The Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868 was negotiated and signed with various western Sioux bands for two primary reasons. The first was to end the hostilities in the Powder River country of Wyoming; this would enable the construction to continue on the Union Pacific Railroad. The second was to establish a reservation and an agency system for the western Sioux. This was done in hopes that civilizing the Indians would enable them to become self-supporting farmers.¹

The Sioux chiefs who signed the treaty believed that the agency or agencies were optional, but officials in Washington decided that an agency was to be built on the Missouri River near the center of Sioux land. The Missouri River would aid in supplying the agency and would provide a means for transporting troops to control any troublemakers. Finally, an alternate plan involving three smaller agencies was accepted. These agencies were built on the west bank of the Missouri River within the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation. The southern agency was located at Whetstone Creek, the middle agency at Cheyenne River, and the northern agency was built at the mouth of the Grand River.² The Sioux agencies were formed into districts with General William Harney in complete command. He was instructed to keep the peace and to offer only police protection to white settlers and Indians alike.

In addition to these duties, Harney controlled and directed the removal of several western bands from Fort Laramie to Whetstone Creek.\(^3\)

The Laramie Loafers and Squaw bands were the first groups to be removed from Fort Laramie. They were placed in government or privately contracted wagons, which moved eastward towards Whetstone Creek, Dakota Territory, in June 1868. James Bordeaux, Joseph Bissonette, and other traders left Fort Laramie with the wagons to continue their activities at the new agency on Whetstone Creek. They went to the North Platte Indian Agency in Nebraska to pick up supplies, and there, one hundred fifty additional people joined the Laramie group on their journey to Whetstone. Agent Matthew Patrick at the North Platte Agency labeled the group, the "Laramie Snipes."\(^4\)

Another group of migrating Sioux went north in early August, but their numbers included mainly old men, women, and young children; people who could not follow the chase. It was not until 14 September 1868 that a large band of Brûles under the leadership of Spotted Tail and Swift Bear left the North Platte Indian Agency. The Brûles were leaving their summer camp on Beaver Creek from where they hunted game as far south as the Republican River. They were forced north to the vicinity of Whetstone Creek to receive their trade goods when the North Platte Indian Agency was closed. As these Sioux bands moved north, they were placed under the jurisdiction of the Dakota Superintendency.\(^5\)

During August 1868 the Laramie Loafers, Squaw bands, and their traders arrived in Dakota Territory. They set up camp

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nearly thirty miles north of Fort Randall on the west bank of the Missouri River, north of the mouth of Whetstone Creek. Stands of cottonwood, ash, and oak provided the materials with which these people built their village Harney City, named in honor of General William Harney.  

Swift Bear and his people located near the agency site, but the Brûles under Spotted Tail established a roving camp near the south fork of the White River, west of the agency. Spotted Tail stayed twenty-five to one hundred miles away from the Missouri River and his people even refused to go to Whetstone for rations. This forced the government, at its own expense, to transport rations and other supplies to their camp. The Indians near the agency did most of the work in preparing the supplies that were sent to Spotted Tail.  

During the first months of the agency's operation, many of the provisions for Whetstone were stored at nearby Fort Randall. Every ten days, several half-breeds and some full bloods would go to the fort and receive their rations. In early September 1868, General Harney appointed Major Clark Chambers, brother of the post commander, as agent in charge of issuing supplies to the people from Whetstone who journeyed to the fort.  

Despite being appointed by Harney, the terms of the Indian agents at Whetstone were often short. Jim Sombers, a settler near the new agency, stated that General Harney had informed the Indians that if they did not like an agent, they could have him removed by a vote of the council. This apparently added to the confusion at the agency, especially during the first months of the agency's operation, as various Indian agents, appointed by Harney, came and left.  

