



## Episode 9, Red Cloud Letter, South Dakota

Gwen Wright: Our first story investigates an odd letter from the creator of one of our most famous national monuments. Every year almost three million tourists visit the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. It took 400 men and women 14 years to carve this engineering marvel into South Dakota's Black Hills. When complete, the stone visages of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln looked down upon the nation they helped create. But the monument has always inspired both reverence and hostilities. To many Native Americans, in particular, it's a permanent reminder of the hypocrisy of a government that took their land and betrayed their ancestors. Now a man from Chappell, Nebraska has discovered a curious letter. It suggests the monument's sculptor may have had a mysterious friendship with the Chief of the Lakota, a Native American Tribe, at the same time he was carving his controversial monument. I'm Gwendolyn Wright and I'm meeting with Brian Bruns to get a look at the letter he found among his grandfather's papers. The letter appears to be from Gutzon Borglum, who designed Mount Rushmore, to the Lakota Chief.

Gwen: So it's from Borglum to my dear brother, James Red Cloud.

Gwen: There's no mention of the monument in the letter, but it's written on official Mount Rushmore letterhead. And it seems to indicate the men had established a relationship. "And yet you must always remember, I am your friend and friend of all the Sioux people." So, Borglum is trying to assert that there is a friendship between them. There are a couple of references here that I don't quite understand. A treaty of some kind and another official sounding resolution. Perhaps it's because Borglum is writing to someone whose native tongue is not English. But to my ear, the tone of the letter was condescending, as if Borglum is mimicking his notion of Indian-speak. It has this patronizing language of, "I will speak to the Great White Father. I shall talk much to him." How did your grandfather happen to have a letter to James Red Cloud? Brian says his grandfather's connection to James Red Cloud began with a childhood visit to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. He made friends with some of the Lakota and later spent several summers on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Now they were the children of James Red Cloud?

Brian: They were the children of James Red Cloud. Yes.

Gwen: Well, why do you think the Red Clouds would have given this to your grandfather?

Brian: My grandfather was a sculptor, and apparently they thought that he should have it because it came from another sculptor.

Gwen: Yeah, that's intriguing. So what would you like for me to find out about this letter?



Brian: Why Mr. Borglum, that did Mount Rushmore, why there would be a friendship between him and the Indian Chief. I have no clue why that would happen.

Gwen: Because, after all, this was sacred land to the Lakota. And to them, this was defacing that land.

Brian: I cannot put that together.

Gwen: Well, I'll take very good care of it, but I do need to take it with me.

Brian: Alright.

Gwen: So he begins by saying, your letter of January 21 gave me great joy. So this is a letter of response to an earlier letter from James Red Cloud to Borglum. This was an ongoing correspondence. Again, this mysterious resolution catches my eye. Borglum seems angry about it. He is saying, "...do not like the resolution. You have let me help you. Now you let me go with my hands tied." So, he's suggesting that he has done them a great favor and is now annoyed. That there's something that he's not able to do because of this resolution. This other reference to a treaty also appears central to figuring out what the letter is all about: "Shall not forget the treaty of '68." So, that must be a treaty between the United States Government and the Lakota, or one of the Native American groups, probably 1868. Let me see what I can find in the historical record. The Rushmore Monument was conceived in 1923. President Calvin Coolidge authorized federal funding for what he labeled "a national shrine of the spirit of patriotism". Carving took from 1927 to 1941. But the more I read about the monument's history, the more complex its genesis. And the character of its creator, Gutzon Borglum appeared. His bust of Abraham Lincoln sits on display at the Capitol. He claimed Rushmore would be a national shrine of democracy. He was clearly a major American sculptor in the early 20th century. For his first commission to carve a mountain, at Stone Mountain in Georgia, he proposed a monument to the Southern Confederacy. And at the same time there are multiple references to his having been a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan. And, therefore, prejudiced against all racial minorities. Borglum's identification with white supremacy certainly makes his relationship with Red Cloud curious. Here's one of the dates I'm looking for. "I shall not forget the treaty of '68." The treaty of '68 is the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. A peace treaty between the United States Government and the tribes commonly known as the Sioux, of which Chief Red Cloud and the Lakota were members. After years of bloodshed on the frontier, the treaty of 1868 forced the Sioux to abandon roaming the Western Plains. The treaty restricted them to 41,000 square miles throughout Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska and the Dakotas, which they would own, including the Black Hills where the Mount Rushmore monument would be carved. And it looks as if this treaty doesn't last for long. Only a few years later, gold was found in the Black Hills and tens of thousands of prospectors flooded the reservation. The Lakota refused to sell their land, so the military forced them off. So when Borglum tells Red Cloud, "I will not forget the treaty of '68", he's being somewhat disingenuous. If it were not for the government breaking the treaty of '68, Borglum would not have been able to carve Mount Rushmore on that land. But the James Red Cloud, to whom Borglum's letter is



