximum daily ration allowed as “1 1/2 pounds net beef (or
its equivalent in bacon) and one-half pound of flour to each person, with 3 pounds beans,
4 pounds coffee, and 7 pounds sugar to every 100 rations”. The maximum allowance of
rations was rarely distributed because the policy of Indian Affairs was to reduce the
rations as far as practicable. 127 The Indian Agent’s used the tribes’s dependency for
government issued food against them by withholding food rations to force compliance
with criteria the Agent deemed necessary.

Tom Weist, described how the ration system effected the Northern Cheyenne life
style:
The Indian Bureau viewed the ration system as a necessary evil that
was to be used to help the Indian until he could become self-
supporting. In practical use, it was also a means of controlling him,
of keeping him on the reservation and enforcing the Indian agent’s

126 U.S. Department of Interior, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Annual Reports,
(Washington: GPO, 1900), 689.

127 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Annual Reports, 1900, 689.
authority. For instance, Cheyenne families who persisted in keeping their children out of school had a portion of their rations withheld until they finally agreed to return their children to school.128

The Indian Agents forced the Northern Cheyenne to comply with their policies by withholding the meager food ration that barely kept starvation at bay.

Rations were also withheld if the agent found that a person was seeking medical treatment from a traditional practitioner. Gregory Campbell, links the withholding of rations to severe affects on health and demography. He claims:

Two policies implemented on the Tongue River Reservation which severely affected Northern Cheyenne health and demography were changes in the distribution of rations and the active repression of traditional medical-religious practices. The indigenous health-care system of the Northern Cheyennes was intimately bound to their religious beliefs and major ceremonies. To combat sickness and disease, Northern Cheyenne doctors employed a large array of curative treatments, ranging from administering herbs to ceremonial participation. As early as 1883, the Secretary of Interior mandated that all American Indian dances, rituals, and native medical practices were contrary to the Indian’s moral welfare. Such practices were to be actively suppressed using incarceration or the withdrawal of rations as punishment.129

Further, short rations or the complete withholding of rations starved the more resistant families into submission. The result of withholding rations to achieve compliance resulted in problems of malnutrition, dependency, oppression, continued poverty, “high incidences of morbidity and mortality, especially among the young and women of child bearing age who were most vulnerable under impoverished conditions. Because of their vulnerability, they are sensitive measures of a population’s health status

128Weist, 123.

129Campbell, “Changing Patterns of Health,” 342.
and primary factors affecting demographic change."\footnote{130}

A year after the reservation was established, Catholic Bishop John B. Brondel wrote to S. T. Hauser, Governor of Montana. Brondel stated in his November 1885 letter, "The Indians told me that last winter four women died of starvation, and this winter they say they shall all die, for they have nothing any longer to hunt."\footnote{131}

Iron Teeth, an elder women who received rations during the early reservation period recalled how the ration system had affected her life. She reflected:

The government promised to feed us if we would live on the reservations. But I am given very little food. Each month our Indian policeman brings me one quart of green coffee, one quart of sugar, a few pounds of flour and a small quantity of baking powder. I am told that I might get more if I should go each month and ask the agent for it. I myself must go and get it, as they will not send it by a friend. But my home is more than 20 miles over a mountain from the agency. I have no horse to ride or to drive. My daughter who lives with me is a widow and has no children. She likewise has no horse...it should not be expected that a 92-year-old woman get her food by personally going to the agency every month, on a certain day of the month, and during certain hours of the day when the agent or his helper is at the office. It would be hard enough in summer. It is impossible in winter.\footnote{132}

The ration system used for political leverage severely effected the Northern Cheyenne tribal health. For the reproductive women, the consequences of malnutrition and high infant morality were not only cruel, but also reduced their fertility which over time lead to a population decline. Among the elder women, the monthly reporting

