



Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun

Dakota Images

Through her dual ethnicity and her work as an interpreter and teacher, Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun helped to shape both the American Indian and Euro-American cultures on the Northern Great Plains.

Bettelyoun was born at Fort Laramie 15 March 1857 to James Bordeaux, a French-American trader and interpreter from Saint Louis, and his Lakota wife, Huntkalutawin. Marie Bordeaux, as Huntkalutawin was also known, was the daughter of Lone Dog, a minor chief of the Red Top band of Brulé Lakota, and the sister of Swift Hawk, a prominent headman throughout the early reservation period. Her membership in these important Northern Great Plains families placed Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun in a position to bridge the gap between the white and Lakota cultures.

Bettelyoun received her schooling in the Euro-American tradition at Hamburg, Iowa, where her father sent her in 1866. In 1870, still a young girl, she returned to the reservation to work at Whetstone Agency as an interpreter and teacher, coupling her academic skills with the knowledge of Lakota language and culture she had learned from her mother. In 1875, she married Charles Tackett, an interpreter. The couple had one child, Rose, before Tackett died in 1877. In 1884, Bettelyoun began working as a matron for girls at a Roman Catholic school in Avoca, Minnesota. She moved back to Rosebud in 1890 to accept a position as field matron. In 1891, she married Isaac Bettelyoun, a well-educated, mixed-blood man who worked as a teacher, clerk, and rancher. Shortly thereafter, the couple moved to Tripp County, where Susan Bettelyoun again taught school.

During the 1930s, Bettelyoun began writing her memoirs in order to correct inaccuracies she perceived in mainstream historical accounts. Her own recollections of incidents she or her family had witnessed, such as the death of Crazy Horse at Fort Robinson in 1877 and the escape of the Northern Cheyenne in 1878, present the unique perspective of a first-generation biracial and bicultural woman. Bettelyoun's completed manuscript is now housed at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln.

Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun died 17 December 1945 at the State Veterans' Home in Hot Springs, South Dakota. She is buried at Saint Francis on the Rosebud Indian Reservation.

by LAVERA ROSE

Copyright of South Dakota History is the property of South Dakota State Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

All illustrations in this issue are property of the State Archives, South Dakota State Historical Society, except for those on the following pages: p. 156, from T. A. Bland, *Life of Alfred B. Meacham* (Washington, D.C.: T. A. & M. C. Bland, 1883); pp. 183, 192, from M. A. DeWolfe Howe, *The Life and Labors of Bishop Hare, Apostle to the Sioux* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1911); p. 197 (neg. no. 94-019), p. 198 (neg. no. 94-020, Father Zimmerman, photographer), p. 205 (neg. no. 94-017), p. 206 (neg. no. 94-016), Marion Dreamer photographs, from Historical Photograph Collections, Washington State University Libraries, Pullman, Wash.; p. 215, from James H. Cook, *Fifty Years on the Old Frontier* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1923); pp. 219, 248, from Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebr.; pp. 220–21, from National Archives, Washington, D.C.