addressed, isn't the Chief Red Cloud who had signed this treaty over 60 years earlier. I'm not finding any references to James Red Cloud here. Maybe I can find some answers at the monument. I've driven by Mount Rushmore a couple of times in my life, and I've always felt uncomfortable about it. It feels as intrusive as it is impressive. Author and historian Jesse Lerner tells me that Borglum intended his monument to celebrate America's so called 'Manifest Destiny', to expand across all western lands, including those belonging to Native Americans.

Jesse Lerner: It's not these specific men who are memorialized here in Borglum's conception. The theme of the monument is the foundation and preservation and expansion of the United States.

Gwen: Jesse shows me an article written by Borglum in which he elaborated upon his vision.

Jesse: He said, "The memorial at Mount Rushmore is the first monument dedicated to a conception and the organization of this great western republic. It will include its struggles to maintain its unity as well as record its territorial completion and development.

Gwen: So that was Borglum's vision, the idea of expansion. About American expansionism?

Jesse: Well, yes, the idea of territorial acquisition was very important to Borglum, because he believed in national destiny, which to him was really racial destiny, in that sense of the right, duty and obligation to settle the entire continent.

Gwen: Borglum chose these four presidents specifically for their contributions to territorial expansion.

Jesse: For instance, Washington obviously is the father of his country. Jefferson is there because he sponsored the Lewis and Clark expedition and for the Louisiana Purchase. Lincoln is there because he kept the country together during the Civil War. And Roosevelt is there because he built the Panama Canal and joined the country.

Gwen: Once carving was under way, the Great Depression hit. Now the government also looked to Borglum's monument as a public works project to create desperately needed jobs.

Jesse: About 400 people found employment, mostly out-of-work miners from the local mines, who were working on the side of the mountain using dynamite to bring out the faces.

Gwen: Not only did it provide a lot of jobs, but it reaffirmed the ideal of the country coming together to carry out great works, even under duress. Jesse also finds our letter a little baffling. The letter mentions the treaty of '68, but it also talks about a resolution that he seems upset about.



Jesse: I really don't know anything about that resolution.

Gwen: He suggests I take a look at the Borglum papers on file at the Library of Congress. So I've requested copies. It seems there were quite a few letters exchanged between Borglum and Red Cloud. Oh, here's one that's dated January 21<sup>st</sup>. There's a good likelihood that this is the letter that Borglum is responding to. But this is strange. Red Cloud is addressing him not as Borglum, but as "My Dear Brother, Chief Inyan Wanblee". That's the name that Borglum has put under his signature, Gutzon Borglum, Inyan Wanblee. But why would the person who's carving up the Black Hills be going by an Indian name? And what does Inyan Wanblee mean? Red Cloud seems to be thanking Borglum for arranging for Washington to send them food and clothing and blankets during an especially hard winter, what he calls "a time of famine and distress". Our letter seems to be a direct response to this. And Borglum... That's right, Borglum says, you have taken clothes and blankets and meat from my hands. So Borglum did go out of his way to help the Lakota, but why? Well, let me keep reading Red Cloud's letter. This is quite eloquent: "The Black Hills still belong to us, and if the treaty of '68 is carried out, we will be happy and content. Won't you plead with the Great White Father to fulfill the treaty of '68." Great White Father is a term Native American's often used to refer to the president of the United States. Now I'm beginning to understand. Red Cloud is asking Borglum to intercede with the president. And so more than 60 years after the treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868, the Lakota are still insisting that the government abide by that treaty. But why did James Red Cloud think that a sculptor could influence a president? I've arranged to meet with Alfred Red Cloud, James Red Cloud's eldest grandson. He's wearing the headdress of his tribal ancestors. He immediately solves one of our mysteries.

Gwen: In the letter I sent you a copy of, James Red Cloud calls him Inyan Wanblee. What does that mean?

Alfred Red Cloud: When friends, non-natives come to the reservation, the Lakota people give them Indian name. So working with stone, that's why they give him the Lakota name Inyan Wanblee, Stone Eagle.

Gwen: Red Cloud tells me Stone Eagle had dynamited and drilled the mountains at the heart of the Lakota's creation myth.

