

AMERICAN PICTOGRAPHIC IMAGES:
HISTORICAL WORKS ON PAPER BY THE PLAINS INDIANS



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INTRODUCTION AND CAPTIONS BY
KAREN DANIELS PETERSEN

FRANK HENDERSON

DARLINGTON, INDIAN TER.

DEC. 12, 1882

*I HAVE SAY TO YOU THIS MONDAY AFTERNOON I TRY HARD TO MAKE YOU
INDIAN PICTURE. I WISH YOU COULD WRITE SOON. AH YOU PLEASD WITH IT?*

I AM YOUR

FRIEND HENDERSON

With this earnest preface, unchanged except for the punctuation, an Arapaho Indian youth, after a desultory schooling, sent the drawings forming the heart of this book to a benefactress in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. As to his name, only the name given to him at school has survived—Frank Henderson.

Born in 1862, the young man had grown up against a background of wars and threats of war. During his first thirteen years, his people were resisting the white man's attempts to replace the Arapahos' free life with the confinement of the reservation. It goes without saying that in the end the white man had his way.

The Arapahos and the Cheyennes, with whom they shared the final reservation in western Indian Territory, had been allied for years beyond reckoning. They were already associated when the tribes lived on the Minnesota and Sheyenne rivers at the end of the seventeenth century. The Arapahos moved just ahead of the Cheyennes in a migration nearly two centuries long. Moving west and south to the Rockies, and then east and south to the reservation, sometimes the two joined forces against a mutual enemy. Although they shared an Algonquian linguistic stock, their languages remained as distinct as their customs, ceremonies, and temperament.

The Arapahos' inclination toward cultural adaptability to new conditions on the reservation was an ongoing source of tension between the allies. Thus, upon the establishment of the reservation near present El Reno, Oklahoma, the Arapahos promptly moved there and were willing to try small farming. It was a year or two before the last of the Cheyennes began alternating their roaming and raiding with periods of reservation life, and then they wanted no part in agriculture.

By 1873 Cheyenne resentment was building up over the increasing abuses heaped on them by the white man, and the Cheyennes embarked on a program of stock-stealing, murder, and skirmishes with the soldiers, to avenge their wrongs. When a few young Arapaho hot-heads joined in the raiding, their men's societies punished them on their return. The Arapaho leaders were in this way able to keep their people fairly calm.

By June of 1874, the decimation of the buffalo at the hands of white hide-hunters, the abundance of whiskey furnished by illicit traders, and the loss of Indian pony-herds to bands of white rustlers tipped the balance toward all-out war. While the Arapahos for the most part remained loyal to their agent, twenty-three of the young men of the tribe slipped away. They joined a large body of Cheyennes, Kiowas, and Comanches who attacked the hide-hunters' headquarters at Adobe Walls. This historic event has been recorded on paper by an Arapaho (Plate 41). On their return, the Arapaho warriors were punished by their fellow tribesmen; from then on only a few of the tribe took part in the bitter war of 1874-75. In a far-flung winter campaign, the army drove the hostiles onto their reservations. In April of 1875 the military sent representative warriors to a distant prison for an indeterminate term. In that month warfare ended on the Southern Plains.

The exile of the warriors was to change the course of thirteen-year-old Henderson's life in a curious way. Although the Arapahos had been largely at peace during the war, two members of that tribe joined seventy other captives—Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and Caddo—for incarceration within the stone walls of Fort Marion at St. Augustine, Florida. Without a trial or even a hearing, the seventy-two were held as hostages for the good behavior of their people. The Arapaho prisoners were Packer and White Bear (Plate 96), from the band of the peaceful leader Powder Face. They were sent to prison for private altercations occurring more than a year before the start of war.

