

Introduction

Those who lack links with a place must forge an identity through other pasts.

—David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*

In 1932 the Pipestone Indian Shrine Association published a brochure to explain and enhance the appeal of the catlinite quarries in southwestern Minnesota. Local interpretation claimed the site attracted visitors because of its “Indian store of fascinating legend and tradition,” said to exist “among all the plains tribes from earliest time, and, little by little, disclosed by them to the white explorers who won the Indians’ confidence.” Almost a century earlier, in summer 1838, Joseph N. Nicollet, one of the first explorers, arrived near the place and described what he saw around him: “It is a high, grand, and beautiful prairie . . . the view to the south seems limitless, the verdure losing itself far away in the azure of the sky. The spectacle is full of grandeur because of its simplicity.” A French cartographer, Nicollet explored the lands west of the upper Mississippi River in an expedition sponsored by the U.S. government. Crossing the western prairies of what eleven years later became Minnesota Territory, he eagerly anticipated ascending the Côteau des Prairies, an area about which he had read in other explorers’ narratives. This plateau, comprising a series of gentle ridges, lies nearly a thousand feet above the surrounding flatter land and divides the watersheds of the Mississippi River to the northeast and the Missouri River basin to the southwest. On reaching the area, Nicollet extolled the elemental beauties of the vast prairie of undulating tall grasses interlaced with wetlands and streams.¹

On the slopes of the Côteau the European explorer approached the most anticipated destination on his expedition—the pipestone quarries of which

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much had been written, mostly by explorers who had never visited the site. Along a shallow stream in a regionally typical expanse of prairie, imposing bluffs of crystalline red Sioux quartzite rose from the grassy earth, accompanied by a small waterfall and pond. At the base of the ridge the surface layer of hard metamorphic rock cracked and exposed lengthy parallel veins of a darker, softer sedimentary stone, prized by several Plains tribes for its deep red hue and suitability for carving. Nicollet marveled at the incongruity of the rock formations and colors on the otherwise unbroken, waving sea of prairie grasses. He noted, “The play of light across the escarpments and the jagged, nearly perpendicular flanks of the valley produce an effect of ravishing beauty . . . the sight is as agreeable as it is unexpected.” Sensing the imaginative potential of this landscape, he concluded, “This admirable hill awaits the poet and the painter.”² In his comments Nicollet proved himself an accurate observer of both geography and American culture. He realized that the quarries would attract visitors from the East, drawn to the place’s human history and geological peculiarities. Unlike others who sought to represent the site in static artistic and literary images, Nicollet viewed the landscape at the quarries as an active presence, its abiding character shaping perception and emotion. In this he was the least typical of the nontribal visitors to the place, the one with a perspective closest to the indigenous experience of the land.

During the nineteenth century the unusual natural and tribal history of the quarries entered public awareness in the United States, culminating in 1874 with the founding of the town of Pipestone near the site. Since the seventeenth century Europeans had known of the significance of carved red pipes to many tribes across North America. But not until Meriwether Lewis and William Clark’s explorations of the upper Missouri River in 1804 did U.S. citizens encounter tribes living near the source of the stone; their expedition spurred a national fascination with both the pipestone quarries and their associated Indian creation legends.

This study traces over a century of non-Native interest in this tribal place and analyzes how the founders and residents of the town of Pipestone adopted and adapted images of the quarries as “the legendary home of peace to all tribes” for their own purposes. The ways in which European Americans interpreted and portrayed the place’s human heritage demonstrated their own personal and communal needs rather than an interest in actual tribal history at the site or respect for tribal beliefs and practices. Pipestone provides a significant example of the larger American process of creating local and national identity

through the use of landscape and association with a mythological Indian past. Not an exhaustive or definitive local history, this book is an exploration of how certain characteristic themes in American historical identity developed in this particular place.