\footnote{130}{Campbell, "Changing Patterns of Health," 345.}
\footnote{131}{Weist, 106.}
\footnote{132}{Marquis, The Cheyennes of Montana, 79.}
requirements were impractical and impossible. Without the local availability of wild game or access to bountiful hunting territories, the young men could not provide for the elder women according to the Cheyenne custom of social charity. However, the customary work of the women persisted in the gathering of wild turnips after the spring rains, and the harvesting of berries in the summer. These natural food products supplemented their diets, but could not make up for the severe lack of adequate food year round. The ration system indirectly created inroads within Cheyenne culture. Reliance on rations allowed female heads of household to survive on par with their neighbors without an adult male provider. This kind of family structure was not the norm for Northern Cheyenne people prior to the reservation period. The man - wife team was critical to survival as the labor of one benefited the other in a mutual exchange of tasks coordinated for optimal results.

**Assimilation Measurements**

The Northern Cheyenne people chose to adopt certain aspects of the Anglo culture as early as the late 1600's when they sought a gun trade with the French at LaSalle’s Fort Crevecoeur.\[^{133}\] Lightning Woman, an elder woman who advised George Bent in the late 1800's, said the Cheyennes traded Plains goods for iron tomahawks and knives from the Mandans and Rees in 1750 - 1775.\[^{134}\] In the early 1800's the Cheyennes were adept traders in the exchange of Plains goods for European goods. The men preferred guns over the bow and the women appreciated the versatility of metal cooking kettles over animal bladder methods. The Cheyenne people sought articles that helped them continue

\[^{133}\] Weist, 16.

\[^{134}\] Hyde, 21.
their Plains life style without adversely changing their culture. However, the pre-reservation era of near constant war and flight forced cultural changes in dwelling structures and clothing styles. By the time of their removal to Oklahoma, Wooden Leg commented on their poor condition, “Our clothing was wearing out and we could not get enough skins to renew them and keep our beds and our lodges in good order.\textsuperscript{135}

Consequently, the Northern Cheyennes wore clothing made of Anglo fabrics, their tipis were replaced by canvas soldier tents, yet they continued what they could of their own ways by wearing their hair long, saving their buckskin for moccasins, and incorporating Anglo fabrics into their traditional clothing styles. The reservation era forced the people to change their diet, live in permanent dwellings, and enforced regulations eliminating their religion, medicinal practices, leadership, and social customs.

The reservations were established to assimilate American Indians into the Anglo culture. As a result, federal policies were enforced to achieve the goals of assimilation and the Indian Agents tracked and measured the degree of change. Table 11, “Assimilation Measurements the Indian Agents Reported for the Northern Cheyenne” on page 97, represents the perceptions of the Indian Agents from 1887 to 1902. In Clifford’s annual report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for fiscal year ending June 30, 1900, he claimed that fifty Northern Cheyennes totally dressed in American citizen style clothing while 1,329 partially dressed in American citizen style clothing. Additionally, sixty-five could read, and ninety-six could participate in an ordinary English speaking conversation. Furthermore, 350 houses were occupied by Indians, and one

\textsuperscript{135}Marquis, \textit{Wooden Leg}, 302.
hundred Northern Cheyennes were church members.\textsuperscript{136}

**TABLE 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Annual Rpt to Com. of Indian Affairs</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th># who entirely dress in Anglo styles</th>
<th># who partially dress in Anglo styles</th>
<th># of Christian converts</th>
<th># of English conversational speakers</th>
<th># who live in a house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>1402</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1252</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1346</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1379</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1329</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>1363</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1263</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>1349</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1249</td>
<td>93</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>1330</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1240</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Many houses were torn down or abandoned

The improvements reflected in these reports are self serving for the agent’s accountability to government goals and continued or increased appropriations within his fiscal control.

The U.S. 12th Census surveyed the language proficiency levels of all Northern Cheyennes enumerated. The results among the adult women show they were not assimilating the English language at the rates suggested by the agent in his 1900 annual report. Figure 5, “English Proficiency for Northern Cheyenne Women in 1900,” shows the high rate of native language compared to the few women over the age of fourteen that

\textsuperscript{136} Commissioner of Indian Affairs Annual Reports, 1900, 644 - 645.
could speak English. Surprisingly, the number of women that reported they could speak, read and write English was twice the number that could only speak English. In further review, the census information revealed that women who could speak, read, and write English were usually the daughters of a white man married to a Northern Cheyenne woman.

