

for saddle clothes and cut up for head dresses and waist girdles. There was no device too ridiculous for their attire and nothing too costly for them to destroy.⁴¹⁶

Indian appropriation and misuse of white clothing operated on many levels for the captives. Captive women felt that Dakota wearing these items had no respect for the previous owners or for what the clothing symbolized, which was probably true. Dakota deliberately misused white clothing to emphasize that power had shifted from white settlers and the government back to the Indians. At the same time, captive women did not realize that Dakota men and women wore plundered clothing and jewelry according to their own standards of beauty and adornment. Plundered clothing and jewelry represented an opportunity for Dakota to wear finer fabrics and jewels than they commonly possessed. Urania White moved beyond Sweet in her comments on the power of plundered clothing:

During this week of tepee life the ludicrous alternated with the sublime, the laughable with the heart-breaking and pathetic. We saw papooses of all sizes robed in rich laces and bedecked in many fantastic styles with silk fabrics, until one must laugh despite all their fearful surroundings. When the laugh died on our lips, the terrible thought crowded into our minds, Where did these things come from? What tales could they tell if power were given them to speak? Where are the butchered and mutilated forms that once wore them? My heart was crushed, my brain reeled, and I grew faint and sick wondering, or rather trying not to wonder, what would be our own fate.⁴¹⁷

Dakota use of clothing and jewelry was comic, but the reality that clothing signified was very bleak. Minnie Buce Carrigan described being devastated when the young Dakota woman she lived with put on one of her mother's dresses:

One day the young squaw put on my mother's dress, a dark green woolen one, and it just about fitted her. I looked at her and then laid down on the ground and burst out crying. I could not bear to see her. She seemed to know what I was

⁴¹⁶ Sweet, 368.

⁴¹⁷ White, 405-406.

crying about and took it off. She never put any of my mother's clothes on again while I was with her.⁴¹⁸

A Dakota woman wearing her mother's green dress was a far too painful and intimate reminder that Carrigan's mother was dead. The losses wrought by the war resurfaced with the sight of a single item of clothing. Wakefield emphasized this point as well when she was given a dead woman's dress:

About this time some squaws brought me a dress belonging to Mrs. Dr. Humphrey. How strange are God's ways! How little did I think when I assisted her in making the dress of my ever wearing it, and at such a place and under such circumstances. Now she was dead, and I, where was I? In a camp of Indians, not knowing but I should be, at last, murdered by them, for I had many miles to travel before reaching civilization."⁴¹⁹

Even more powerful than Indian uses for plundered clothing was denial of much needed clothing by Dakota women. Janette DeCamp Sweet recognized her heartbreak when much needed clothes were offered but not supplied. Speaking of an Indian woman named Hazatome she said:

She had often come to our house and been kindly used. Her pity was so great that she offered to give each of us an Indian costume. Never doubting her sincerity, I was greatly pleased and told her I would come for it the next day. I ran the risk of going some great distance from our lodge to meet her and receive the clothing . . . I found Hazatome and asked her for the articles, fully persuaded that they would be forthcoming. Imagine my surprise when she would not utter a word. She neither affirmed nor denied having promised them, but simply ignored me altogether. I could not help crying with disappointment, but left her, thinking that I would never believe or trust an Indian again.⁴²⁰

Without the much-needed clothing, Sweet felt betrayed on a number of levels. Foremost, she and her children desperately need Indian clothing so they would be better protected from the elements. Also, Indian attire would help them blend in better among the Dakota especially because threats were repeatedly made against white captives. In this way,

⁴¹⁸ Carrigan, 12.

⁴¹⁹ Wakefield, 111.

Indian clothing worked as a dual signifier sometimes marking white women's distance from white civilization and other times showing a captive's acceptance of Indian culture. Dakota attire for Sweet and her children would have provided a sign to all that she had claimed a role in the tribal network thus making her position a little less tenuous.

