

Some SIOUX LEGENDS in PICTURES

BERTHA L. HEILBRON

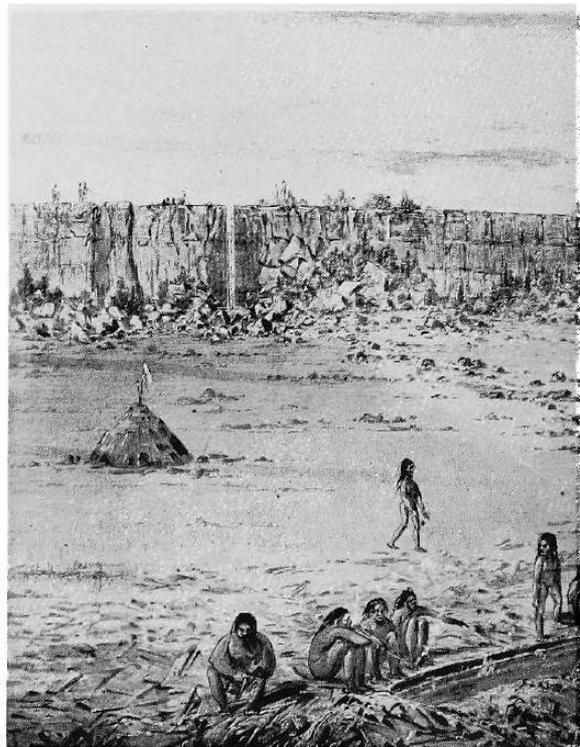
WRITTEN RECORDS left by visitors to the Minnesota country and frontiersmen who lived there in the days before statehood are rich in legends told by the native red men, especially the Sioux. Available, too, are artists' versions of the lore these primitive folk built up about some of nature's wonders in their northern wilderness abode. Produced by men who accompanied government exploring expeditions, by independent travelers, or by soldiers stationed at remote military posts, these visual representations of Indian folklore have come down to us as illustrations in books about the upper Mississippi Valley and as original drawings and paintings preserved in the collections of libraries, museums, and historical societies.

Among the painting reporters who pictured some of the spots associated with the legends of the Sioux was George Catlin, perhaps the most prolific of all frontier illustrators of Indian life. This artist planned to produce a complete pictorial record of the American Indian and his culture before the red man was too greatly changed by contact with the whites. So Catlin made his way to Fort Snelling in the heart of the Sioux land in the summer of 1832. There he heard about a sacred quarry even farther to the west where the Indians of many tribes went in safety to obtain the red stone

from which they fashioned their beautiful peace pipes. Supposedly no white man had seen this neutral ground. Catlin was determined to visit the unique spot.

Four years later he returned to Fort Snelling, stopping there on his way to the famous quarry on the height of land known as the Coteau des Prairies near the present boundary between Minnesota and South Dakota. Catlin not only reached it, after various adventures with hostile Sioux who tried to persuade him to turn back, but he