![Figure 5: English Proficiency for Northern Cheyenne Women in 1900](image)

By 1900, the majority of Northern Cheyenne were living in fixed dwellings. Their houses were log cabins with dirt floors, one small window, and one door. John Tully, the Indian Agent in 1891 described the homes as “dark, dismal dungeons.” The log homes lacked proper ventilation and sanitation that lead to increased diseases. Households confined to unsanitary living conditions have greater infectious diseases and greater

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female morbidity and mortality rates. Women usually care for the sick so their exposure to illness was greater.\textsuperscript{138} Fifty-one female heads of household, like the majority of the Northern Cheyenne population, lived in single family log homes. The majority of grandmothers also lived in single family log homes. If the U.S. 12th Census had been conducted in the winter months the number of Northern Cheyenne's living in moveable dwellings, such as canvas wall tents, may have been reduced. However, the census was conducted in June, therefore, the residents of moveable dwellings may have chosen that option for the summer season.

Northern Cheyenne women responded in practical ways to changes impacting their culture. For example, prior to the reservation period they had experienced several styles of dress made with tanned animal skins. By the early reservation period they incorporated traditional patterns of dress using cloth fabrics and other materials more readily available than tanned animal skins.

The women Grinnell interviewed in the late 1800's described the ancient fashion of women's dress and that of their grandmothers during the early 1800's. He reported, [The ancient dresses consisted] of two rectangular pieces of dressed skin, tied together with strings which passed over the shoulders and supported the dress, and tied together also, at intervals at either side, with strings, and held by a belt or thong about the waist.\textsuperscript{139} These ancient dresses were tied not sewn at the seams. Women later learned the technique of sewing. Grinnell further described how the style of dress had changed by the

\textsuperscript{138}Campbell, "Changing Patterns of Health," 353.

\textsuperscript{139}Grinnell, \textit{The Cheyenne Indians}, vol 1, 57.
early 1800's and included sewn seams. He recounted elder women's interviews:

"In the time of our grandmothers," old women say, "perhaps a hundred years ago [1800], the dresses worn by women were longer on the right side than on the left. The right arm had a short sleeve; there was a strap over the left shoulder, and the hide was doubled back, hanging down from the upper chest in a loose flap, ending in an edge which ran diagonally from the right shoulder in front around the body to below the left shoulder-blade."

When these old time dresses were fashionable, the women painted their bare left arm with red stripes to represent their husband's coups. The modern buckskin dress of the late 1800's was sewn at the seams, covered the shoulders, and included ornamentation. Grinnell decribed them as:

a smock ... reaching from the neck halfway from knee to ankle. The sleeves were like a cape, open below, and hung down to the elbows. Often there was a cape from one sleeve across the back to the other sleeve ... Women's dresses of the olden time were ornamented with elk-tusks, and the capes with stained porcupine quills. One hundred elk-teeth used to be worth a good horse. A dress thus ornamented would sometimes wiegh ten or twelve pounds.

Young Beaver, a 93 year old widow and eight other women enumerated in the 1900 U.S. 12th Census were infants when the bare left arm dresses were worn about the time Lewis and Clark encountered the Cheyenne in 1806.