Food

Food was also an important issue for female captives and many of the captives commented on the quantity, quality and preparation in Dakota camps. While clothing and food were both cultural signifiers for these women, food and water were obviously much more pivotal for their survival. Minnie Buce Carrigan commented on the lack of food at one family she stayed with:

While I lived with them I was nearly starved all the time and was always sickly. Once when I was very hungry I saw an Indian girl put some potatoes in hot ashes to roast and then go off and play. I could not resist the chance of procuring a square meal even if by questionable means, so I watched and waited until I thought the potatoes were cooked, and saw that the girl was at play on the other side of the tepee, and then I took the potatoes back of another tent and ate them with great relish.⁴²¹

Even though she knew stealing was wrong, she did it anyway just to have something to eat. Helen Tarble and her children faced serious food deprivation during her time in the wilderness after escape: "They cried but little, but constantly begged for something to eat. All I could give them was wild rice straw to chew for the juice, a few plums and berries, and some roots which I dug. There was plenty of water and I made a drinking cup by pinning two large leaves together with thorns."⁴²² At times, lack of food was a harsh reality for captive women and their children.

⁴²⁰ Sweet, 368.

⁴²¹ Carrigan, 17.

⁴²² Tarble, 36.

Hunger in camp was sporadic as there was an abundance of food due to plunder of white households. According to Urania White, “The Indians through plunder had on hand a good supply of provisions, consisting of flour, dried fruit, groceries of various kinds, and an abundance of fresh meat.”⁴²³ Wakefield recognized this as well:

My children never knew what it was to be hungry in the Indian camp, for food was plenty, and that which was good. Nearly every day some little dainty was brought to ‘Jute Wicaste Tawicu’—English doctor’s wife. I really thought my children would be made sick by Indians, for they were continually feeding them.⁴²⁴

Frazer and Wakefield at least felt that food was plentiful in camp. Water was another issue. Many of the captives found the water used by Dakota as filthy and unpalatable.

Urania White described in detail the problems with Dakota water sources:

That part of the train where I was, pitched their tepees beside a mossy slough, from which we obtained water for tepee use. The first few days the water covered the moss and could be dipped with a cup. The cattle were allowed to stand in it, and dozens of little Indians were playing in it every day; consequently the water soon became somewhat unpalatable to the fastidious. However, we continued to use it. After remaining there three or four days, the water sank below the moss. To get it then we had to go out on the moss and stand a few minutes, when the water would collect about our feet. It is astonishing how some persons will become reconciled to such things when forced upon them.⁴²⁵

Even though animals and people stood in the water, White and her captors continue to use it. This upset White who normally would not have used dirty water. After being deprived of water while in hiding, Wakefield discussed what thirst drove her to: “As we walked along we passed through a muddy piece of ground and I dipped up the filthy water in my hands and drank and gave my child. It was refreshing, but I think a dog would refuse to drink such water at ordinary times, but my mouth was parched with

⁴²³ White, 406.

⁴²⁴ Wakefield, 112.

⁴²⁵ White, 411.

thirst.”⁴²⁶ Even temporary deprivation of food and water made anything palatable for captive women and children.

Captive women closely scrutinized how Dakota women prepared food because this was one of their primary duties before captivity. Urania Frazer described how certain foods were prepared:

Their manner of broiling beefsteak was not much of a trick, but very remarkable for labor saving. They put the steak across two sticks over the blaze, without salting, and in a few minutes it was done... Tripe was an extremely favorite dish among them, and they were quick in its preparation. The intestines were taken between the thumb and finger, the contents were squeezed out, and then, without washing, the tripe was broiled and prepared in regular Indian epicurean style Truly these noble red people can justly be called a labor-saving people, whatever other qualities they may lack.⁴²⁷

Making bread was much easier for the Indian women who used the same bowl for mixing and cooking as noted by Helen.⁴²⁸ What the captives had labeled as poverty among the Indian women before, they came to see as a lifestyle unencumbered by excess work for more stringent standards of food preparation.

Even though Dakota food did not seem appetizing to captives, they ate it because they had no other alternative. White noted “Their manner of cooking was not every elaborate; an epicure would not have relished it as well as we did, until after being forced by the pain or weakness caused by want of food. Hunger will make food cooked after the manner of the Indians palatable.”⁴²⁹ Captives learned to eat food prepared by Dakota women out of necessity, but they would never eat dog. Both Carrigan and White described a dog feast they witnessed during their captivities. Carrigan related her disgust in a detailed description:

⁴²⁶ Wakefield, 81.