When middle-class Yankee businessmen founded the town of Pipestone near the quarries in 1874, they chose the location because of what they perceived as its natural, spiritual, and historical attributes. After his 1836 visit to the area George Catlin's artistic and literary representations of the site "upon the mystic horizon" made the area famous. In the 1850s Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's widely read poetic interpretations of tribal mythology offered a romantic depiction of the quarries—as a timeless place sacred to all tribes and unique on the North American continent—that appealed to the industrializing East. The town's founders and early residents accepted these prevailing images as ethnographically accurate and imbued the landscape with useful meanings that stressed the symbol of the "peace pipe" and the quarries' creation legends. In the late nineteenth century, they adapted elements of Native people's beliefs that met their own cultural needs for a peaceful, historical place considered truly American. They actively used imagery from various tribes' legends of the quarries, divested of their original indigenous meanings, to create a special local identity within a national context and to promote the town beyond the region. The emphasis they placed on the quarries as a site that was central to America's Indian heritage helped Pipestone grow as an agricultural market center and gain both a federal Indian boarding school in the 1890s and, during the New Deal years, a national monument to protect the quarries for future generations.

This book seeks an understanding of the meanings of the popular interest in tribal mythologies and how that interest shaped broader perceptions of the past and the landscape. Pipestone's residents exemplified the national ambivalence immanent in white relations with tribes and in responses to America's rapid industrialization. The local effort to ameliorate that tension identified a revered common ground while relegating tribal spiritual traditions to a safely distant, compressed prehistory—an approach that helped form community and contributed to the growth of American nationalism throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Pipestone's founders and later residents continuously adapted their conceptions of the quarries' traditions in order to generate a usable past on which to base and promote an identity that was both local and American. Their uses

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of tribal imagery developed from Catlin's early influential representations and evolved through the town's development and on to the first productions of the town's annual *Song of Hiawatha* pageant in the 1940s and 1950s, which enshrined Longfellow's version of tribal spiritual beliefs about the quarries. Throughout this period members of regional tribes continued visiting the quarries to extract stone and to maintain their traditions. With diverse perspectives on the site's relevance, Native Americans remained present and active on the periphery of Pipestone throughout its history. Tribal members subtly influenced nontribal interpretations of the place and its past, some by cooperating in the town's promotion of Indian imagery and others by seeking more direct control of the quarries and their traditions.

The historical study of a community such as Pipestone reveals much about the formation of American identities as an ongoing process of negotiating collective social meanings of cultural, spiritual, and racial symbols and creating useful forms of national heritage. European Americans' prolonged fascination with aspects of other cultures, especially indigenous ones, indicated points of ambivalence and unsettled definitions within their own communal identity. Following the Civil War, northern Americans sought to recover a sense of national unity by emphasizing values of commercial growth and progress and celebrating historic landscapes. At the same time, nascent concerns about the excesses of industrialization began to erode some middle-class Americans' sense of confidence. Popularly designated as the Indian site of creation and the source of the so-called peace pipe, the quarries filled these needs by serving as a uniquely American place with a usable past. Pipestone's development also reflected the pervasive unease about the place of Native Americans in national society and culture. Reification of and identification with dehistoricized tribal legends helped absorb positive elements of a perceived uncorrupted Indian past into the greater scope of U.S. history. Pipestone illustrates the persistent tension inherent in American attempts to adapt the continent's past for use as a foundation on which to build a cohesive identity. The selective use of a Native sense of sacred traditions made the landscape historically meaningful and worth preserving without compromising secular cultural beliefs in American material progress.

Prior to the visits of Catlin and Nicollet, samples of carved pipestone and vague tales about its source circulated throughout the East. From traders and explorers European Americans increasingly heard of the quarries as the sacred place where many tribes, despite intergroup conflicts, met in peace to extract

the revered stone variously associated with tribal creation stories. Successive tales of the quarries as a unique, mystical site prompted Catlin and others to cross the prairie in search of it. Interpretations of the legends that these non-tribal visitors recorded after their encounters with the Dakota and other Plains tribes became the accepted—and expected—representations of the quarries and the basis for claims about their significance. Unlike the oral histories of the quarries, passed down through generations of the tribes whose cultural practices included various pipe ceremonies, the repeated literary descriptions of the site established it as a place of significance for European Americans who otherwise had no personal or cultural reason to be interested in it. Viewing tribes as homogeneous, whites condensed versions of tribal histories and beliefs and extracted imagery without seeking any Native verification. The repetition of the static images removed them from their sources in tribal living cultures and rendered them useful for nontribal purposes. This process of creating “imaginary Indians” warrants analysis because it continues to shape perceptions of tribes and relations among people of different cultures.