Like Grinnell's description of Cheyenne women's style of dress by the late 1800's, the Tongue River Agent noted the style Northern Cheyenne women preferred in 1902.

\[\text{Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians, vol 1, 57.}\]
\[\text{Grinnell, The Cheyenne Indians, vol 1, 224.}\]
The Agent claimed:

It takes but 5 yards for a dress for the average woman in Indian style, where it takes 9 or 10 yards in “white” style; besides it takes no skill to make an Indian dress. Hence, it will be some time before these women will spend twice the amount of money for a dress than they think necessary or do ten times the work on a “white” dress that it takes to make an “Indian” one.142

The style of dress among Northern Cheyenne women in the early 1900's is shown in plate 8 of ration day in Lame Deer, Montana. The women wore cloth dresses loosely shaped in the same pattern as their former buckskin dresses. Some were wearing shoes, but none of the women wore coats like the white woman in plate 9. The women with infants carried them in a traditional fashion on their backs wrapped inside their shawls. The buffalo robes had long been replaced by Anglo blankets and shawls. Almost every Cheyenne woman in the photographs kept her head covered in a scarf and wore her skirts long in keeping with Cheyenne standards of modesty and chastity.

Plate 7: Ration Day in Lame Deer, MT.

The Northern Cheyenne women in this photograph, taken in the early 1900's, were not identified. (K. Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana).

Plate 8: Northern Cheyenne Women and the Field Matron.

The women in this photograph were not identified. Compare the difference in styles of dress between the white woman and the Northern Cheyenne women. (K. Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana).

Although the Indian Agent's persisted in their enforcement of assimilation policies, the Northern Cheyenne's held steadfast to their culture. The Northern Cheyenne grandmothers and grandfathers taught the lessons of resiliency and cultural continuity to the younger generations. Rubie Sooktis' grandmother instructed her in the ways of being a Cheyenne. She stated:

My Grandmother impressed on my memory what this journey of life means as we sat and watched the ripples from a stone she tossed into a still pool of water form and expand. She turned to me and said, "This is the life of a Cheyenne person. The stone I threw in represents the Creator. Each of the ripples set in motion
by the stone has a meaning. One must never forget the stone that creates the ripples. As the stone is the center of the circle of ripples, so too, the Creator is the center of each person’s life as the individual Cheyenne travels through life.

No matter how long or short a Cheyenne’s life may be, he travels this journey. He is a traveler through life. His life here on earth is like a flash of light. Because of the swiftness of moving along the journey, the individual Cheyenne attempts to prolong a happy moment of his existence by giving himself fully to that one happy moment in time.143

The resilience of Northern Cheyenne women has been inspired by the strength of their spirituality, their fortitude in facing challenges, an ability to adapt, and their reverence for happy moments. By these qualities their hearts were never on the ground long enough to allow the conquering of the Cheyenne nation.

Plate 9. Vo’estaa’e, White Cow or White Buffalo Woman, daughter of Morning Star.

Morning Star lead his people north through the winter snows, eluding soldiers and enduring great hardships, to return home. White Cow survived these ordeals. “There are those who would say that she had a right to hate...But we can see no hate in Woostah. That is her lesson” (Aadland 44).
Summary

The demographic profile of Northern Cheyenne women in 1900 portrays them in their roles as mothers and wives who persevered in the same fashion as their grandmothers through debilitating social conditions while preserving cultural continuity.

The Northern Cheyenne were one hundred percent dependent on rations in 1900. The maximum ration allowance was rarely distributed because the policy was to reduce the rations as far as practicable and rations were withheld to force a family into compliance with assimilation policies. Short rations or withheld rations increased morbidity and mortality among the children and women in their reproductive years who are most vulnerable under impoverished conditions. The Northern Cheyenne households were not sustained by the harvesting of wild game or employment. In 1900, few men were employed and no women were employed outside the home. Reliance on rations allowed female heads of household to survive on par with their neighbors without an adult male provider. Without the availability of wild game the men lost their role of providing for the family.

For eighty-three women, most over the age of sixty, widowhood induced most of them to live with their daughters while forty-three headed their own household and lived independent but dependent on rations for subsistence. For the eldest women, such as Iron Teeth who lived twenty miles from the agency, personally collecting rations at a specified time created an extreme hardship. Furthermore, the depletion of wild game prevented the young men from providing for the elderly according to the Cheyenne custom of social charity. The fifty elderly widowed women could not expect to remarry
because only three unmarried men of similar age were available.