Their jailer, Lieutenant Richard H. Pratt (universally called Captain Pratt), was a humanitarian who tempered justice to his prisoners with mercy. He encouraged his wards to attend school classes conducted by women volunteers. He arranged for the employment of his men by local citizens and tourists. He provided materials for the prisoners' depiction of life as buffalo-hunters; over a thousand drawings from the Fort Marion School of Art have survived until today. When their three years of detention were up he facilitated further education in the East for those wishing it—first, for seventeen at Hampton Industrial School in Hampton, Virginia, and, after a year there, for eleven of these at an Indian school that he was beginning in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. One of those who elected to go to Hampton and Carlisle was White Bear, the Arapaho.

Captain Pratt, from his experience with Indians on the Plains, at Fort Marion, and at Hampton, had developed a theory that was to set a new direction for Indian education in the United States. He believed that the solution to the so-called Indian problem was to remove Indian boys and girls from the cultural influences of their homes, enroll them in distant schools, and immerse them in the dominant culture of the country; in short, to make white men of them.

To put his theory into practice, Pratt needed a school of his own. His quest found a ready response on the part of the government. In the aftermath of the Custer debacle and the subsequent Indian wars, Congress was wary about provoking Indian hostility. Pratt told the House Committee on Indian

Affairs that such a school would do more than educate pupils. He added, "It is also plain that the fact of having here so many children of chiefs and headmen is an effectual guarantee of the good behavior of the tribes represented." The hostage principle that had worked at Fort Marion, he was putting into practice again.¹

By gaining the cooperation of the government, he was able to get the use of a deserted army barracks at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He brought two of his Fort Marion-Hampton men—called the Florida boys at Carlisle—to enroll on September 10, 1879, as the first students at Carlisle Indian School. They set about helping prepare the barracks for a school. Now all that Captain Pratt needed for proving his theory was a student body of Indian boys and girls.

After a decade of conflict on the Great Plains, it would not be easy to persuade parents to turn their beloved children over to the white man. The Secretary of the Interior had specified that Pratt bring thirty-six from each of two volatile Sioux agencies, Rosebud and Pine Ridge, and forty-eight from the Southern Plains.

Pratt arranged for his two most trusted ex-prisoners, David Pendleton, a Cheyenne, and Etahdleuh, a Kiowa, to come from New York and Massachusetts and go to their agencies to recruit. A former reservation teacher, Alfred Standing, would visit the Pawnee and Ponca agencies. Captain Pratt himself left for the Sioux country. Employing telling arguments, he won over the Sioux and brought more than his quota back to Carlisle on October 6. After arranging that nine more of his useful Florida boys would arrive October 8, he set out for the West again, this time to Wichita, Kansas, to meet the parties from the Southern Plains.

The emissaries arrived at the Cheyenne and Arapaho agency at Darlington on September 28. Etahdleuh soon left for his own Kiowa and Comanche agency, while David Pendleton was lionized by his old friends.

It was a bad time for making proposals to Henderson's people for surrender of their children. Their beef rations, already scanty, had been cut September 15, to their intense dissatisfaction. After repeated appeals to Washington by their sympathetic agent, John D. Miles (Plate 88), the Department of the Interior reversed its ruling at a fortuitous time for Pendleton. The Indians, wishing to show their appreciation of this reversal, set about to furnish the requested number of children. Many of the children, impressed by the young man's handsome appearance and knowledge of English, said they wanted to go where they could grow up to be like him.

The recruits from this agency were made up of two Cheyenne and four Arapaho girls, and sixteen Cheyenne and six Arapaho boys—among them an orphan, Frank Henderson, whose drawing-book is

¹"Industrial Training Schools for Indians," 46 Congress, 2 session, *House Report*, no. 752, vol. 3, p. 3 (serial set 1936).

presented here. While the two official lists give the Indian name for some recruits and the father's name for most, these lists show only that Henderson was 17, that his parents were dead, and that he was admitted to Carlisle on October 27, 1879.

At this time, reservation schools were frequently set up as boarding schools for the purpose of removing children from the influence of their village life and inculcating in them the habits of "civilization". The initiation of a new pupil coming to the Cheyenne and Arapaho boarding school from a village camp was said to run this way, after his name and approximate age were ascertained:

"The subject is then shorn of his long locks and taken to the bath-room where he is thoroughly scoured. Here his tattered, filthy blanket . . . is exchanged for a new suit of citizens clothes complete with hat, shoes and socks. He is then given an English name, which is written on a piece of paper and put into his pocket, and taken to the school room and assigned to his place."²

Henderson, the orphan, may have been one of the "dirty ragged waifs, orphans and outcasts" who came to the Cheyenne and Arapaho school.

