

HISTORY AT OUR DOORSTEP

CHIEF RED CLOUD

MAHPIYA-LUTA

1822-1909

RED CLOUD

MAHPIYA-LUTA

FAMOUS WARRIOR, CHIEF AND DIPLOMAT

Born in 1822 near a fork in the North Platte River near present-day North Platte, Nebraska, Red Cloud, was named for a unique formation of crimson clouds that hovered in the horizon when he was born. His parents were Lone Man of the Brule Lakota and Walks as She Thinks of the Oglala Lakota Sioux. Following the matriarchal tradition of the tribe, the mother's clan was responsible for his upbringing. This was accentuated when he was left fatherless at a very young age, and taken into the home of his mother's uncle, Old Chief Smoke, who served as his primary mentor.

At an early age, Red Cloud distinguished himself as a highly skilled hunter and courageous fighter. Having no hereditary claim to tribal chiefship, he attained leadership consideration by demonstrating superb bravery, aggressive leadership, and an unusual ability to be cunning. Eighty separate deeds of bravery in battle were credited to him as a shrewd and ruthless warrior.

Red Cloud served as a tribal chief until 1881 and was instrumental in organizing various resistance acts against expansion into native lands. He gained much notoriety for his leadership and meticulously calculated plans in stopping the U. S. Army from further development of the Bozeman Trail and accompanying forts. This became known as Red Cloud's War. Red Cloud was the first and last American Indian in the West to win a war against the U. S. Army.

Aware of the great numbers of European Americans and their plans for settlement of the West, Red Cloud felt that it was futile to physically engage in battle and decided that he could best protect his people through sound negotiations that would ensure peace. He traveled to the East and other locations seeking assurances to protect his tribal members and their native lands. Unfortunately, the U. S. government failed to honor what was promised to them.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, he married only once. Red Cloud and his wife, Pretty Owl, were together over fifty years and according to some reports had six children. He was known as a good father and natural gentleman. Blind and approximately eighty-seven years old, Red Cloud died on December 10, 1909 at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. He is buried at the Red Cloud Cemetery there.

Red Cloud is distinguished as being the most photographed American Indian of the nineteenth century. He was posthumously honored by the U. S. Postal Service with a Great Americans Series stamp and in 2000 was inducted into the Nebraska Hall of Fame.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA'S CHIEF CITY

Contrary to popular assumption, Chief Red Cloud was never in the vicinity of Red Cloud, Nebraska. First settled in 1870 and formally established in 1871, Red Cloud is the only municipality in the world to bear his name. During the establishment of Red Cloud, Nebraska, many Americans were gaining a new appreciation of Red Cloud, the famed Native American, as they watched him eloquently demonstrate superb diplomatic skills in negotiations to protect his tribe. Credited with being the leader of the town's founding fathers, Silas Garber, was equally impressed by Red Cloud, the negotiator, and persuaded his fellow settlers to name the town in his honor.

By Suzi Yost Schulz

Go to www.visitredcloud.com and www.walkredcloud.com for more information about Red Cloud and things to do in the area. You can also pick up a copy of The Moonstone Bookstore's History at Your Doorstep brochure with a list of things to do in the Red Cloud area at the bookstore or go to the bookstore's web page and download a copy of it.