Oral Histories of Northern Cheyenne Descendants of the Battle of Little Bighorn, 1985-1987

Overview of the Collection

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Creator</th>
<th>Jackson, Royal G.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Oral Histories of Northern Cheyenne Descendants of the Battle of Little Bighorn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>0.4 cubic feet, including 28 audiocassette, (2 boxes)</td>
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<td>Collection Number</td>
<td>OH 20</td>
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<td>Summary</td>
<td>The Oral Histories of Northern Cheyenne Descendants of the Battle of Little Bighorn collection documents a project, led in the mid-1980s by Oregon State University professor Royal Jackson, that sought to capture the perspective of contemporary Northern Cheyenne tribal members on the famous 1876 battle between certain of their ancestors and the U.S. 7th Cavalry, led by Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer. The interviews held in this collection also lend extensive insight into the changes experienced by the Northern Cheyenne people throughout the twentieth century and provide a snapshot of the Northern Cheyenne as they viewed themselves in the mid-1980s.</td>
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<td>Telephone: 541-737-2075</td>
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<td>Fax: 541-737-8674</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:scarc@oregonstate.edu">scarc@oregonstate.edu</a></td>
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<td>Access Restrictions</td>
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<td>Languages</td>
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Historical Note

The Battle of Little Bighorn took place on July 25-26, 1876 near the Little Bighorn River in what is now southern Montana. Sometimes referred to as "Custer's Last Stand," the encounter pit the 7th Cavalry of the United States Army, under the command of Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, versus a collection of Lakota, Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors. The 7th Cavalry sustained severe losses as a result of the encounter - its casualty count ultimately tallied to 268 dead and 55 injured, over half the total roster of the regiment. Among those whose lives were claimed was Lt. Custer as well as every soldier fighting in the five companies alongside him. Estimates of Native American casualties vary

Oral Histories of Northern Cheyenne Descendants of the Battle of Little Bighorn, 1985-1987
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widely, but the battle is almost universally remembered as having been an overwhelming victory for the Native American alliance; a victory that was, at least in part, brought about by major tactical mistakes made by Custer in commanding his troops. Custer was a flamboyant and celebrated figure who had achieved fame for decorations earned during the American Civil War. His death, combined with the heavy defeat suffered by the 7th Cavalry, rendered the Battle of Little Bighorn both an extremely newsworthy event during its time and a continuing source of fascination within American popular culture.

The Cheyenne people are believed to have established themselves as a tribe in the early 1500s. Originally based in the Great Lakes region of present-day Minnesota, the Cheyenne migrated west, eventually settling in what is now Montana. By the 19th century, the Cheyenne nation had grown quite substantially, populating a great expanse across the midwestern United States. Throughout the century the Cheyenne were commonly at war: first against the Crow people - traditional enemy of the Cheyenne - and later against the United States Army. In the aftermath of the Black Hills War of 1876-1877, the Northern Cheyenne were forcibly relocated to Oklahoma - home of the Southern Cheyenne - by the United States government. The tribe, unaccustomed to this new environment, fared very poorly and in 1878 a fragment of the Northern Cheyenne returned to their ancestral homeland, settling in the Powder River Basin of southeast Montana and northeast Wyoming. In 1884 the 444,000-acre Tongue River Indian Reservation, located in southeastern Montana, was established by U.S. President Chester A. Arthur. The reservation has served as home to the Northern Cheyenne people ever since.

Royal G. Jackson was a faculty member in the College of Forestry at Oregon State University from 1970 until his retirement in 2004. Jackson taught courses in recreation resource management and nature-based tourism; his research interests included forest history, nature-based tourism, and protected area management. He pursued research projects in the western United States and in Costa Rica. As part of his research, Jackson conducted numerous oral history projects pertaining to the history of forestry, specifically, the Oregon State University College of Forestry and the Research Forests (McDonald and Dunn Forests); the Soap Creek Valley in Benton County, Oregon; Basques in Harney County, Oregon; the diversification of a resource-based economy in Deschutes County, Oregon, to include tourism; the Winema National Forest; the Battle of Little Bighorn from the perspective of the Northern Cheyenne descendants; and the environmental movement and ecotourism in Cost Rica. Jackson earned his BA in 1960 from the University of New Mexico, an MA in 1965 from Western New Mexico University, and his Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico in 1971.