⁴²⁷ White, 406.

⁴²⁸ Ibid, 19.

The next morning after this incident I heard a great commotion again. On investigation I saw a most disgusting spectacle. Side by side, with their throats cut and their feet in the air, lay a number of dogs. I returned to the tent sickened by the sight, but in a little while my curiosity got the better of my sensations and I went out again. By this time the Indians were singeing the hair off the dogs with burning hay. I recognized our little white poodle among the carcasses. The Indians had eight to ten kettles on the fire and as soon as a dog was singed it was thrown into boiling water. Perhaps they were only scalding them preparatory to cooking. I concluded they were cooking them without preparation and resolved not to eat any of the meat if I had to starve.⁴³⁰

Carrigan was horrified to see her own poodle among the dogs being prepared for the feast. White also described the dog feast but analyzed its political function where only warriors were allowed to partake in preparation for war. At other times, all could partake of the dog if it was prepared in a different way.⁴³¹ The thought of eating dog horrified most captives who had sentimental attachments to their own dogs.

Food also functioned as a symbol of white civilization. Jannette Sweet had difficulty tolerating Indian food during her captivity. She felt she did not have a decent meal until she escaped to the friendly Indians: "She and her daughter cooked a nice supper of beef and bread and placed it on the table, and we ate with such appetites as hunger alone can give. It was the first real food in many weeks."⁴³² Sweet did not consider food prepared by Dakota women at Little Crow's camp to be real, meaning civilized and fit for white consumption. Sweet could not satisfy her hunger until she had beef but especially bread, served at a table, not sitting on the ground like in the camps. Bread was also important to Carrigan as well, "I never saw any bread from the time I left

⁴²⁹ White, 406.

⁴³⁰ Carrigan, 16.

⁴³¹ White, 417.

⁴³² Sweet, 371.

home until I got among white people again.”⁴³³ Food acted as a powerful symbol of white civilization as well.

Women's Work

Over time, as white women were incorporated into the female network of Indian camps, they observed in detail Dakota women's behavior and work patterns. Sometimes Indian women ridiculed white women for acting in ways that were specifically white. Urania White told how Dakota women made fun of her because she did not behave in the proper female manner:

The Indians and squaws had rules of etiquette, which they strictly observed, and would frequently, admonish me concerning them. They would tell me how to sit on the ground; how to stand; and how to go in and out of the teepee door, which was very low. I think they must have considered me a dull scholar, for I could not conform, or would not, to all their notions of gentility. The Indians would frequently have a hearty laugh to see me go in and out of the teepee door.⁴³⁴

Here White exposed larger cultural conflicts over proper female behavior. In captivity Dakota and Euro-American cultural norms came into direct conflict as white women were expected to learn and act according to Dakota gender roles and behaviors. These two groups of women had distinctly different behavioral expectations that clashed within the context of captivity. When captives violated gender roles or cultural taboos, there were consequences. Wakefield learned this when she washed her feet in the family's communal water pail:

One day I went for water, and as my feet were dirty, I tho't I would wash them; as the pail was an old one I thought I would wash my feet in it, for I could reach the water only by lying down on my face; so I thought I would dip it up and wash, and then wash the pail. When I got back to the tepee the family were all in great commotion. Chaska brought in an interpreter, who said I had committed a great sin by putting my feet in the pail, for all vessels belonging to a tepee are sacred, and no women are allowed to put their feet in them or step over them. I told him I

⁴³³ Carrigan, 11.

⁴³⁴ White, 417.

could scrub the pail, but he said it would not do, for they would never use it again, and they did not. It was turned upside down, and when we removed they left it on the prairie.⁴³⁵

Wakefield unwittingly broke a Dakota taboo and exposed the gulf in understanding that existed between two cultures. Luckily her ignorance and Chaska's presence saved her from punishment for stepping outside Dakota female roles.