Early on the morning of October 9, wagons were waiting. The children going from the reservation school to Carlisle had their clothes and personal effects packed and ready to start on the long journey. A great number of their relatives and friends had come in from the Indian villages to see them off. When the order to load up was given about nine o'clock, the parting and leave-taking were accompanied by many kisses and many tears. For the children, they were tears of affection, not of regret; for the parents, tears for giving up their offspring to strangers of another race.

After a grueling 160 mile ride by wagon from Darlington, Henderson's little party arrived at the railroad terminus at Wichita and found Captain Pratt. But there were no tickets waiting there for the journey to Carlisle. Indeed, in spite of Pratt's many emphatic messages to Washington, the fifty-two uprooted young people from four agencies had to wait eight days at Wichita. They reached Carlisle on October 27.

So it was that Henderson's group, together with the eleven Fort Marion men and the eighty-four Sioux, comprised the first class to enter the famed Carlisle Indian School.

The new recruits must have experienced no small degree of cultural shock. To the wild, unkempt, unruly crowd, the eleven Florida boys, tall, neatly uniformed, and quiet, were rocks of refuge. The men acted as interpreters; whatever the tribal affiliation of the newcomers, the men could converse with them in the expressive Indian sign-language. Personally attached to their humanitarian former jailer, they were meeting his expectations "to leaven with their civilization the lump of barbarism."

²*Cheyenne Transporter* (Darlington, Indian Territory), Dec. 5, 1879.

They taught the young people how to march into the dining room and class room. When new clothes issued to them were a mystery, the Floridas helped them put them on. They did guard duty and janitorial work. They were officers of the military company and they drilled recruits. They helped do repairing and building for the school.

School opened November 1 with one hundred forty-seven pupils. They spent half the day in the shops learning trades to prepare them for working on their return to the reservation. The first offered were shoemaking, carpentry, and blacksmithing. The other half day was spent in the schoolroom. White Bear and the other Florida boys, being more advanced in spelling, reading, writing, and geography, had a separate classroom.

All was not work at Carlisle. Some learned to play band instruments. Christmas brought a tree and gifts. There was much hilarity over their new appearance, whether putting clothes on wrong or being shorn of their locks. The barber cut so close that they called each other "bald head."

There was a continuous flow of letters between the reservation and Carlisle. "I has not forgot Henderson." "Josie said send my love to Dan tucker and Henderson." When the young man sent his agent a message, it was written by someone more skilled than the pupils. Henderson had learned to make wagons, and wanted to work at making them for the agency when he returned home.

He must have been pleased with one early event, the distribution of slates and pencils at school. The youths at once fell to work covering the slate with drawings—a buffalo chase, shooting birds in a tree—symbols of the free life they had left behind.

Townspeople became interested in the school and learned to know some of the boys and girls. Frank Henderson's particular friends were the three elderly Underwood sisters, Sarah, Martha, and Anne. It was to one of these, Miss Martha K. Underwood, that Henderson sent the drawings in this book on his return home.

In spite of the solicitous ministrations of staff, Florida boys, and townspeople, Henderson was unhappy at Carlisle. "From the start," reported Captain Pratt, "he has been determined to go home and has been a discontented bad element in school on that account."³

After a year and a half, his health, like that of many other pupils, deteriorated. When the doctor removed a very large tapeworm from him, he went downhill rapidly and became very despondent. Finding nothing else wrong with him, the doctor concluded that his trouble must be homesickness. On June 7, 1881, Pratt felt obliged to send him home because of ill health. Alfred Standing escorted a group going back to the reservation to recuperate—four other boys, a girl, and the homesick Henderson.