Content Description

The Custer Battlefield National Monument Oral History Program was led by OSU Forestry professor Royal Jackson from 1985-1987. The project was funded by a grant provided by the University of Wyoming’s National Park Service Research Center. The stated goal of the program was "to examine and document the Battle of Little Bighorn and its place in the Northern Cheyenne memory and tribal past, as it has been transmitted through the oral tradition to the present generation. The early reservation era and Cheyenne history and culture were secondary subthemes also explored in these conversations." Examination of the collection's materials likewise indicates that the contemporary self-image of the Northern Cheyenne was a major theme for Jackson and his twenty interviewees, with alcoholism, the erosion of traditional values and the future of the tribe, among other subjects of the day, appearing as frequent topics of conversation.

Jackson conducted all of his interviews in September and October 1985, and September 1986. Interviews were recorded at several locations throughout the state of Montana including Ashland, Birney, Busby, Lame Deer (headquarters of the Tongue River Reservation) and Muddy Creek. In
addition to the topics mentioned above, interviews often touched upon the federal policy of land allotment, education and forced assimilation, the "long walk" from Oklahoma, natural resource use, strip mining, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Of his interview subjects, Jackson wrote: "The oldest informant was 79 years old; the youngest was 56. The average age of the 20 interviewees was about 65....All were born in Montana and for most of them their place of birth was on the reservation. A few left for a short period of military service, education, or to work elsewhere, but all of them have lived the largest part of their lives on the reservation....In almost all cases there was a strong and well-defined family linkage between the informant and a participant in the Battle of Little Bighorn." All interviews but one were conducted in English; in the case of the lone exception (Charlie White Dirt), the interview was conducted with the assistance of an interpreter conversant in the native tongue of the Northern Cheyenne.

The collection's interviews are contained on 28 audiocassettes. Copies of these cassettes were deposited with the Superintendent of the Custer Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency, Montana and with the library at Dull Knife Memorial College in Lame Deer, Montana. An additional set of audiocassettes was donated to the Horner Museum at Oregon State University and subsequently transferred to the OSU Archives upon the museum's closure in 1996.

In addition to the audiocassettes, the collection consists of four published volumes - a final report and three volumes of transcripts. Jackson's final report contains an introduction to the project, a discussion of project methodology, a summary of project findings - grouped under the headings "Early Reservation Era," "Cheyenne History and Culture," and "The Battle of Little Bighorn and Associated Mythology" - reproductions of signed release forms, a sample informant letter and indices to all three volumes of transcripts.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

Oral Histories of Northern Cheyenne Descendants of the Battle of Little Bighorn (OH 20), Oregon State University Special Collections & Archives Research Center, Corvallis, Oregon.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

The materials described in this collection have been arranged into two series, one describing the collection's audiocassettes and a second the collection's final report and published transcripts. An alphabetical view of the oral history interviewees whose recordings and transcripts are held in this collection is as follows:

- Bement, Eldora (September 18, 1986)
- Big Head, August (October 3, 1985)
- Brady, Raymond, Sr. (September 9, 1986)
- Glenmore, Josephine (September 17, 1985)
- Knows Gun, Sylvester, Sr. (September 11, 1986)
- Limpy, Henry (September 11, 1986)
- Little Wolf, Gilbert (September 17, 1985)
- Medicine Bull, Bert (October 10, 1985)
Rising Sun, Ted (September 9, 1986)
Roundstone, Martin (September 16, 1985)
Rowland, Allen (October 13, 1985)
Shoulderblade, Issac (October 1, 1985)
Shoulderblade, Jim (September 26, 1985)
Sioux, Henry (September 22, 1985)
Spotted Wolf, Clarence (September 16, 1986)
Stands in Timber, Elva (October 6, 1985)
Walks Along, Joe (September 13, 1985)
White Dirt, Charlie (September 22, 1985)
White Wolf, Fred (September 30, 1985)
Wolf Black, Charlie (October 10, 1985)

Acquisition Information

These oral histories were originally part of the Horner Museum Oral History Collection (OH 10). In 2013 they were separated out and described as a new collection.