Most of the legends presented to the reading public depicted the quarries as the sacred place of creation of the first pipe and, often, of the first tribal people. The main variations on this genesis theme produced similar senses of significance. According to one general legend, a beneficent Great Spirit created humans out of the deep red stone at the site and taught them to carve and smoke the pipe in reverent remembrance. Other versions tell of horrible warfare in the area, the bloodshed of which turned the surrounding stone red, or of the slaughter of buffalo that soaked the ground with their blood. Some variations recount a drowning flood after the warfare, with a few survivors hiding near the quarries under boulders—a collection of massive granite rocks known later as the Three Maidens. With or without a deluge, the Great Spirit is said to have instructed the remaining people to revere the stone and its source, to create the pipe from the stone, and to use it to settle their differences peacefully in a sacramental ceremony. Writers such as Catlin and Longfellow and later settlers at Pipestone embraced and embellished these themes, generalizing to make them culturally applicable for all tribes on the North American continent and readily making comparisons to their own cultural reference points in phrases such as “Indian Eden” or depictions of the Great Spirit as a Christlike figure. Such descriptions made the site both safe and exotic, appealing because of its distant past associations with a noble, vanishing people, subdued by their romantic spiritual beliefs.

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By the time U.S. exploration west of the Mississippi began, the Dakota peoples had established political hegemony on the northern Plains and the prairie surrounding the C teau. With Ojibwe expansion into the northern woods in the seventeenth century, the Dakota bands had moved westward and developed a horse-centered culture that allowed them to dominate the sparsely populated grasslands. For several centuries early Plains tribes, including the Oto, Omaha, Pawnee, Iowa, and other descendants of the Oasis and Mississippian cultures, had visited the quarries and extracted stone for ceremonial purposes and for trading, but until the arrival of the Dakota no tribes resided permanently in the area. Different bands within the larger Dakota group had their own beliefs about the quarries, as did other tribes in the broader region, such as the Mandan, Pawnee, and Kiowa. Some stories about the place involved a white buffalo, and some featured snakes, but all regional tribes ascribed a degree of importance to pipe ceremonies and to the quarries, and they identified the source of the red carving stone as sacred ground. By the early eighteenth century the Ihanktonwan or Yankton, a Nakota band, attained control of the area and negotiated with the United States, in the Treaty of 1858, to reserve the quarries from settlement. Other tribes that traditionally quarried pipestone agreed that the site needed to be preserved, but they never accepted Yankton claims to the right to negotiate on behalf of the quarries or to represent other tribal interests in them. To varying degrees the Yankton and other regional tribes opposed the sale of pipestone for nonceremonial uses, a practice that became more widespread in the mid-nineteenth century with the creation of popularized imagery about the quarries and then escalated with the founding of Pipestone. Although the establishment of the Pipestone National Monument (PNM) in 1937 strictly regulated pipestone extraction and commercial carving, controversy over the quarries and the use of the stone persists throughout the region, as does tension stemming from European American incursions into tribal spiritual practices, such as pipe ceremonies.³

Recognizing the continual presence of tribes at the quarries, this study of Pipestone's relationship to the place includes tribal actions as part of the history of the area. Because of the sensitivity of the issue to tribal members who visit the site as a spiritual practice, the study does not attempt to interpret a cultural viewpoint from the historical tribal members involved at the quarries. Out of respect for the Yankton's ability to speak on their own behalf, this work describes their actions without ascribing meaning to them and shows how tribal people participated in developments at the quarries rather than just re-

sponding to events. To presume the authority to give voice to tribal perspectives would, in essence, perpetuate the cultural imperialism that characterized behavior in Pipestone and throughout the United States. Tribal governments represent themselves and their interests in relations with the federal government and American society at large. Tribes and their individual members hold diverse views on the subject of the quarries; their religious and personal perspectives cannot be generalized.