³R. H. Pratt to John D. Miles, June 21, 1881, Oklahoma Historical Society, Indian Archives, Cheyenne and Arapaho—Carlisle Indian School.

The doctor's diagnosis was probably correct; by September 28 Henderson was working as assistant and interpreter for the Reverend Samuel S. Haury.

On the return of educated Indians to their homes, the great experiment in Indian education in the East was to receive its final test. The determining factors, it was believed, would be the ability to find employment, and the presence of missionaries who would continue the religious influence inherent in the academic and industrial training in the East.

Although Agent Miles was pleased with the effect on the community of students returned from Fort Marion, Hampton, and Carlisle, he knew the way was not easy for them. "The influence of these boys and men has been for good, for progress, and for peace. . . . They will aid in removing the stumbling blocks of superstition and fear which now blockade the way. . . . I believe and trust . . . the ridicule now bestowed on these conscientious pioneers will cease and their labors will be lightened."⁴

Henderson was one of the fortunate few who met both of the criteria, employment and religious influence. At just about the time of his return to the agency, Rev. Mr. Haury came to Darlington to minister to the Arapahos. He built a Mennonite mission and boarding school which opened, partially completed, in the fall of 1881. There were seven boys between the ages of ten and eighteen, and six girls; for these Frank Henderson interpreted. The following February the building was destroyed by fire. In April, school was being held in two tents lent by the commandant at Fort Reno, while the schoolboys slept in the loft of a stable.

It was during this time that Frank Henderson was working on the drawing book for Miss Underwood (a date of March 20, 1882, is written on page 63). On December 12 he sent the book off to her.

In the summer of 1882 Agent Miles gave Mr. Haury the news that the military was about to abandon Fort Cantonment, sixty miles to the northwest. Miles suggested that the vacated building could perhaps be used free of charge by the missionaries. By December the Department of the Interior had transferred the twenty-four buildings to the Mennonite mission.

Presumably Henderson moved to Cantonment when Mr. Haury moved in February of 1883 to attend to the extensive repairs to the buildings. There, some of the sacred men (sorcerers, Mr. Haury called them) and some of the aged Indians were opposing the presence of the mission. They believed that the Indians' acceptance of Christianity would impede their own indoctrination of the Arapahos.

By 1884, the conflict between the two religious systems was intensifying. Mr. Haury's aim was now to break the tribal connection of the people. Although he did not believe the Sun Dance should be broken up by force, he was able to get those at the mission to pledge non-participation. Following an official ban on the Sun Dance, Mr. Haury announced with satisfaction that the Arapahos did not "make

⁴Jno. D. Miles, Report, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1881*, 194.

any medicine" that year. Although Henderson's book shows the Sun Dance (Plate 81), his continued employment at the mission implies his acceptance of the clergyman's course.

By the year 1883-84, classes in the former barracks were being taught in English. The majority of the younger students understood English and spoke it freely among themselves. The need for an interpreter must have been minimal. However, Henderson's connection there continued: he was allotted clothing at the Mennonite mission on March 31, 1885.

The *Cheyenne Transporter* of Darlington, on April 15, 1885, has a final note on our artist:

"Frank Henderson, an Arapaho boy returned three years since [*sic*] from Carlisle, died at Cantonment a short time ago. He had been acting as interpreter for Rev. Haury, and was a bright Indian."⁵

In his short lifetime this obscure young man made an illustrious achievement for which he will be gratefully remembered: he enriched American art with the gift of images from Arapaho history.

PICTOGRAPHIC DRAWING: AN AMERICAN FOLK ART

The illustrations that follow herald the emergence of an unrecognized member of the school of American Folk Art—pictographic representation. Often dismissed as primitive art and relegated to the domain of the ethnologist, the pictography here presented is a welding of the aesthetic and the historical into a pleasing art form.