Related Materials

This collection is a component of the Oregon Multicultural Archives, which documents the lives and activities of African American, Asian American, Latino and Native American communities of Oregon. Researchers interested in the Native American oral tradition may wish to consult the Oregon Native American Language Sound Recordings (OH 12) collection, which documents the Tolowa and Tututni languages indigenous to the Siletz and Coquille tribes. The Royal G. Jackson Papers are also held by the Special Collections & Archives Research Center.

Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

Series I: Audiocassettes, 1985-1986

28 items
The arrangement of audiocassettes established by the Horner Museum has been maintained in this series. Horner Museum accession numbers are included with each set of audiocassettes. All interviews were conducted by Royal Jackson.

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| 1            | Rowland, Allen
Horner accession numbers 987-1-11a-b. Recorded in Muddy Creek, Montana. Abstract: Born in 1926. Discusses his ancestors and stories he has heard growing up; how his grandfather served as a Cheyenne scout; Custer and the Battle of Custer; Crow scouts; other Native Americans involved; discrepancies between the Native American and white man's | October 13, 1985 |

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| 1           | Roundstone, Martin  
Horner accession numbers 987-1-12a-b. Recorded in Busby, Montana. Abstract: Born 1910. Discusses his ancestors and stories he has heard; Philip Rising Son and Limpy's stories; Custer and the Battle of Custer; Crow scouts; Two Moons Monument; Crow involvement in the Battle of Custer and stories of a medicine man; sweet medicine. Describes his boyhood on the reservation, school in Busby, forced assimilation and various jobs he has had. Also discusses the changes he has seen over the years; religion and peyote; traditions and customs; warrior societies; and problems facing the Cheyenne today. | September 16, 1985 |
| 1           | Stands in Timber, Elva  
Horner accession numbers 987-1-13a-b. Recorded in Birney, Montana. Abstract: Born 1928. Discusses her ancestors and stories she remembers from her childhood about Custer and the Battle of Custer, discrepancies between the white man and the Native American version of history, other Native Americans involved, and the predictions of sweet medicine. Describes changes she has seen over the years; family life; extended family; disinterest in history; values and traditions; language; alcoholism; and attitudes toward the land. | October 6, 1985 |
| 1           | White Dirt, Charlie  
Horner accession number 987-1-14. Recorded in Muddy Creek, Montana. Abstract: Born 1905. Discusses his ancestors and stories he has heard about Custer, the Battle of Custer, other Indians involved, and his impressions of the Custer Battle Field. Describes how things have changed during his lifetime. Interview was conducted with the aid of an interpreter. | September 22, 1985 |
| 1           | Shoulderblade, Jim  
Horner accession number 987-1-15. Recorded in Lame Deer, Montana. Abstract: Born 1908. Discusses his ancestors and some of the stories he heard growing up; how his grandmother Morning Woman was caught by Custer's troops; Custer the Battle of Custer; other Native Americans involved; how the Native Americans started the gold rush in the Black Hills of South Dakota; discrepancies between the Native Americans' version. Discusses his childhood and how things have changed over the years; Cheyenne traditions and values that are still important today; how the economic base for the tribe has changed; natural resource management; language; his experiences as a tribal chairman and the challenges he faced. Also discusses warrior societies and the tribal council in Indian Affairs today; challenges for the Cheyenne in the future. | September 26, 1985 |
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| 1           | Sioux, Henry  
Horner accession number 987-1-16. Recorded in Lame Deer, Montana. Abstract: Born 1911. Discusses his ancestors, origins of his name, his childhood on a farm, his work on a round-up, school in Busby, and various stories he heard growing up. Describes the differences between his boyhood and today; the welfare system; ration days; values and traditions; land usage; alcoholism; religion; and the future for the Cheyenne. | September 22, 1985         |
| 1           | Walks Along, Joe  