Following the examples of Robert Berkhofer Jr. and Daniel Francis, use of the term *Indian* in this study generally indicates the imagery created and employed by European Americans, whereas the terms *Native* or *tribal* refer to actual indigenous peoples. At places with multiple cultural meanings it is important to recognize the role of human imagination in creating narratives of the past. Questioning accepted heritage can open it to discussion and allow for an appreciation of the diversity of human cultures. Analysis and understanding of the motives that led to the nontribal creation and continued use of images of the pipestone quarries can make genuine cultural exchanges and dialogues more possible and potentially clearer.⁴

In an unpublished 1960 manuscript for his later administrative history of Pipestone National Monument, Robert Murray suggested a possible connection between the popular images of the quarries and the town's sense of itself. He observed that Pipestone's citizenry generated a mass of promotional literature based on the works of Catlin and Longfellow and on their own experiences at the place. Murray did not further analyze the development but commented that "these works have yet to be brought together for study and evaluation. It would seem, though, that they must have had some influence in the formation of local attitudes toward the Quarries."⁵ Even though he limited his own work to the study of federal government activity in the area, without further analysis of the images he recognized as important, Murray saw the potential for a scholarly examination of Pipestone's identity.

Because of the preponderance of literary and visual representations of the quarries in the years before Pipestone's founding in 1874, its initial ideological basis developed prior to its actual social and economic growth. Formation of the town's identity, therefore, began before the town existed and continued after its founding in overlapping phases as different European American individuals' and groups' perceptions about and experiences at the place motivated them to act. Their actions provide distinctive themes in Pipestone's history, phases around which to organize an analysis of the process of building on earlier developments

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and modifying local heritage to address the needs of the time. In all its stages, Pipestone has exemplified common behaviors and beliefs about the tribal past in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Philip DeLoria's work on popular uses of Indian imagery to claim cultural authority and to stress Americanness demonstrates a broad pattern of comparable actions by others across the country. Differentiating the expansive, linear narrative of experienced human history from the monolithic symbols and idealized stories of a compressed past that compose heritage, David Glassberg and David Lowenthal's studies show how conceptions about the past and national origin myths can help create collective identity and a sense of belonging to a place, a process that occurred repeatedly in Pipestone's development. With a different perspective on the creation of accepted heritage, Joan W. Scott analyzes historical identity formation and its maintenance through the repetition of representations, both of which she considers strategic and cohesive activities. While heritage is often creatively assembled and can depart from recorded history in its presentation or lack of details, people's experience of heritage is often emotionally charged, very authentic for them, and useful to communal purposes.⁶

In the preliminary stage of Pipestone's layered growth throughout the early nineteenth century, prominent explorers (including Lewis and Clark as well as Henry Rowe Schoolcraft), creative portrayers of Indian themes (such as George Catlin and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow), and scientists (particularly Ferdinand Hayden and John Wesley Powell) extracted culturally appealing images from tribal beliefs about the quarries, published them widely, and collectively created a nationally known site. Part of an evolving American identity that stressed a common national inheritance, their writings established the essential, repeated images of the quarries—a unique place on the vast prairie, sacred ground, site of peace for all Indians, stone quarried since before human memory—that set expectations for the early settlers in the area and served as the foundation for later descriptions and promotions of the place. Attracted by Catlin and Longfellow's popular images, the homogeneous group of town founders—mainly middle-class, white, Protestant merchants from New England and the upper Midwest—saw the quarries as they expected them to be and used their residence at the place authoritatively to promote their town widely. They behaved in ways customary to their time, with the quarries providing a cultural landscape from which they constructed a usable heritage that appealed to the masses but was removed from actual tribal history at the site.