At first glance the relationship is not apparent between these drawings and the inscrutable petroglyphs, those crude depictions and abstractions that adorn cave walls and cliffs throughout the Great Plains. Rock art in time gave way to hide painting, most notably on tipis or shields decorated with esoteric devices to provide supernatural protection (Plates 24-25), and on buffalo robes painted in geometric patterns or with depictions of the brave deeds of the wearer. When a man wrapped his warlike robe about him and strode through the village, the devices blazoned on the robe confirmed his rank in the war-based hierarchy. On the earlier robes, so long as the figures achieved the intended effect, the aesthetics of pleasing arrangement or elaboration of detail were not important, nor was the realism created by accurate scale and portraiture of clothing.

Concurrently, pictography was the means of communicating over distances of time or space. Just as the Indian sign-language was the lingua franca on the Great Plains, the language of pictography

⁵*Cheyenne Transporter* (Darlington, Indian Territory), April 15, 1885.

could be read by members of most tribes. Written on wood or bark or bone, the letters in picture were a tool for survival.

A third application of pictography at this time was in the recording of history. A few Plains tribes had individuals entrusted with painting glyphs on a buffalo hide in a spiral pattern. The glyphs memorialized some outstanding event for each successive year.

With the passage of time, pictography became more refined, employing greater precision, more detail, and greater realism. Access to muslin and paper, pencil and ink, hastened a development in rendition. Although painted shields and tipis persisted into the time of our drawing book, pictured robes had all but disappeared. In their place there came into use account books or ledgers that a man could fill with his pictographic skirmishes and horse raids, and carry about with him. Except for occasional buffalo-hunting scenes, war was the nearly universal subject in these books. As we have noted, the war on the Southern Plains ended in 1875, and seventy-two captives were sent off to Fort Marion, Florida. There an extraordinary development occurred: as rapidly as the prisoners shed their chains, they were freed from the strictures of tribal art. Drawing passed from the traditional to the personal—self-expression, art for art's sake. They were free to make pictures that appealed to the eye and to emotions.

At Fort Marion, war scenes played a minor role. Instead, encounters with animals, scenes of camp life, ceremonials—genre pictures—filled the pages.

It was four years after the flowering of the Fort Marion School of Art that Frank Henderson was working on his drawing book. The drawings are reminiscent of the Plainsman's old love-affair with the horse; scenes with these beautifully executed animals dominate the second half of the book. The brave deeds are complemented by genre scenes: men's societies, camp life, Sun Dance, nature, courting—American folk art indeed. But two elements rare to Plains art appear: wry humor of a cartoon-like character (Plates 17, 36, 47, 57, 59, 92, 150) and a mystical portrayal of man's encounter with the supernatural (Plates 13, 15, 24–25). Another element surfaces occasionally—the strong emotions evoked by Plates 27, 60–61, and 122.

Henderson's drawing book is the lineal descendent of three families of forebears: like the tribal calendars, it is pictorial history, for the purport of the book is ethnohistory; like the autobiographical robes it proclaims a man's brave deeds; like the letters in picture, it communicates with us through the language of pictography from a distant time and place.

GREAT PLAINS PICTOGRAPHY DEFINED

The pictorial graphic system of the Great Plains sought to record history, publicize autobiographical events, or communicate messages. Its secondary considerations might be to produce an aesthetically pleasing form, to amuse, or to memorialize man's experience with the supernatural. It employed an economy of expression that was a pictorial shorthand.

There is a widespread misconception that the pictographic artist was unschooled and without artistic rules to guide him, that he drew in the way the whim dictated, like a child. Among Great Plains tribes, each man learned pictography as a tool for survival. In making a pictured robe, the old man who was to paint it spread the hide on the ground and the young men gathered around it. "The instructor did the work of painting, and the young men looked on and listened to the old man's instructions."¹

He taught that a horse should be drawn with a small head, an arching neck, and, in motion, widespread legs. Why did he depict a horse in this way instead of in a more naturalistic manner? By repeating the form through generations, it became a source of satisfaction. A man drew it this way because this was the way to draw a horse.

Drawing was done freehand, without a pencilled line to guide the hand in outlining the figure in ink. The outline was filled in with flat color, with no attempt at three-dimensional modeling. Detail was selective: to facilitate recognition of a figure, the most distinctive features were emphasized. Background detail was added only if it contributed to understanding.