While the women were in captivity, they were also incorporated into Dakota women's world through work. Based on their new roles in the tribe, white women hauled wood and water, cooked, helped to move the camps and cared for children. In "Living on a Frontier Part'—Virginia Women Among the Indians, 1622-1794," Jennifer Davis McDaid noted that female captives and Indian women shared similar tasks in captivity:

In retrospect, the tasks may have seemed more severe than they were in reality. Although the surroundings were dramatically different, food cultivation and preparation remained women's concerns, whether they working in English or Native American context. Indian women and captives tended crops, gathered wild plants, took care of village children, and performed household chores.⁴³⁶

The experiences of many women in camp were similar to that of Helen Tarble who worked as a servant during her brief captivity: "They put me to work and found plenty of it to do. I chopped wood, brought water, gathered corn from the fields and fed the horses, and all the time I was closely watched and never allowed to go alone."⁴³⁷ Wakefield also performed woman's work: "I had not many idle moments. I made short gowns for squaws, made bread, fried meat and potatoes, brought water and went to the river three or four times a day to wash my baby's clothing."⁴³⁸ They often saw some of these chores as onerous but could not help observing that the Dakota women had many labor saving

⁴³⁵ Wakefield, 100-101.

⁴³⁶ Jennifer Davis McDaid, "Living on a Frontier Part'—Virginia Women Among the Indians, 1622-1794" *Virginia Calvacade* 42 3 (Winter 1993): 109.

⁴³⁷ Tarble, 34.

ways of doing things that the captives learned to utilize. For example, Carrigan described how a Dakota woman washed her:

My dress was washed only once while I was a prisoner. The old squaw took me down to the creek and made me sit down in the water clear up to my neck. I screamed, for I thought she was going to drown me. She held me with one hand and with the other hand she fished out a bar of soap from her waist and went rubbing it over my dress, for I had been soaking in the water quite a while. She rubbed and washed all over me a while and then she told me to 'pockagee.' I had to dry my dress on my back, for it was the only one I had. I expect her washing answered two purposes—she washed me as well as the dress, for an Indian always likes to save work.⁴³⁹

Urania White described how Dakota women washed themselves:

This was the first washing that had been done since my stay with them. The squaws' mode of washing their wardrobes was to walk into water two or three feet deep, then quickly lower and raise themselves, and at the same time rub with their hands. Their wet clothing was allowed to remain on them to dry.⁴⁴⁰

While this manner of washing seemed odd, it was much easier than white methods of boiling water, scrubbing with a washboard, line drying and ironing.

Indian Women as Protectors

While food and clothing were important concerns for the captives, personal safety was their greatest worry and the one area where Dakota women provided the most aid. As Indian hopes for the war faded and the warriors' frustration grew, captive women and children were regularly threatened throughout captivity. During this time, Indian women protected white women and children by hiding them from male aggressors. Helen Tarble had been in the Indian camp only a short time when four Indian men began disputing over her. Little Crow decided to settle the matter by having her killed instead of giving

⁴³⁸ Wakefield, 103.

⁴³⁹ Carrigan 15-16.

⁴⁴⁰ White, 416.

her to one of the Indians as his wife. She appealed to an Indian women for help but was initially refused:

I appealed to the squaw as a woman and a mother to help me and my children to escape, but she said "no," and that she would do nothing to help me. When night came, however and I was just about to put my children to bed, the squaw ordered me to take them and come with her to a corn-field. It began to rain hard and I objected to taking the children out, but she was very imperative and I had to obey her. When we got to the about the middle of the corn-field she said I could remain there, and that the Indians were coming to kill me and the children.⁴⁴¹

This Dakota woman not only saved Tarble's life but also hid her in a place from which she escaped with her two children. Tarble's appeal as a woman and mother was very powerful as she drew on mutual gender roles for protection. Mary Schwandt also related how closely Maggie guarded her after her adoption:

Late one night, when we were all asleep, Maggie in one corner of the tent, her mother in another, and I in another, some drunken young hoodlums came in. Maggie sprang up as swiftly as a tigress defending her young, and almost as fierce and ordered them out. A hot quarrel resulted. They seemed determined to take me away or kill me, but Maggie was just as determined to protect me.