Generally, the women of 1900 had married their current husbands at age twenty-three and had birthed three babies at home during their first fourteen years of marriage. It was the norm in 1900 that most mothers would have experienced the death of at least one child. The youngest children usually lived with married parents and a grandmother who assisted with parenting the children. Widowed grandmothers lived with their married daughters despite the cultural in-law avoidance custom between mother in-laws and their son in-laws. Through this adaptation a small measure of cultural change had occurred. However, cultural continuity persisted through the close relationships between grandmothers and their grandchildren. Whether living in or out of their grandchildren’s homes, the grandmothers were significantly involved in parenting. Most of the grandmothers had birthed five children prior to the reservation years and by the time of their elder years had lost two or three of their children. They were well experienced in giving life, in the challenges of living, and in coping with death.

From 1886 to 1900 the birth and fertility rates had fluctuated in an alternating pattern of high and low results. As the number of elder women increased the fertility rate seriously declined creating a paradox that contradicted expected outcomes. In this case the demographic data raised questions about the reasons why an ideal cultural parenting environment including a grandmother’s care would not correlate with a higher number of surviving infants. The grandmothers longevity might have been acquired through immunity to disease while malnutrition and poor living conditions seriously impaired fertility and escalated child mortality.
Although the early reservation mothers birthed more children than the mothers of the pre-conflict years or the war years against the United States, the tribal population declined during the early reservation years. The fertility peak of 1886 had not been regained by 1900. Additionally, sterility increased during the reservation years as reported by twenty-six women in 1900 who had never birthed a child while among the elder women only four reported no children ever born. In 1900, Northern Cheyenne women were not seeing the white male doctors for gynecological or obstetrical reasons except for two life threatening cases then the physicians were sought out as a last resort. Midwives were the preferred attendants for women giving birth. Furthermore, infectious diseases thwarted fertility such as tuberculosis that flourished in overcrowded, poorly ventilated, dirt floored, log homes. Consequently, reservation conditions created an environment for diseases and malnutrition that increased the rate of sterility and suppressed fertility among women which prevented increased birth rates and population growth.

Young people dominated the tribal population in 1900. The tribal majority were females and persons under the age of twenty-five years. It appears the Northern Cheyenne persisted in their cultural value for chastity since no single women had birthed a child in 1900 and all mothers were married, divorced or widowed. Among those of marriageable age, the women could expect to marry before the age of twenty and the men generally married by the age of twenty-four. The twenty-five monogamous marriages of one year or less in 1900 had been acknowledged by tribal custom and not recognized by the Indian Agent. The data indicated that polygamous marriages were nearing extinction.
Most of the nine reported polygamous marriages originated prior to the reservation period and averaged twenty-three married years by 1900.

The youngest women were more likely to go through a period of marital shifting. Women ages fifteen to thirty-four represented seventy-two percent of the twenty-five divorces in 1900. In comparison, the rate of divorce dropped to nearly zero among women over the age of thirty-four. Consequently, despite some marital shifting among the youngest couples, the Northern Cheyenne of 1900 valued long term marriages as demonstrated by the fifty-three couples that had been married thirty years or more.

In response to early reservation assimilation policies, poverty and malnutrition the resilience of the Northern Cheyenne ensured their physical and cultural survival. Except for a few daughters of White men married to Northern Cheyenne women, the Northern Cheyenne maintained their language in 1900 and were not proficient in English. In 1900 the Northern Cheyenne preferred their Indian names with White Cow Woman being the most common name shared by twenty-four girls and women. They continued what they could of their own ways by wearing their hair long, saving their buckskin for moccasins, and incorporating Anglo fabrics into their traditional clothing styles. The reservation era forced the people to change their diet, live in permanent dwellings, and enforced regulations eliminating their religion, medicinal practices, leadership, and social customs. Rebellious against cultural change, grandmothers risked being jailed to steal their grandchildren from school. They preferred to teach their grandchildren in the Cheyenne way.
CHAPTER 5: WHITE COW WOMAN: A FICTIONAL SUMMARY

The woven fragments of personal narratives, demography, and other historical records shape a framework of characteristics likely shared by the majority of Northern Cheyenne women in 1900. Those characteristics combined with significant symbols of the time form the basis for a fictional Northern Cheyenne woman named White Cow Woman.