The art of American pictography is no longer practiced; it is America's lost language. But many pictographic drawings survive, spread widely throughout the land. Learning to read their messages can be mastered if a viewer learns the basic rules.

The artists who labored over these works of folk art have brought something of great value to American culture.

¹George Bird Grinnell, *The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Ways of Life*, vol. 2, p. 19 (New Haven, 1923).

PICTOGRAPHIC CONVENTIONS ILLUSTRATED IN THE PLATES

Angle of fire	117	Dotted line from mouth	34	Object above another	114
Animal's legs spread	98	Floating object	92	Object, partial	13
Blanket covering man	60-61	Footprints and animal tracks	41	Past and present time	41
Blood from mouth	69	Hand outstretched	108	Pipe carried by rider	9
Breech cloth short	104	Horse green or blue	27	Ribbon-like lines	34
Breech cloth long	167	Horse with conventionalized spots	132	Right to left movement	100
Costume symbol	59	Horse's tail tied up	94	Tail and mane long	86
Cross	154	Lines from human mouth	17	Wavy line	24-25
Crowded laterally	27	Name symbol	4	Zigzag line	13

FRANK HENDERSON'S DRAWING BOOK

The drawings seen here are extremely rare in their provenience. In a profusion of drawings Cheyenne, Kiowa, or Sioux in origin, as well as work from many other Plains tribes, no other large collection of early Arapaho drawings is known to this writer; indeed, only the eleven that White Bear and Packer produced at Ft. Marion come to mind. Why this should be so is puzzling. It was not for lack of artistic ability, as the work in this book amply demonstrates.

The drawing book measures $11\frac{3}{4}$ by $5\frac{5}{16}$ inches, with the larger dimension of the lined and numbered account book running vertically. The media used are ink, colored pencils, and lead pencil, except for a few, beginning with Plate 118, that add watercolors.

The pages bearing some kind of drawing total 122. Unreproduced pages are blank or have work of a quality not worthy of inclusion. The letter to Henderson that is quoted appears on the first page. Below it is the signature of Martha K. Underwood.

Miss Underwood's grand-niece inherited the drawings. Mrs. James B. (Josephine U.) Ritter treasured them and spent many hours interpreting them with the help of a pictographic dictionary, and making colored tracings on tissue paper of some of the pictures she loved and carefully preserved for posterity.

Trying to identify the artists who made the drawings is difficult. It is obvious that more than one contributed his talent to Henderson's book. As a key to identifying the artists, the name-symbols are ambiguous. In the drawing with four named men (Plate 4), it is not to be imagined that four different men drew the figures. This fact raises the question, were other pictures with name-symbols not by,

but of, the person shown? Such a practice would apply to the named women, for women did not draw representational figures.

But what are we to think of the many depictions of brave warriors who bear the name of Horseback? It is unreasonable to believe that someone was drawing this many pictures of another man. The pictures are reminiscent of the war-robos that glorify one man.

Trying to sort out this problem by internal evidence led nowhere. Records suggest that some of the artists were older than Henderson. But he, even at the age of 13, when the wars ended, or 16, when the buffalo were gone, might have participated in war or the chase. Or he could be illustrating twice-told tales he had heard.

Fruitful of argument is the question, how did the peaceable Arapahos have so many battles to portray? Again, these events could have been hearsay.

I prefer to use this rule: if only one man is named, he is both the artist and the subject. If more than one, or none, is named, the artist will remain unidentified.

Of the named artists, Horseback is the most prolific, with 19 drawings; Dark Cloud next with 10; Sitting Bull, 8; Black Wolf, 3; and Hill Man, 2. A Horseback, a Black Wolf, a Hill, and a Sitting Bull appeared in agency records. The artist Sitting Bull probably was not the Southern Arapaho Ghost Dance leader but was a brother or cousin who in 1882 had the name Sitting Bull and later became well known under a new name, Scabby Bull.