Continually seeking national legitimization of their place, by the 1890s the town leaders were using the site's perceived tribal significance as the grounds for lobbying the federal government to build an Indian boarding school at the quarries. In step with trends in national Indian policy, Pipestone's prominent residents saw themselves as progressive and reform-minded, and they considered the quarries' growing reputation as a place of peace sufficient justification for the establishment of a government boarding school at the site. Toward the turn of the twentieth century, Pipestone's leaders sought to solidify their town by lobbying for federal aid. They continued this pursuit well into the 1900s, a behavior more prominent for economic reasons in the West but useful when seeking national attention in the Midwest—a region already convinced that its geographic location demonstrated its symbolic place in the heart of the country. Full of a sense of American exceptionalism, Pipestone promoters used the quarries to illustrate what made their nation special, often sending carved samples of pipestone to dignitaries abroad and encouraging people within and outside the country to visit “America's only peace shrine.”

Participating in a renewed, widespread movement to salvage aspects of tribal traditions that could be used as national historical symbols, local women led the community's preservation movement to seek federal protection of the quarries as part of America's heritage. With the support of others in town, their efforts led to the 1937 establishment of Pipestone National Monument, the first Park Service unit in Minnesota. The general pattern of the citizens' preservation work in Pipestone paralleled the activities of other Americans in an era of increasing interest in identifying and setting aside for posterity important cultural and natural sites, such as efforts to preserve the Indian ruins in the Southwest that were considered part of the same timeless indigenous past as the quarries. Although located in the Midwest, a large region with few Indian sites deemed historically relevant, Pipestone is representative of Americans' intense conflation of local identity and national significance.

By the 1940s and 1950s, the successful establishment of a permanent federal guardian at the quarries led the town's civic and commercial leaders to reassert themselves as cultural custodians of local Indian heritage. Adapting national trends from earlier in the century, an active cross section of residents expressed what they considered their traditional and inherited right to interpret the place's past through the establishment of trading posts and museums and the community's production of the annual *Song of Hiawatha* pageant near the quarries. This phase of Pipestone's identity development resembled that

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seen with historical reenactments and museums elsewhere in the United States, particularly in the communal sense of custodianship over carefully defined local heritage and identity based on generalized images of American Indians.

Throughout the eighty years covered in this study, Pipestone's population barely exceeded five thousand, and the town has remained a relatively remote farming community on the vast prairie. Yet the same qualities that make it provincial also make it significant and representative of the common experiences that constitute American history. The people who promoted Pipestone and sought to keep the quarries widely known consistently spoke and wrote of the place and themselves as characteristically American. Each successive group of promoters saw the site and their community as contributing to national heritage, as being an important part of larger American culture as they envisioned it. At the grassroots level Pipestone's merchants, journalists, teachers, church groups, fraternal organizations, and women's associations took part in defining for themselves what it meant to be American where they were. Pipestone provides a site-specific example of activities typical within late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American history. It demonstrates the creation, acceptance, and repetition of historical representations central to collective identity, a process that occurs at both local and national levels.

Although they acted in ways typical of proud residents of thousands of other towns across the United States and always stressed what they considered the "American" qualities of their town, the succession of leaders in Pipestone simultaneously maintained that the town was uncommonly significant because of the uniqueness of its setting and its presettlement past. They considered the quarries both a national treasure and a place that made their locality special and unlike any other in the country. This intersection of local and national identity, of being at once singular and part of the whole, *e pluribus unum*, is quintessentially American. From a national perspective, identity requires an impersonal interest in many places, with a broad array of sites contributing to the totality. At any given place, however, people invest themselves in seeing their particular locality not just as part of the whole but as representative of it. They localize the ideological foundation of national identity, interpreting it to fit the world within view and giving the idea of America a familiar form and a place.

The men and women who moved to the quarries built Pipestone from an idea, from images that were of and created by people they had not met. Because of these preformulated perceptions of the area, the site became a known

geographic location before the town existed. But the town of Pipestone became and remained a place—and an interesting one—because of what happened there. Since centuries before Nicollet drew his map, the people who arrived at the quarries interacted with the natural and cultural landscape and developed their own meanings for it. Later, Pipestone began as a similarly collective concept. Whether for tribal people or for European Americans, human relationship to the land personalized the idea of the quarries, and the experiences of individuals there made it a place. Like its name, the history and identity of Pipestone began with the land and continue inseparable from it.