CATLIN'S oil painting

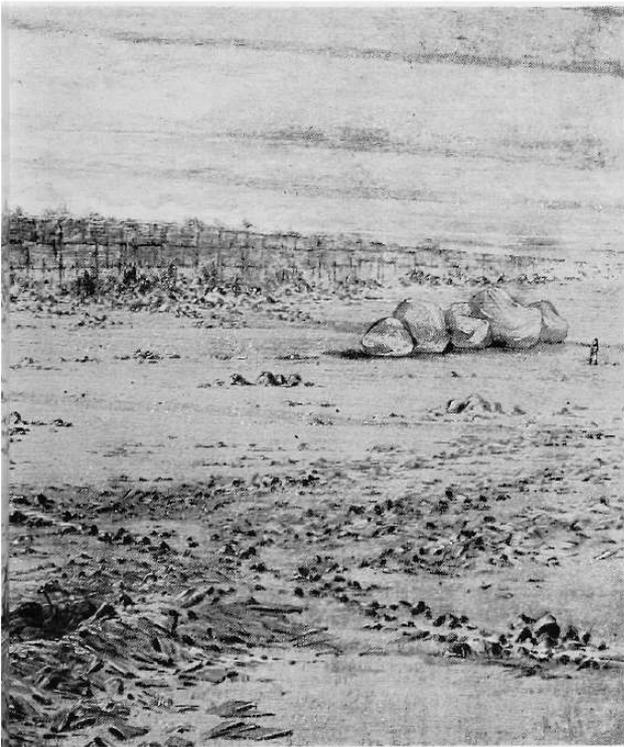


MISS HEILBRON, the editor of this magazine, is currently engaged in the preparation of a pictorial history of Minnesota to be published in the fall of 1958.

sketched the site, recorded many of the legends the Indians told about it, and published both his pictures and the stories in a two-volume work about the American Indians. Today we know that the Pipestone Quarry was familiar to traders before Catlin's day, but if discovery implies reporting and publication, this exploring artist's claim that he discovered the Minnesota quarry is valid.

ON HIS SKETCH of the quarry, Catlin based the painting here reproduced, which is included among the 450 examples of his work in the National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.¹ The canvas depicts natives digging for pipestone at the base of a great wall of polished red and gray quartzite rising out of the level prairie and facing the West. It shows, too, the beautiful waterfall formed as Pipestone Creek drops over the wall to wind through the plain below. Nearby is the Leaping Rock. According to Sioux tradi-

the Pipestone Quarry



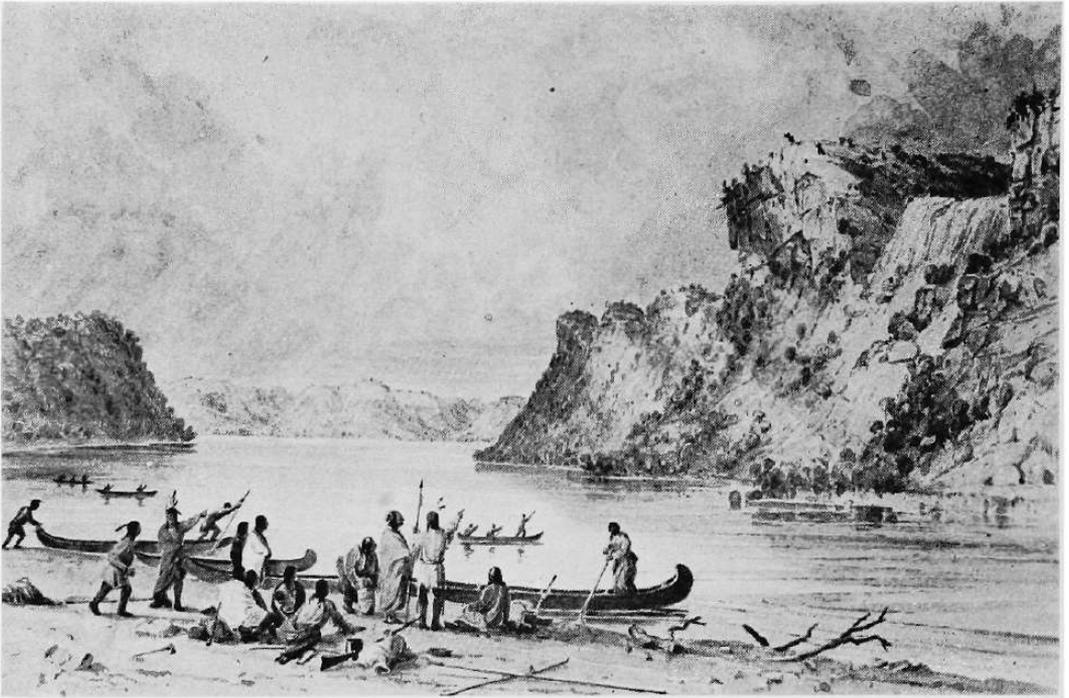
SIoux worshipping red boulders (detail)

tion, by risking his life in a leap from the high ledge to this solitary pillar of stone, a young brave could demonstrate the sincerity of his love for the maiden of his choice.