In September, General Harney ordered Agent Patrick of the North Platte Agency to come to Fort Randall where his services

6. Union and Dakotian (Yankton, Dakota Territory), 10 Aug. 1868. Harney City was first associated with the non-government portion of Whetstone Agency, later the village that grew opposite of Whetstone on the east bank of the Missouri River became known as Harney City.  
8. Union and Dakotian, 12 Sept. 1868.  
9. Ibid., 2 Jan. 1869.
were needed. It was not until late December 1868 that Patrick arrived at Whetstone, after the closing of his North Platte Agency. He found acting agent E. W. Raymond ill and not capable of conducting the agency's business. Patrick took charge of Whetstone, but often had trouble from other men who claimed that General Harney had selected them as the Indian agents for Whetstone.  

Upon examination of the agency, Patrick reported that the half-breeds and whites associated with the Indians had built for themselves nearly eighty log cabins for the winter, but they had built no buildings for the agency. The property on hand consisted of twenty plows, sixteen yoke of oxen, one mowing machine, and one steam mill. In addition, there was only twenty days ration of beef and flour at the agency for the various bands who depended on the government for subsistence. Patrick stated that due to the failure to keep supplies at the agency, the Indians would starve. However, by January 1869, he had replenished some of the agency's dwindling food supply. Despite Patrick's presence, the first winter at Whetstone was a time of hardship for many of the Brule Sioux. Game was scarce and the rations were not always plentiful. The weather was extremely cold and often the roads were impassable. Over one hundred children and old people died of exposure and malnutrition. That same winter the secretary of the Department of Interior reported that the Indians at Whetstone were virtually withdrawn from the department's control. Therefore, the Indians were destitute and, to make the situation worse, no monetary funds were available to help them.

When Harney assumed control of the entire district, he appointed agents and interpreters, hired employees, made contracts at will, and issued vouchers for more money than he had appropriated to him. In addition, Harney had ignored the Department of Interior during the entire operation. When the House of Representatives investigated, he admitted that he was acting without authorization, but defended his actions as
necessary in order to keep the Sioux on their new reservation. Congress supported a policy of continuation, as they still believed that it was cheaper to feed the Indians than to fight them. The House Committee on Appropriations recommended that a sufficient amount of money be appropriated to pay all of Harney’s past indebtedness in order to test the Indian policy to its greatest capacity.  

Although Congress stood behind Harney and his work on the Missouri River, General Philip Sheridan expressed dissatisfaction with Whetstone. He believed that Harney made a grave error in locating the agency on Whetstone Creek because the site was too close to the white pioneers who were steadily moving upstream, along the Missouri River. Also, the agency was too far from any military post. Fort Randall was thirty miles south of Whetstone, which was too far away if troops were needed immediately at the agency.

Like Sheridan, John Thayer, a member of Congress, was disturbed with Harney’s work. Thayer was opposed to the Indian agents that Harney had appointed. He wanted Patrick installed as the permanent agent and the other “Harney agents” discharged from duty. The last agent Harney appointed in late fall of 1868 was Dr. S. L. Nidelet. The agency could not be operated effectively by two men, but Patrick never became the official agent because he was called to Washington to testify before a Senate committee on the conditions of the Indians.

Dr. Nidelet was the last agent that Harney appointed, however, because he proved to be incompetent and irresponsible. Also, he made himself unpopular at the agency by offering considerable sums of money to young, intelligent, half-breed women to become prostitutes. Agent Nidelet also received a salary for acting as a surgeon by the terms of an arrangement he made with the medical director at Saint Louis. It was reported that General Harney had paid for all of these services.