Horner accession numbers 987-1-17a-b. Recorded in Lame Deer, Montana. Abstract: Born 1931. Discusses his ancestors, origins of his name, his childhood, his father as a farmer, his opinions on the Custer Battle Field, his education, military experience, alcoholism and experiences as a minister. Describes stories he has heard throughout the years; Yellow Robe as a scout; the long walk from Oklahoma; Custer Battle; Ghost Dance; the Sacred Hat; and the relationship between the Crow and Cheyenne. Discusses how things have changed on the reservation over time; different ways the Cheyenne make money; education; forced assimilation; religion; peyote; attitudes towards nature; values and traditions; natural resources; the importance of warrior societies; tribal council; and language. | September 13, 1985         |
| 1           | Knows Gun, Sylvester, Sr.  
Horner accession numbers 987-1-18a-b. Recorded in Lame Deer, Montana. Abstract: Born 1926. Discusses his ancestors, his father as a professional wrestler and ranch hand. Some of his own experiences - the Sun Dance, Busby Boarding School, forced assimilation, his college years and how he made Chief. Describes stories he has heard; the Battle of Custer, other Native Americans involved, ceremonies preceding the attack, warrior societies, how Custer was viewed by the Native Americans, Native American versus white perspectives on history, and the quality of the soldiers in battles. Describes the changes he has seen in the Native American way of life; values and traditions; language, religion, family life, education, nature and natural resources on reservations. | September 11, 1986         |
| 1           | Glenmore, Josephine  
Horner accession number 987-1-19. Recorded in Busby, Montana. Abstract: Born 1920. Discusses her ancestors, her childhood growing up on a ranch, the Busby school, marriage in | September 17, 1985         |
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<td>1941, how white and Native American religion played a part in her life, warrior societies, Cheyenne values and traditions, how her children have grown up, and challenges for the Cheyenne today. Describes stories she has heard about the Custer Battle and her great grandfather’s involvement.</td>
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<td>Big Head, August Horner accession number 987-1-20. Recorded in Lame Deer, Montana. Abstract: Born 1922. Discusses his ancestors, his childhood growing up on a ranch and boarding school at St. Labre. Describes stories he has heard about Custer and Custer's Battle, discrepancies between the Native American and white man's version, and other Cheyennes who were involved. Talks about the changes he has seen over the years; values and traditions, way of life, diet, religion, the family and work ethic.</td>
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<td>Little Wolf, Gilbert Horner accession number 987-1-21. Recorded in Busby, Montana. Abstract: Born 1930. Discusses his ancestors and stories he has heard about; his great-grandfather Little Wolf; the long walk from Oklahoma; Custer and the Custer Battle; other Native Americans involved in the battle and the story of Little Wolf killing a man. Describes the values and traditions of how he was brought up and how they are changing. Discusses how a Cheyenne’s way of life is different from the white man’s way of life.</td>
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<td>Shoulderblade, Issac Horner accession number 987-1-22. Recorded in Lame Deer, Montana. Abstract: Born 1913. Discusses his ancestors, childhood growing up on a ranch, memories his father had about the St. Labre boarding school, his experiences at the school, his job as an interpreter on the Northern Cheyenne reservation, and various stories he remembers about the history of his tribe.</td>
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<td>White Wolf, Fred Horner accession number 987-1-23. Recorded in Lame Deer, Montana. Abstract: Born 1928. Discusses his ancestors, his education at the Busby Mission Chemawa Indian School and stories he has heard; Custer and the Battle of Custer; Crow scouts; other Indians involved in the battle. Discusses his feelings on the way in which the Park Service presents history, discrepancies between the Native American and white man's version of history, lack of interest with Native Americans today and their history, and the future for the Cheyenne tribe. Describes how the Cheyenne have changed over the years;</td>
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<td>religion, family life, values and traditions; alcoholism, warrior societies, and natural resources.</td>
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| 1           | Medicine Bull, Bert  
Horner accession number 987-1-24. Recorded in Birney, Montana. Abstract: Born 1927. Describes his childhood and his father's experiences as a rancher for the tribal herd. Talks about the loss of the old ways but how some things still remain; Native American Church, sweat lodges, Sun Dance, warrior societies and tribal council. Discusses some of the stories he has heard; Custer and the Battle of Custer; Sand Creek Massacre; the long walk from Oklahoma, break out from Fort Robinson. Describes how life has changed over the years; education, discrimination, religion, values and traditions, the family, travel, diet, and the effect of state welfare on Native Americans. | October 10, 1985 |