Included also in Catlin's view is the cluster of boulders known as the Three Maidens. The Sioux believed that after the Great Spirit appeared before his people at the quarry, some Indian maids disappeared beneath these boulders, where their spirits remained. The natives harbored a superstition that to ensure successful quarrying the maidens must be consulted and given offerings. Catlin produced a picture also of another group of boulders revered by the Sioux in the neighborhood of the Coteau des Prairies. Consisting of one large and two small masses of rock, which supposedly resembled a buffalo cow and two calves, the stones were painted red by the Indians. Catlin's view of natives worshipping at this site is, like his picture of the quarry, in the National Museum.

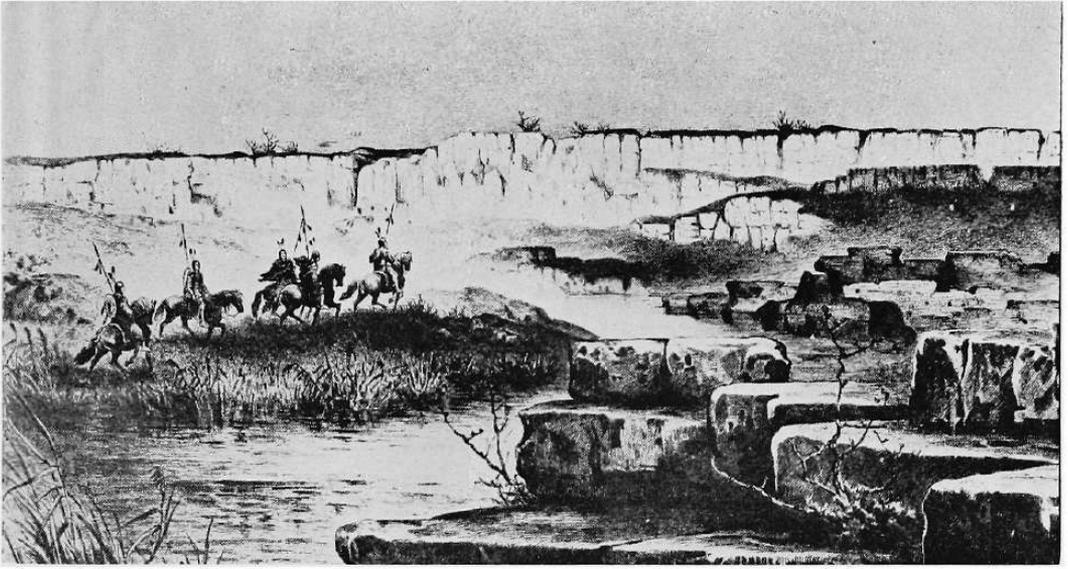
The artist recorded this story of the pipestone quarry: The Great Spirit called his people together there, and "standing on the precipice of the red pipe stone rock, broke from its wall a piece, and made a huge pipe

¹ This picture will appear also in the author's forthcoming pictorial history of Minnesota. Another version of Catlin's painting is owned by the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art at Tulsa, Oklahoma.



CAPTAIN *Eastman's* water colors of *Maiden Rock* (above) and the *Falls of St. Anthony* (below) illustrate two Sioux legends that concern disappointed love





CRONAU'S view of the Pipestone Quarry

by turning it in his hand." As he smoked the pipe, he told his people that this red stone "was their flesh — that they must use it for their pipes of peace — that it belonged to them all, and that the war-club and scalping knife must not be raised on its ground. At the last whiff of his pipe his head went into a great cloud, and the whole surface of the rock for several miles was melted and glazed."

Probably the poet Longfellow had this passage in mind when he told how "Gitche Manito, the mighty"

On the red crags of the quarry
Stood erect and called the nations.
Called the tribes of men together.

He then directed them to

Break the red stone from this quarry,
Mould and make it into peace pipes.