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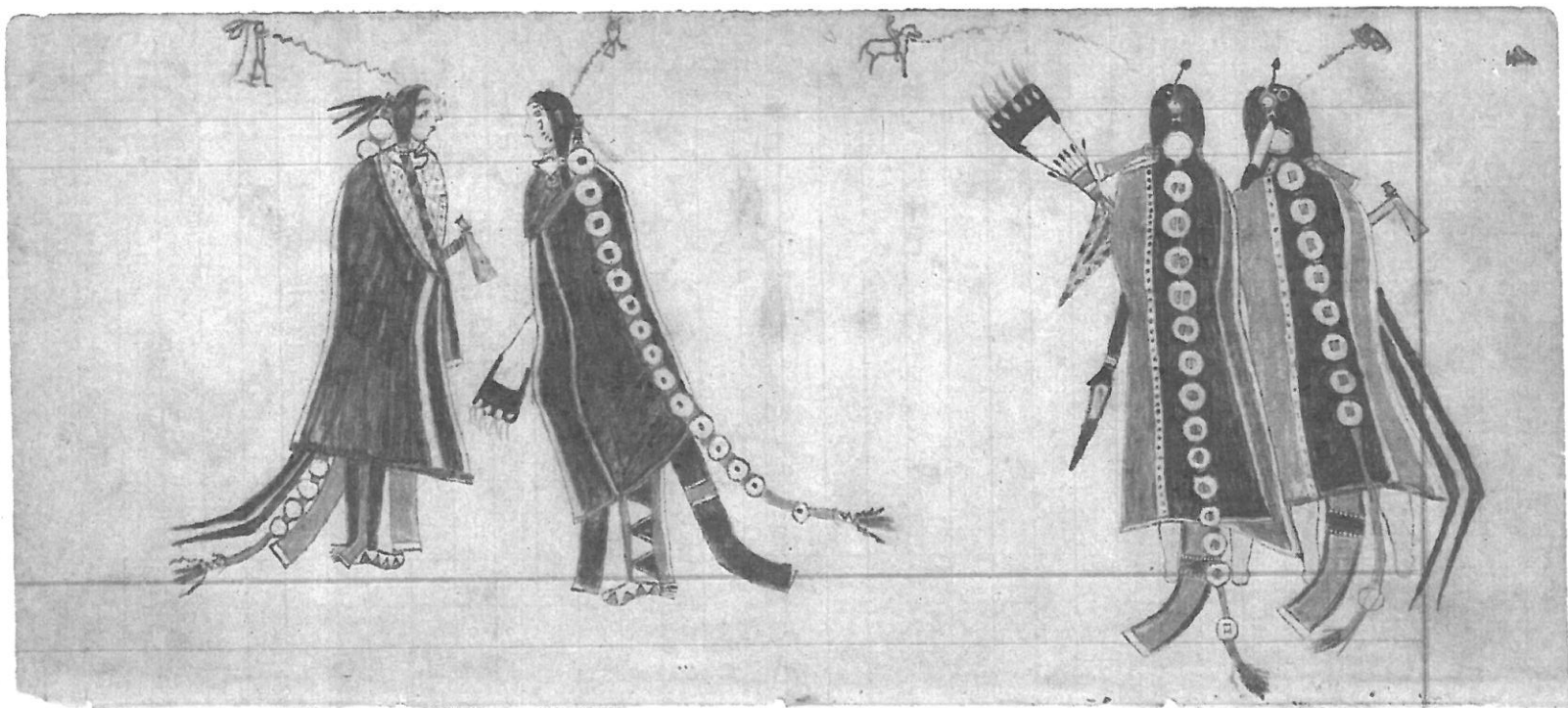
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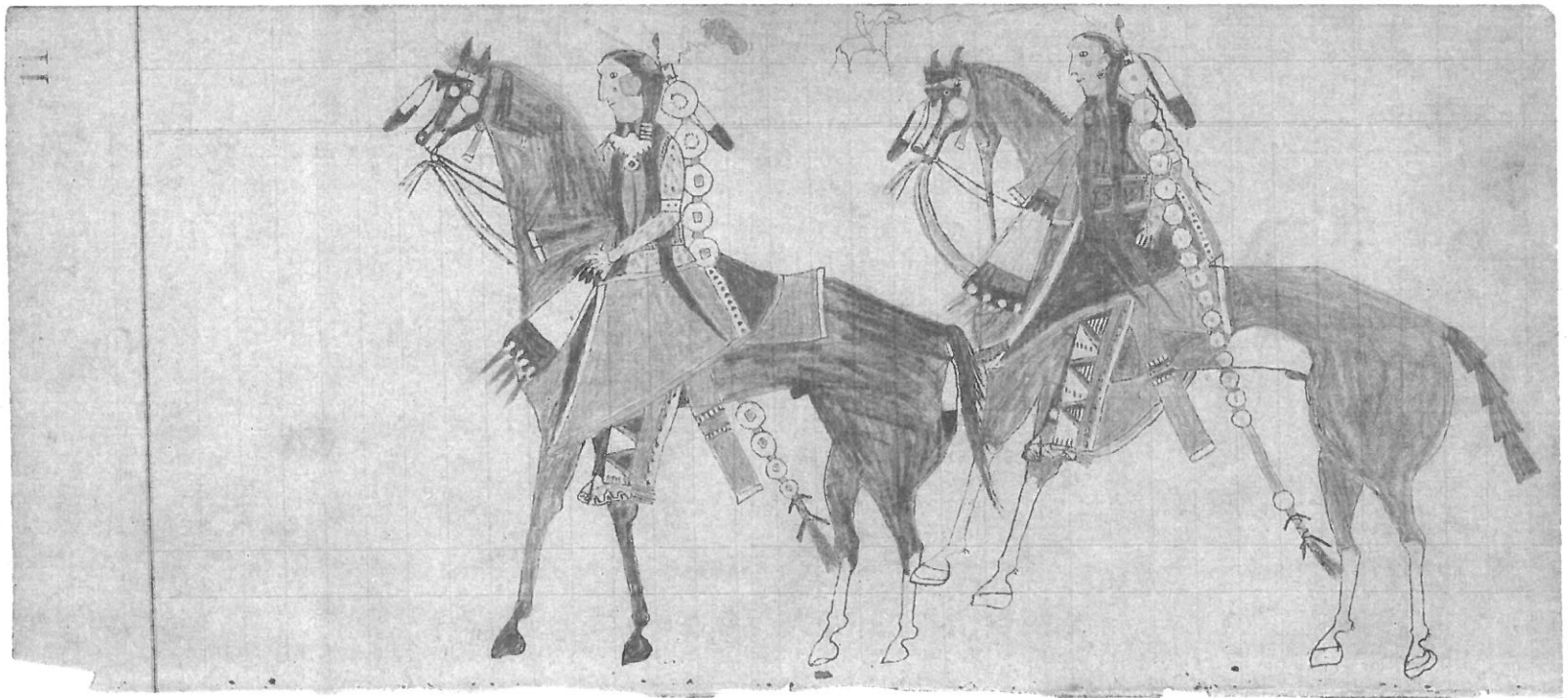
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#4

4. *Friends*

The men with the trailing German-silver hair plates may be named Head Dress, Owl, Horseback, and Sitting Bull (not to be confused with the famous Hunkpapa Sioux of this name). The pictographic name-symbol is connected to the owner's head by a line. English translations of name-symbols in this book, except for Hill Man and Black Wolf, were supplied by the author. The men on the outside carry pipe tomahawks; the man at the left is wearing a calico shirt.



#11

11. *Sitting Bull and Horseback*

Dressed in their peacetime best, the men carry eagle-feather fans and wear their bi-colored blankets wrapped around their hips. As they amble along they may be singing an Arapaho hunting song:

It is dark, but the moon is shining.
I'm carrying home my game.



#57

57. *Group Picture*

Dark Cloud, Antelope Horn, and a dozen of their confreres pose for their picture. The men on the ends are leaning on gilt-handled sabers with otter-skin streamers.