Snana had her own reasons for protecting Mary. According to Snana's own narrative, she lost her oldest daughter eight days before the war began. Snana asked for a captive to adopt to take that child's place, which was commonly practiced among the Indians to replace lost family and tribal members. Her uncle located Mary and Snana's mother bought her with a pony. Snana said of Mary:

When she brought this girl, whose name was Mary Schwandt, she was much larger than the one I had lost, who was only seven years old; but my heart was so sad that I was willing to take any girl at that time. The reason why I wished to keep this girl was to have her in place of the one I lost. So I loved her and pitied her, and she was dear to me just the same as my own daughter.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Tarble, 34.

⁴⁴² Snana, *Narration of a Friendly Sioux in Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862*, edited by Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988): 143.

Snana wanted a captive child to replace her daughter and help her heart heal. As a result she cared for Mary and defended her as she would her own children, “and I thought to myself that if they would kill my girl they must kill me first. Though I had two of my own children at that time with me, I thought of this girl just as much as of the others”.⁴⁴³

Snana clearly revealed two things in this statement. First, she showed how Indian women viewed care of captive children and also how captive children fit into Indian families.

Mary Schwandt became her daughter as a result of adoption. As a captive Schwandt fulfilled a role within the tribe replacing Snana’s lost daughter. In the fall of 1894, thirty-two years after the war, Schwandt and Snana were reunited. Snana said of that visit, “It was just as if I went to visit my own child.”⁴⁴⁴ In many ways, she did. Snana became a mother to Mary during her captivity and Mary never forgot her tender care. Snana’s care came at a pivotal point for Mary who would have continued to endure sexual assaults and probably would not have survived her captivity.

Chaska’s mother hid Sarah Wakefield and her children several times to keep them from being harmed:

Chaska’s mother came into their lodge, saying that a man was coming to kill me; and she caught up Nellie, my baby on her back and told me and my boy to hurry. She told an old man her story, and he said “Flee to the woods.” She gave me a bag of crackers and a cup, and we ran to the ravine . . . She hid me in the tall grass and under brush, and bidding me sit still, left me saying she would come in the morning.⁴⁴⁵

The Dakota woman’s kindness continued the next day as she cared for Wakefield who had been exposed all night in the storm:

But after several hours I saw the old woman coming, and I was overjoyed to see her... She took Nellie on her back and I tried to get up, but found I could not

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 258.

⁴⁴⁵ Wakefield, 72.

stand... But the old woman rubbed me and while doing so said the men had gone who were going to kill me, and I must try to walk to her tepee, and she would give me some dry clothes and some coffee.⁴⁴⁶

Dakota women were not afraid to protect captive women and children and acted within their role as caregivers to do so. Dakota women used their power to prevent violence against captive women and children.

Indian women's kind acts were not forgotten once the captives were released. In their narratives, Schwandt, Wakefield, Frazer, and DeCamp Sweet all openly acknowledged, thanked and hoped for the continued well being of those who helped them while in captivity. Mary Schwandt's acknowledgment of Maggie in her narrative was especially emotional and heartfelt:

I learn that she is somewhere in Nebraska but wherever you are, Maggie, I want you to know that the little captive German girl you so often befriended and shielded from harm loves you still for your kindness and care, and she prays God to bless you and reward you in this life and that to come.⁴⁴⁷

Even as a grown woman Schwandt referred to herself as a German girl recalling her role as Snana's adopted daughter. Urania Frazer also acknowledged the gratitude she felt towards her adoptive Indian parents: "...and although more than a third of a century has elapsed since that event, strange as it may appear to some, I cherish with kindest feelings the friendship of my Indian father and mother."⁴⁴⁸ While in captivity, these women realized that not all of the Indians were bad people and in fact many were willing to help the captives however they could. Despite the horrors of capture and captivity, many women realized and appreciated the sacrifices the Indians made. Captives had to

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁴⁷ Schwandt, 21.

⁴⁴⁸ White, 404.