On 3 March 1869 Congress passed an economizing program

15. J. N. Smith to P. Sheridan, 1 June 1869, Upper Platte Agency.
to reduce the army’s forty-five regiments of infantry to twenty-five. This left the military with 509 unassigned officers. Under another law passed on 30 June 1869, sixty-eight of these officers were allowed to report to the commissioner of Indian Affairs for duty at the various Indian agencies. The government did not require these officers to post bond, but accepted their army commissions as insurance against any corruption.\(^{16}\)

Captain De Witt C. Poole, after being unassigned since April 1869, proceeded to Dakota Territory in early summer and sought the territorial governor, John A. Burbank, for an interview regarding the Indians at Whetstone.\(^{17}\) Poole hoped to gain valuable suggestions for handling affairs at Whetstone, but much to his dismay, “the Governor and ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs acknowledged but a slight acquaintance with them, and knew nothing personally, as he had never been at the Agency.”\(^{18}\)

Immediately upon Poole’s arrival at Whetstone, he encountered problems, the first being the lack of annuity goods, which he needed to keep the Indians content. The Sioux at the other agencies along the Missouri River had received their annuities, but none were delivered to Whetstone. Poole requested some of the goods in order to prevent ill feelings among the Brules at his agency. In response, Governor Burbank met a boat going downstream with annuities and transferred some of the goods to Whetstone. The annuities were distributed among the Indians, but one discontented brave demonstrated his disapproval by shooting at Captain Poole during the night.\(^{19}\)

In addition to the lack of annuity goods, Poole found that the reservation was unsuited for farming. Despite the fact that 450 acres were planted in the spring, the wheat had been sown too early and was withering in the fields because of the summer drought. Ree corn was also planted, but the grasshoppers fed on

19. D. Poole to E. S. Parker, 21 July 1869, Upper Platte Agency; Poole, *Among the Sioux of Dakota*, p. 56.
it. In addition, the traditional Brules felt that farming was degrading and would not follow the example of the progressive Indians who were farming. Swift Bear did everything in his power to induce his people to farm, but could not sway the majority of the nomadic Sioux.²⁰

The equipment at the agency was also in a state of ruin. All the equipment for a blacksmith shop, a mill grinder, and a saw mill, plus wagons and log carts, were there, but not in use. Most of the agricultural tools required advanced knowledge of scientific farming, which the Brules did not have. The equipment had been purchased by Dr. Nidelet and was either worn out, ruined, or else totally worthless to the Indians. A cabin had been purchased for the agent, but no other agency buildings existed.²¹

Despite the gloom at Whetstone, Captain Poole started the first school for the Indian children. Poole's two daughters were well educated, but could not speak the Dakota language, so Suzan Bordeaux Bettelyoun, daughter of a transplanted Fort Laramie trader, served as the school's interpreter. Poole was extremely interested in the school and visited it often. However, the Indian children were not as interested. Some days all the children came; on other days, only a handful attended. Often, anxious mothers would bring their children to the school and wait patiently for them to come out of the cabin at the end of the day.²²

In addition to the school, the agency had a commissary where rations were stored. Supplies were sent to the agency and a military officer, Lieutenant A. E. Woodson, issued them to the Indians. However, Woodson had trouble with some of the Indians when they destroyed property belonging to the commissary. He blamed whiskey and the defeat that some Brules suffered by General Eugene Carr and his Pawnee scouts during the summer as the major sources of the problem. Poole requested that the commissioner of Indian Affairs send a full

²⁰ Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1869, pp. 302-3; Poole, Among the Sioux of Dakota, pp. 35-38.
²¹ Agent Patrick to E. S. Parker, 15 June 1869 and D. Poole to Gov. Burbank, 31 Aug. 1869, Upper Platte Agency; Poole, Among the Sioux of Dakota, pp. 35-38.
²² Suzan Bordeaux Bettelyoun Manuscript, Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, Lincoln, Nebr.
company of troops with two mountain howitzers to the Whetstone Agency to protect the public property.\textsuperscript{23}