Catlin not only pictured the quarry, but he obtained some bits of the red stone, which is soft and easily worked when freshly quarried. This he sent to a Boston chemist, who pronounced it a new mineral compound and gave it the name "catlinite," by which it still is known.

It seems strange that the pipestone site was not more popular as a subject for art-

ists who made their way to the Minnesota frontier. Among the few others who went there and published visual records of their visits was a German named Rudolf Cronau. In a folio volume on the United States published in 1887 under the title *Von Wunderland zu Wunderland*, he included a view of the quarry with Indians who look much like medieval knights on horseback. The same work contains a more detailed picture of a group of Yankton Sioux digging for the red stone.

THREE of the best pictorial representations of legends associated with the upper Mississippi area are the work of Captain Seth Eastman, an army officer and a West Point graduate who was stationed at Fort Snelling first in 1830 and again almost continuously from 1841 to 1848. These delightful water colors were prepared to illustrate the work of his talented wife, a pioneering folklorist who took advantage of her situation on the remote frontier to record the traditions of the red men and publish several volumes of their legends. The quality of the work produced by this husband-and-wife team has seldom been matched. Sixty



MINNEHAHA Falls as pictured by Eastman

of Eastman's water colors, including the three here reproduced, were acquired by James J. Hill, and they are now in the collection of the St. Paul reference library established by the Empire Builder and endowed by his family.

The most popular of the tales pictured by the artist-captain is the story of the Lover's Leap, which was first recounted by Mary H. Eastman in her *Dahcotah, or, Life and Legends of the Sioux around Fort Snelling* (1849). The heroine was a Sioux maid named Winona, whose parents insisted that she marry a man who offered rich gifts for her hand, although she loved another. On her wedding day she climbed the heights overlooking Lake Pepin on the east, sang her death song, and threw herself from the precipice still known as Maiden Rock.

The Falls of St. Anthony provide the background for another legend of disappointed love ending in suicide which is pictured by Eastman. It centers about a squaw named Ampota Sapa, or Dark Day, who learned to her sorrow that the husband with whom she had lived happily for years was about to bring a second wife into their

LEWIS' lithograph of Red Rock Prairie



wigwam. Taking her children with her, the unhappy mother paddled her canoe down the Mississippi to the brink of the falls and disappeared over the cataract as her horrified husband watched helplessly from the bank.

A happier legend, the story of Minnehaha who became the bride of Hiawatha, is suggested by Eastman's picture of "The Laughing Water," the beautiful little cataract now in a Minneapolis park. The site became world famous after Longfellow published his *Song of Hiawatha* in 1855. The army officer's view of Minnehaha Falls, however, appeared earlier in two of his wife's books, along with his pictures of Maiden Rock and the Falls of St. Anthony.

EASTMAN'S subjects in a sense came to him, for he not only could see them easily, but he could hear the folk tales associated with them from the lips of the natives or from his wife. Other artists had to travel far to see what for him had been so close at hand. Among those who made the journey to the upper Mississippi was Henry Lewis, a scene painter from St. Louis who traveled

upstream in 1848 to assemble material for a great moving panorama of the Father of Waters. His Indian subjects, reproduced as colored lithographs in his book on the Mississippi Valley, which was published in Germany in 1857-58, include a view of Red Rock Prairie, a low bank of limestone on the river below St. Paul. The site took its name from an egg-shaped granite boulder which the red men held in awe and treated as an object of worship. They decorated it with red paint applied in fantastic patterns, and offered gifts of sugar, tobacco, pipes, and other items to the spirit they believed was imprisoned there. The strange boulder was still to be seen at the place that became known as Red Rock as late as 1909, when the accompanying photograph was taken.

Although this reminder of Indian superstition remained, most of the sites associated with the red man's lore changed greatly before the era of the camera. Thus we are fortunate to have pictorial records made by men like Catlin and Eastman, who depicted these sites while they were still untouched by the march of civilization.

FROM WINCHELL, THE ABORIGINES OF MINNESOTA

THE red rock
as photographed
in 1909





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