Alfred Red Cloud: The elders say that it is our birthplace in the Lakota National. They followed the buffalo to this big cave and traveled many days in the darkness until they come to the light at the end of the tunnel. There is a lot of caves up there in the Black Hills and that's where we emerged from. That's the reason why the Black Hills are real sacred to us. We come back here every spring all summer long. People travel hundreds of miles just to come and worship.

Gwen: So, James Red Cloud, your grandfather, would probably have been quite upset about this carving into the sacred Black Hills.



Alfred Red Cloud: My grandfather, he didn't want the sacred Black Hills to be disturbed in any way. But as time came along, I think he made friends with the stone carver.

Gwen: Alfred believes this friendship was partly pragmatic. His grandfather hoped the powerful Borglum could help his people.

Alfred Red Cloud: The buffalo were gone, so there was difficult times, hard winters and most like starvation come into our people. The stone carver told my grandpa that he was good friends with the president of the United States. My grandfather was asking the stone carver to deliver a message that he needed help for his Lakota people.

Gwen: Alfred suggests the mysterious resolution in the letter might be something his forefathers had decided.

Alfred Red Cloud: That resolution would be coming from the council of elders, the warrior society and the chief. But, I just couldn't come up with that resolution.

Gwen: Well, you've given us some wonderful insightful material. We thank you very much.

Alfred Red Cloud: Right.

Gwen: I'm still not clear why a believer in Manifest Destiny would be so concerned with the plight of Native Americans. Historian and Borglum expert, Albert Boime, explains the artist was a complex man with almost as many faces as his sculpture.

Albert Boime: There's no question about his sense of self-importance. He had a colossal ego that matched the gigantism of Mount Rushmore itself. Borglum always saw himself as the champion of the underdog. But he did have a genuine sympathy for the Oglala Sioux, there's no question about it. But they were never his equal. They were helpless children, which indicates power relationship. This was very important. As far as Chief Red Cloud was concerned, Borglum had the power to induce Washington to supply these goods for the Lakota.

Gwen: Which would then make sense that Red Cloud would be, in a sense, courting him and calling him "My Dear Brother" and giving him this Indian name of Inyan Wanblee.

Albert: Yes. I think so. But I think at the same time, Red Cloud is shrewd; just as shrewd as Borglum in his own way. And I think there was some mutual exploitation going on between the two of them.



Gwen: But, did you find anything about this reference that Borglum makes, "I do not like the resolution"? Albert shows me a copy of a tribal council resolution adopted on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1932, just a few days before Borglum's letter. It's an effort to get Borglum to help them in their hour of greatest need.

Albert: The tribal council of Pine Ridge Reservation declared, "Be it therefore resolved: That Mr. Gutzon Borglum, be asked to appeal to Washington in our behalf and try to arrange a delegation to go there on matters," it says, "outline attached herewith".

Gwen: Now what about that would have upset Borglum?

Albert: Borglum wanted to be the supreme authority....

Gwen: What Albert tells me allows me to see the deeper meaning of Brian's letter. Well, Brian, your letter tells us a great deal about relations between Washington, Mount Rushmore and the Lakota. Here's your letter and it's context. It's an answer to a letter, that you have a copy of here, from James Red Cloud to Borglum. Borglum had indeed helped them. In fact, this letter....I tell Brian about the brutal winter of 1932 and how the Lakota had passed a resolution asking Borglum to arrange a meeting for them with the president. But, what about that would have upset Borglum?

Albert: The Native Americans wanted their own delegation and Borglum was no longer the ambassador now.

Gwen: Borglum wanted to speak for the Lakota, but they trusted themselves better and had resolved to present their grievances in person.

Albert: And this offended him, because he thought he was being reduced to the status of messenger boy. Now remember, he was a control freak. And to be reduced to a middleman was something that he found terribly offensive.

Gwen: Borglum thought the Lakota needed him; that they were simple children. And Red Cloud was so much more clever and independent than Borglum had realized. That's why he was upset in the letter that you have.

Brian: Isn't that neat?

Gwen: Isn't that neat?

Brian: Yes. Love it. Yeah, that's super. Thank you very much.



Gwen: Well, thank you so much, Brian for helping me understand a great deal more complexity about a national icon. Before carving of the monument began in 1927, the Sioux Nation filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Government for violating the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. Over a half century later, Washington offered a settlement of more than 100 million dollars, but it was refused. The money sits in an interest bearing fund and is reportedly now worth over three-quarters of a billion dollars. Despite being one of the poorest communities in the nation, the Lakota still refuse to accept the money. Instead, they continue to hope that one day they'll reclaim their ancestral land.