White Cow Woman was thirty-four years old in 1900. She lived in a one room log cabin along Lame Deer Creek next door to her husband’s family. Her elderly widowed mother lived with them and their four children. White Cow Woman was the only wife of Young John and they had been married for fourteen years. Although seven years her senior, he had patiently courted her for five years prior to sending his aunt with a marriage proposal. When she turned twenty he drove six horses to her father’s front door. They were all beautiful horses, mostly bays, but when her father cut the dappled gray from the bunch and tied it near the house, she knew her father was especially pleased. They married in the traditional Cheyenne way and at that time they had no fear of being jailed for not asking the white minister for permission like the younger people had to do now.

Young John struggled to turn the prairie soil into dryland farming while White Cow Woman tried to grow a garden like the Indian agent had instructed them to do, but the crops never amounted to much. The rain never came when the crops needed it the most. The grasshoppers ate the few plants that survived the hot, dry summers. The prairie land didn’t like farming, nor did the people who thrived on hunting.
Young John and White Cow Woman couldn’t depend on growing their own food or harvesting wild game to feed their family. Few deer crossed the reservation where many hunters were quick to meet them with their rifle-fire. All the wild animals the Cheyennes had traditionally hunted were gone. Buffalo meat was only a memory for the adults in White Cow Woman’s family, the children had never tasted it.

Women’s work of the old days had stayed pretty much the same. White Cow Woman, her mother and the children gathered wild turnips after the spring rains, and picked choke cherries and plums in the fall. The children loved these outings with their grandmother who taught them about the many uses of the plants they saw along the way. They dried sweet mint, turnips and berries, but even that was not enough. White Cow Woman’s family depended on the rations issued by the Indian agent to keep from starving.

Just after sunrise on ration day, White Cow Woman walked the two mile trail with her two eldest children who attended the day school in the small town of Lame Deer. Her mother would stay home with her toddler and turn the choke cherries drying in the sun. White Cow Woman wore the new calico dress her oldest daughter had made at school and belted it with the heavy black leather belt given to her father years ago when he had been a scout for General Miles. She wrapped herself in the woolen shawl that came with the treaty annuities many years before her marriage. Her new baby rode comfortably in his cradle board on her back. She was happy the baby was lively, bright eyed and plump, she couldn’t bear to have this baby sicken and die like the two before him. The family dogs ran back and forth ahead of them, ducking in and out of the brush excited by the children’s chatter. They begged their mother for a story of the “old days.” They always wanted to
hear stories of how their grandparents and parents had hunted buffalo and traveled to far away places. White Cow Woman always made time for stories. She began a story they hadn’t heard before about a trip to the Missouri river where her mother traded tanned buffalo robes for knives, blankets and other household things and she, a little girl then, tasted sweet stripped sticks for the first time. These were happy childhood memories that brought a smile to White Cow Woman especially when she saw the joy they brought to her children. The two children pretended they were riding horseback on a trading trip running in and out of the red willows that grew along the creek. Soon, White Cow Woman’s thoughts carried her away from the creek-side trail to visions of her sisters she hoped to see in town. She was worried about her sick niece. Too many Cheyenne people had died from illnesses the best medicine men could not heal. She could not help it that fear set in immediately when another family member became ill.

White Cow Woman greeted her elder sister, Little Woman, at the ration house. The children ran off to join their friends at the day school. The mother’s could hear the teacher’s bell ringing wildly amidst the distance sounds of dogs barking, a baby crying nearby and White Cow Woman’s dogs sniffing and pawing at the door where the meat was butchered. The business of the day was warming up as the sun climbed above the tree lined ridge that sheltered the narrow valley below.