The liquor to which Woodson and Poole referred was being supplied by the liquor traders who lived on the east bank of the Missouri River opposite of the agency in a small village known as Harney City. The town’s population was composed of cattlemen, woodcutters, and a few merchants, and included a post office and a restaurant. “It was spoken of by those who had visited the place as the wildest frontier town in the country.”\textsuperscript{24} Many times the Indians at Whetstone claimed that men from that village brought liquor to the agency. The liquor traders often sold the contraband to other whites or half-breeds, who sold it to the Indians for blankets, horses, or other items of value.\textsuperscript{25} Because the village was outside of the Great Sioux Reservation, the traders could not be arrested. They were liable for prosecution only if they were caught within the defined limits of the Indians’ land.\textsuperscript{26}

The liquor trade from Harney City brought trouble in the autumn of 1869 between Spotted Tail and a subordinate leader, Big Mouth. Big Mouth was entertaining Spotted Tail and tried to induce him to drink by using himself as an example. When Spotted Tail tried to leave the lodge at four o’clock in the morning, Big Mouth stood up with Spotted Tail and attempted to shoot him, but Spotted Tail fired first, killing Big Mouth. Friends of both Indians rallied, but no further fighting or feuding resulted that night.\textsuperscript{27}

Despite a calm, Poole anticipated trouble and sent word to Brevet Colonel J. W. Whistler at Fort Randall to send troops. A detachment of soldiers from the 22nd Infantry under the command of Brevet Major C. A. Webb arrived at Whetstone and

\textsuperscript{23} D. Poole to Gov. Burbank, 8 Aug. 1869, Upper Platte Agency; \textit{Union and Dakotian}, 30 June 1870; D. Poole to E. S. Parker, 1 Oct. 1869, Upper Platte Agency.


\textsuperscript{27} D. Poole to E. S. Parker, 31 Oct. 1869, Upper Platte Agency; Poole, \textit{Among the Sioux of Dakota}, pp. 82-83.
arrested three men accused by Poole of being whiskey suppliers. Louis Antechem and John Bartnau were the two half-breeds arrested and Albert Gay, a white, was also taken by the soldiers. The three prisoners claimed that they lived with and were a part of the Indian bands at Whetstone; therefore, they were not liable for prosecution by civilian authorities.  

In spite of the arrest, several whiskey dealers became more bold in their actions. That winter some traders even brought liquor to the agency in wagons, which they drove across the ice covered Missouri River. These men often sold the whiskey directly to the Indians in timbered areas near the agency. This whiskey, which was worth only one dollar a quart, was often traded to the Indians for thirty dollars worth of their supplies. Although conditions were not good at Whetstone, Poole believed that there was some improvement at the agency following the arrest of the three liquor dealers.  

During that winter, some Indian women took refuge in the school, as the janitor kept the building warm and supplied with firewood. Captain Poole allowed the agency to serve coffee and bread to the parents as well as the children who sought comfort there. However, he reported that supplies were running low and that the flour supply would be gone by mid-March. In spite of all that Poole tried to do, the Indians suffered much sickness and disease at the agency and at Spotted Tail’s camp on the White River.  

As the agency continued to reap disruption from whiskey traders and crop failures, Spotted Tail began to express disapproval with the agency’s location. He wanted the agency moved to the west, further into the interior of the reservation near the forks of the White River or to a point south of that river. He stated that either location was fine, both having water and timber; and they were located away from the Missouri

28. Returns from United States Military Posts, 1800-1916, Fort Randall, Dakota Territory, Post Return for Oct. 1869, RG94, National Archives; D. Poole to E. S. Parker, 1 Nov. 1869, Upper Platte Agency.  
River and the men who lived there. The whites and half-breeds at Whetstone also favored the agency's relocation, but not to the White River. They preferred a place known as Butte Cache, near the sacred Black Hills. If the agency was moved there, they believed that they would be in a position to tap the resources of the Black Hills.  