| 1           | Rising Sun, Ted  
Horner accession numbers 987-1-25a-b. Recorded in Busby, Montana. Abstract: Talks in detail about his ancestry and the history of the Cheyenne; destruction of the Dull Knife's village; the trek that his grandmother and a few other Cheyenne made leaving Oklahoma in the 1870s (the "long walk") and the hardships they suffered; differences between the South Cheyenne and the North Cheyenne; stories he has heard about the Custer Battle; discrepancies between the white man's and the Native American version of history. Describes his early life on the reservation in Busby, Montana; entertainment; Cheyenne values and traditions; early schooling on the reservation and forced assimilation; loss of culture; opinions on the Bureau of Indian Affairs; his life in the military; alcoholism; reversion to Christianity; alcohol and drug problems on the reservation today. | September 9, 1986 |
| 1           | Spotted Wolf, Clarence  
Horner accession numbers 987-1-26a-b. Recorded in Ashland, Montana. Abstract: Born 1924. Talks about his ancestry, his childhood on his father's ranch in Montana, land allotment, the issue days in the late 1930s, Native Americans working on CCC projects during Roosevelt's time, entertainment during his childhood years, school and forced assimilation. Discusses some of the changes he has seen over the years: diet, Native Americans with less reliance on kinship, religion and values. Describes his feelings and stories he has heard about some of the Cheyenne history, the long walk back from Oklahoma, the break out from Fort Robinson, the Custer Battle and warrior societies. Discusses the future of the Cheyenne, the loss of culture and tradition, natural resources and strip mining. | September 16, 1986 |
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<td><strong>Limp, Henry</strong>&lt;br&gt;Hornr accession number 987-1-27. Recorded in Busby, Montana. Abstract: Born 1919. Discusses his ancestry and stories his grandfather and others used to tell him, including ones concerning the Battle of the Rosebud, various customs, medicine men, and the Custer Battle. Describes how the reservation has changed over the years: education, less reliance on themselves and more on the Bureau of Indian Affairs, alcoholism and drug problems, loss of tradition and values. Discusses his feelings on the strip mining of coal and the future of the Cheyenne tribe.</td>
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<td><strong>Wolf Black, Charlie</strong>&lt;br&gt;Hornr accession number 987-1-28. Recorded in Birney, Montana. Abstract: Discusses his ancestry, childhood, and stories he heard growing up: the Custer Battle, Two Moons Monument in Busby and discrepancies between the Native American and white man's version of history. Describes how things have changed on the reservation over the years, disinterest in Native American history with children today, diet and illness, values and customs, attitude toward land and wildlife, family life and assimilation towards the white man's way.</td>
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<td><strong>Bement, Eldora</strong>&lt;br&gt;Hornr accession number 987-1-29. Recorded in Ashland, Montana. Abstract: Born 1923. Discusses her ancestors, her childhood on a ranch, her husband and his ancestors, and her involvement with the Cheyenne Cultural Program at St. Labre. Describes how the Cheyenne culture has changed since she was younger; ways of living; values attitudes, traditions and religions. Discusses stories she has been told about the long walk from Oklahoma, the Custer Battle, and discrepancies between the white man's and Native American version of history.</td>
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<td><strong>Brady, Raymond, Sr.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Hornr accession numbers 987-1-30a-b. Recorded in Lame Deer, Montana. Abstract: Born 1925. Discusses his ancestors, childhood and stories he heard growing up; the long walk from Oklahoma; the surrender of Little Wolf; his grandfather Braided Locks; the Elk Warrior Society; Custer's Battle; fighting with other tribes such as the Pawnee and Crow. Discusses the traditions, values and life styles he was raised with and how they are changing today; religion on the reservation; his schooling and military experience; ration days; negative and positive aspects of the Bureau of Indian Affairs; warrior societies and how they function today; his experience with</td>
<td>September 9, 1986</td>
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alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous; the issue of strip mining; and his opinions on the future of the tribe.

