



Mary C. Collins

Dakota Images

Mary Collins, a teacher and Congregational church missionary, was born in 1846 in Alton, Illinois, and received her M.A. degree from Ripon College in Wisconsin. She taught school in Keokuk, Iowa, for three years, but in 1875 she decided to become a missionary to the Sioux Indians in Dakota Territory. At a meeting of the American Board in Chicago she met Reverend Thomas Riggs and his wife, who were missionaries at Peoria Bottom near Fort Sully, and traveled back to Dakota Territory with them. They arrived at Oahe on 1 November 1875. Collins remained there for ten years.

In 1885 she moved to the Standing Rock Agency. There she lived with the Indians, which included Sitting Bull's band. She acquired a knowledge of the Sioux language and learned a great deal about their ways. Because she knew some simple remedies for illness, she was welcomed as a medicine woman. Collins was a practical woman and, instead of teaching the Indians how to die and go to heaven, she endeavored to teach them how to live well in this present life, how to serve God, how to build homes, and how to become self-supporting. She organized a young men's society before she organized a church, and after many years, it became a part of the Y.M.C.A. She also taught them how to manage their own businesses and how to debate important questions.

Perhaps the most dramatic event in her life occurred when she argued with Sitting Bull about the results of the Ghost Dance and advised him to go to Fort Yates and stop the dancing or many Indians would be killed. After Sitting Bull was killed, Collins tried to help the Indians in their land negotiations. When she retired, she moved back to Keokuk, Iowa, where she died on 25 May 1920.

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