In November 1869, Spotted Tail requested permission to go to Washington to speak with the president about the agency's removal, but his trip was not approved until the spring of 1870. Spotted Tail and a delegation of Indians from Whetstone reached Washington in May 1870 and immediately Spotted Tail voiced his sentiments against the present location of Whetstone to officials in the Interior Department. He told about the liquor trade and its effect on his people and about the hardships of farming. He went on to say that the Missouri River was not fit for men, the lumber was gone, and the white men controlled the river for their own ends. He stated that his people would move either the agency or themselves, regardless of the department's wishes.  

When the delegation returned from Washington, the approval of officials in Washington to permit the agency to be removed created good feelings at the agency. Whites and half-breeds favored the move because the agency goods would have to be transported a great distance and the cost would be paid by the government. Also, they would benefit by their association with the agency if the Black Hills were opened.  

In late spring 1870, the troops that Poole requested the preceding fall arrived at Whetstone, despite the fact that the agency was supposed to be relocated in the near future. They were members of the 14th Infantry commanded by Captain J. H. Van Devislice. The troops immediately began to erect a stockade that was supported and protected by blockhouses from which the ends of the agency could be fired upon with two brass howitzers. The stockade would provide protection for
the government employees in case of an Indian outbreak. In addition to the stockade, the soldiers built quarters for one company of enlisted men, an officers’ quarters, a hospital, a guardhouse, several storehouses, magazine areas, a bakery, stables, and work areas. Subsistence stores for the quartermasters were provided from a depot in Chicago. The Indians resented the army’s presence, but could do nothing short of war. They did complain that the army had used the agency’s steam mill from July 1870 through October 1870 to make logs for the stockade and did not pay the Indians for its use.\(^{34}\)

As the military troops began to work on their post, the agency employees prepared two hundred acres of land for planting. The Indians wanted no part of the agricultural work after the results of the previous year. And, like the year before, the months of June and July brought drought, and the harvest was barely larger than the seed planted. Again, there were no rewards in farming, and the government was forced to give full rations to the Indians.\(^{35}\)

To add to the agent’s troubles, Poole received personal criticism that summer. Little Dog, a Brule Indian from Whetstone, traveled to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, and reported to the post commander that the Indians at Whetstone received large quantities of whiskey, but no rations. He went on to say that the Brules had sold many of their ponies for whiskey that was brought up the Missouri River in steamers.\(^{36}\) However, when Governor Burbank reported on affairs at the agency, he praised Poole and his work. Burbank stated that there was no agency more difficult to operate than Whetstone, due to the uneasy disposition of the Indians who were constantly making trouble for the agent. He did admit that whiskey was a problem, but said that Poole did everything in his power to prevent its misuse.\(^{37}\)

In September 1870, William Welsh, a member of the Board
of Indian Commissioners, visited Whetstone. He reported that the Indians were in a state of poverty, ill clad, their lodges were covered with thin muslin sheeting, and the children often died from exposure during the severe winters. In addition, there were many women with half-breed children whose fathers were prominent whites in the vicinity of the agency. Most of these white men had left the Indian women and their children to fend for themselves.  

While at Whetstone, Welsh tried to stop a small portion of the liquor trade. A Dakota preempter, living opposite of the agency, owned the only ferry in operation near Whetstone. The ferry owner claimed one mile and a half of river front property, and the profit from whiskey sales was his major source of income. Welsh purchased the ferry privilege, the land, and the buildings for $1,200. The deal was completed with the understanding that the trader would never return to the Missouri River. Several months later, he was back on the river, preempted the land north of Welsh's property, and established his liquor trade once more.  

After Welsh left the agency, he used his influence to have Poole replaced as the agent at Whetstone. The captain was dismissed, not due to his conduct, but to the new policy enacted by President Grant concerning the selection of Indian agents. In 1869 Grant gave to the various church denominations the right to select Indian agents. The remaining positions were filled by military officers, such as Captain Poole, but the Army Appropriations Act of 15 July 1870 caused the army officers to be permanently relieved of duty at the Indian agencies and gave the religious bodies complete control over the appointment of agents.  