### Series II: Published Report and Transcripts, 1987

4 folders

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<td>&quot;Custer Battlefield National Monument Oral History Program - Final Report,&quot; by Royal G. Jackson Final report contains an introduction to the project, a discussion of project methodology, a summary of project findings - grouped under the headings &quot;Early Reservation Era,&quot; &quot;Cheyenne History and Culture,&quot; and &quot;The Battle of Little Bighorn and Associated Mythology&quot; - reproduced release forms, a sample informant letter and indices to all three volumes of transcripts produced by the project.</td>
<td>Winter 1987</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>&quot;Custer Battlefield National Monument Oral History Program - Volume 2,&quot; by Royal G. Jackson Introduction to and transcripts of interviews conducted with Sylvester Knows Gun, Josephine Glenmore, August Big Head, Gilbert Little Wolf, Issac Shoulderblade, Fred White Wolf and Bert Medicine Bull. Item includes reproduced release forms and index for Volume 2 interviews.</td>
<td>Winter 1987</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>&quot;Custer Battlefield National Monument Oral History Program - Volume 3,&quot; by Royal G. Jackson Introduction to and transcripts of interviews conducted with Ted Rising Sun, Clarence Spotted Wolf, Henry Limpy, Charlie Wolf Black, Eldora Bement and Raymond Brady, Sr. Item includes reproduced release forms and index for Volume 3 interviews.</td>
<td>Winter 1987</td>
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Names and Subjects

Subject Terms:
Cheyenne Indians--Montana.
Indians of North America--Wars--Great Plains.
Little Bighorn, Battle of the, Mont., 1876.

Personal Names:
Custer, George A. (George Armstrong), 1839-1876.

Corporate Names:
Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (Agency: U.S.)
Northern Cheyenne Tribe of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, Montana--History.
United States. Army. Cavalry, 7th.

Geographical Names:
Lame Deer (Mont.)
Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (Mont.)
Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation (Mont.)--History.
Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation (Mont.)--Social conditions.

Form or Genre Terms:
Audiocassettes.
Oral histories (document genres)

Other Creators:
Personal Names:
Bement, Eldora.
(interviewee)
Big Head, August.
(interviewee)
Brady, Raymond.
(interviewee)
(interviewee)
Knows Gun, Sylvester.
(interviewee)
Limpy, Henry.
(interviewee)
Little Wolf, Gilbert.
(interviewee)
Medicine Bull, Bert.
(interviewee)
(interviewee)
Roundstone, Martin.
(interviewee)
Rowland, Allen.
(interviewee)
Shoulderblade, Issac
(interviewee)
Shoulderblade, James.
(interviewee)
Sioux, Henry.

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http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv38891
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Spotted Wolf, Clarence.
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Stands in Timber, Elva.
(interviewee)
Walks Along, Joe.
(interviewee)
White Dirt, Charlie.
(interviewee)
White Wolf, Fred.
(interviewee)
Wolf Black, Charlie.
(interviewee)

**Corporate Names:**
University of Wyoming-National Park Service Research Center.

Finding aid prepared by Chris Petersen.
2013

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