The sisters and other early arrivals visited quietly, while they waited for the agent to give out their rations. White Cow Woman loosened her shawl and swung the baby around to her chest as her sister chose a place to sit along the south wall of the log building. White Cow Woman took this peaceful opportunity to nurse her baby while catching up on
Little Woman’s news.

Little Woman’s teenage daughter, Sage Woman, had the coughing sickness, they called “white death.” Little Woman and her husband had taken their daughter to a medicine man near Birney. The agent found out about it and ordered the Indian policemen to put the old man in jail. The agent told Little Woman’s husband to bring Sage Woman to the white doctor or he would withhold their rations. The agent told them their daughter would die without the medicine the agency doctor would give her. The two sisters knew that people treated by the white doctor’s medicine had died from the coughing sickness. They didn’t think his medicine was very good.

The sister’s focused their attention to the nursing baby, neither speaking, barely breathing. They could not look at each other. They couldn’t bear to see the sorrow in the other’s eyes. The air around them became heavy with the dread of knowing they had been to the rocky ravines too often to bury someone they loved. Their stillness served as acknowledgment of their shared love for Sage Woman, the cherished one whose beauty brought happiness to everyone. Little Woman pulled her shawl up over her head and wrapped it tighter around her and settled into her spot as though she were a tree rooted into the ground. White Cow Woman whispered to her sister that she would fast and leave tobacco offerings for Sage Woman’s recovery. A faint song escaped from the woolen shawl enclosing Little Woman, a song sung so softly that only White Cow Woman could hear the pleading rhythmic melody.

The dogs growled, crouching low with their guard hairs standing on end, signaling that the agent was approaching the ration house. He gave the dogs a wide berth then
kicked at the one that dared to rush in and nip at his pant leg. All the women slowly and methodically gathered at the door lining up to take their turn in receiving their rations.

White Cow Woman hoped he was in a good mood and would let her have her mother’s share of rations. Sometimes he made the very old ladies come into town to get their own rations. He yelled from the ration house door, then the interpreter translated his orders.

“No meat today. You’ll all have to come back next week. He will give you salt, soap, beans and flour. There’s some coffee, but no sugar.” White Cow Woman had hoped for a good chunk of meat to carry home. She didn’t mind a heavy load when she knew the cooking pot would have plenty in it for supper.

Her turn came to present her ration cards to the agent. He looked carefully at the names on the two cards, her family’s and her mother’s. He stared at her longer than she was comfortable with. She looked at the ground to avoid his meanness. Then he spoke loudly in his language. He called her Mary, the name a former agent had given her. Beyond the White name, the only words she understood were “rations” and “school.” She glanced up at the interpreter to see if his face showed the meaning of the agent’s words. The interpreter translated, “You can have your mother’s rations today, but not next time. Because your kids are in school he will let you take her rations this time. Next time she has to come get them herself.” White Cow Woman opened her cloth sack and the agent dropped in the smaller bags of food. She stepped away from the ration house door and breathed a sigh of relief. Her dogs jostling around her as she shifted the baby’s weight on her back and adjusted her grip on sack. She turned towards home with the sun almost overhead warming her against the cool breeze. As she crossed the side of the
building she noticed her sister was closing her bag. Then she caught her sister’s eye. It was only a brief look, their eyes met just long enough to acknowledge their bond. What she saw in her sister’s eyes reaffirmed her devotion to stand by her sister through the bad times ahead. White Cow Woman felt that no matter what happened they were in it together. She straightened her back to steady her load and strode off through the brushy creek side path with her dogs clambering to get ahead of her. White Cow Woman had work to do at home and the day was half over. The swishing sound of the ration sack against her wool shawl quickly faded into the louder noises of town. Behind her, she left moccasin tracks softly embedded in the damp shaded trail.

Plate 10. EVA WHITE COW AND HER BABY

Eva White Cow, daughter of Woostah and grand-daughter of Morning Star, holding her baby girl in a beaded cradleboard in 1907 at Lame Deer (Aadland 90 - 91).
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