John W. Washburn, a resident of Dakota Territory, replaced Poole as the new civilian agent at Whetstone. The captain then moved to the military post at the agency and took command of

39. Ibid., p. 16; Poole, Among the Sioux of Dakota, pp. 211-13.  
Whetstone Indian Agency

the troops stationed there. Poole’s new duties were to manage the garrison and to aid the new Indian agent for Whetstone. The civilian agent received the agency goods and immediately began to report on an old and recurring problem; the Indians needed additional supplies. Washburn stated that the Indians needed heavy cloth to mend their lodges and that they wanted to go south and hunt for food on their old hunting ranges. He also reported that there was great suffering among the older women who had families, but no husbands to help them. By mid-winter, the weather became extremely cold and conditions became crucial. During that winter they were totally dependent on the Department of Interior and the Indian Bureau for all of their supplies.

Before the winter snows had melted, Washburn requested seeds for spring planting, despite the fact that he himself expressed doubts about growing anything at the present agency location. By early spring, the agency employees were cutting trees, hauling timber, and making logs to be used for fences around the agency’s fields. This work was being done because the Interior Department had not yet informed Washburn officially of the forthcoming relocation of Whetstone.

Despite the uncertainty of the agency’s future, Mrs. Hattie Washburn, the agent’s wife, began the second school at Whetstone, which was sponsored by the Episcopal Missionary Society. Sammuel D. Hinman, an Episcopal missionary to the Sioux, reported that about one hundred fifty pupils were attending the school. Associated with the school was the Protestant Episcopal Mission named Church of Hope; no pastor had been named, but eighty people had already been baptized.

With the coming of spring, many Brûles were anxious to move the agency to the west. On 6 March 1871, Spotted Tail came from the western camp on the White River and held a council with Agent Washburn. He wanted to know what actions

41. E. D. Townsend to Commander of Dakota, 12 Oct. 1870 and J. W. Washburn to E. S. Parker, 2 Nov. 1870, Upper Platte Agency.
42. J. W. Washburn to E. S. Parker, 1 Dec. 1870, Upper Platte Agency; J. W. Washburn to E. S. Parker, 3 Jan. 1871, Whetstone Post.
43. J. W. Washburn to E. S. Parker, 23 Feb., 1 Mar. 1871, Whetstone Post.
44. Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1871, p. 269.
had been taken in regard to the agency’s removal into the interior of the Great Sioux Reservation, and whether he could go south across the Platte River and hunt buffalo. According to Spotted Tail, all these things had been promised to him in Washington during May and June 1870. Washburn allowed Spotted Tail, along with the head farmer, Steve Estes, to establish a sub-agency in the interior.\textsuperscript{45}

In the meantime, Swift Bear arrived at Whetstone on 22 March 1871, and stated his opposition to any plan that would move the agency from its present location. He believed that the Missouri River site had better farming potential than any other location.\textsuperscript{46} The Indian Bureau and Agent Washburn did not consider Swift Bear’s statements, but continued with their plans to relocate Whetstone. The department favored the site near the Black Hills known as Hidden Butte, but any move to that region would invite trouble from the hostile northern Sioux. Before the actual move began, Spotted Tail and other Indians voted for the site called Little White Clay. They argued that the Peace Commission of 1868 stated that Sioux land included this area. However, this proposed site was located outside of the Sioux Reservation and in the state of Nebraska.\textsuperscript{47}

Before a definite location was chosen, Washburn hired John W. Smith, a resident of Whetstone, to transport many of the agency goods to the interior. The agent based his selection on Smith’s personality, even before he had received all the bids. Smith lived with the Indians, was friendly toward them, and would most likely hire some Brûles to help with the move.\textsuperscript{48}

The location that was finally selected was Big White Clay, in the southwest corner of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. In early May, Spotted Tail and his bands left for the new location, and on 1 June 1871, the agent, with many Indians in his charge, left the old agency and followed Spotted Tail. Washburn stated he would have left earlier, but the commander at Whetstone Post would not furnish him with the fifty guns and five

\textsuperscript{45} “Whetstone,” p. 5; J. W. Washburn to E. S. Parker, 6 Mar. 1871, Whetstone Post.
\textsuperscript{46} J. W. Washburn to E. S. Parker, 22 Mar. 1871, Whetstone Post.
\textsuperscript{47} J. W. Washburn to E. S. Parker, 1 Apr., 3 Apr., 18 Apr. 1871, Whetstone Post.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 10 May 1871, Whetstone Post.
thousand rounds of ammunition that Washburn wanted until that date. The buildings and remaining stores were turned over to the post commander at Whetstone, and as a final request, Washburn asked that the stores and supplies for the new agency be stored and shipped from the old Missouri River site. So, the old Whetstone agency served the new agency as a base of supply.49

Later in the summer, Swift Bear returned to the Missouri River agency and told Captain Poole that he wanted to return with his band to the old location. He still believed that the new agency site was unsatisfactory, but he was not allowed to return to Whetstone. Despite the hopes that Swift Bear and some officials in the Indian Bureau may have had concerning the reopening of Whetstone, the agency was never opened again. Some of the public buildings, owned by the Interior Department, were destroyed by settlers in the area. Between June 1871 and February 1872, it was estimated that twenty buildings were damaged.50

The sub-agent, William Miller, who was stationed at the old agency, ordered the people to stop destroying this property, but it was to no avail. After August 1872, all the goods and supplies at Whetstone were transferred to Fort Randall where commissioned officers received all the supplies for the interior agency. In the fall the remaining agency buildings were placed on the auction market and sold to the highest bidder. During April 1872 the troops evacuated the agency post and homesteaders tore down part of the stockade. Later, fire destroyed the remaining portion of the military garrison.51

The Whetstone Indian agency was only one result of the very idealistic Indian policy that the Peace Commission at Fort Laramie attempted to enact, but in the end, the agency stood as

49. Ibid., 1 June 1871, Whetstone Post; Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1871, p. 527.
50. D. Poole to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1 Aug. 1871, Whetstone Post; William Miller to General Hancock, 21 Feb. 1872, Whetstone Post.
a symbol of the decay and failure of that policy. From General William Harney’s initial work to the agency’s abandonment, little was accomplished to help the Brules or to improve the federal government’s relations with them. Harney and the other white leaders placed the agency on land that was unsuited for farming. The Indian lands of western Dakota were suited for grazing and stock raising, but that would have been contrary to the goals of the peace policy, which attempted to make every Sioux a farmer.

Another problem with the agency system was the manner in which the agents were chosen. Indian agents appointed to their posts by the spoils system owed their positions to political influence. Once there, they faced the difficult and often impossible task of making the Indians civilized farmers. The territorial governor, who was an official in the Indian Bureau, was excluded from most of the correspondence with the agents because these agents wrote directly to Washington for advice and information as they owed their allegiance to Washington and not to the local officials.

Factionalism between the traditionalists and progressive groups of Indians led to many agency problems. Their disputes often centered on agency location, tribal decisions, and the degree of adaption to white culture. In the early years, Spotted Tail and his traditional followers triumphed.

The annuities and provisions that were promised the Sioux in exchange for certain concessions as established in the Treaty of 1868 were often of such poor quality that the Indians did not care whether or not they received them. Also, the white settlers living near or at the agency received most of the Indian supplies, either in the form of government contracts to supply and haul provisions to the agency, or in exchange for liquor that found its way to the Indian reserves.

These problems were common occurrences at Whetstone and at the other Sioux agencies. The inability of the government to ease the tension and improve conditions for the Indians led to the breakdown of this policy. The frustration felt by many of the Indians only added fuel to the growing flame that sparked into the Sioux War of 1876.