

John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Diplomacy and War 1790 to 1870*. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1988.

This well-documented history of the Plains Cree is a scientific approach to looking at events in three eras: the westward expansion of the Cree; the horse wars during the golden age of the Plains people; and the buffalo wars, which led to starvation and loss of independence. It is very neat, but that is how the author arranges his research. Actually, the Plains Cree were adapting to the changes brought about by contact with new technology and diseases. It is a dark period of uncertainty so that, militarily and religiously, new societies were formed by the Plains Cree in an effort to control the young men. The value system changed and it glorified bravery and conquest for horses, which were symbols of power and prestige. There was also a shift in alliances between tribes to accommodate their need for buffalo hunting in order to trade buffalo hides for liquor, guns and ammunition.

The Cree made alliances with some tribes and launched military offensives against others to secure hunting territory and economic survival. The pressure brought about by trade and the diminishing herds of buffalo made it necessary for the Cree to demand exclusive hunting privileges.

It is a great and colourful story of the Plains Cree which lasted about 200 years. They would have been a formidable force to contend with had it not been for the tragic extermination of the buffalo.

The land was empty, and hunger and disease led to a spiritual quest, for the Cree believed the herds would emerge from underground. The spirit of the buffalo was felt to have left their trails and bones behind.

Malloy's account for the period of the 1780s to the 1870s is a sad story, but while the veterans of the tribal wars were alive, they sang and recounted coup; they danced in celebration and gave gifts to the visitors. They relieved their exploits and glorified the military societies. The oral history passed on by the veterans is the missing link that will one day be part of history.

In the early 1930s an old man alone in a small sweat lodge prayed for better days but lamented in a tragic sad voice the death of the past glories of the Plains peoples. Their buffalo, horses and large camps were memories he had experienced.

This book is not just about the Plains Cree but about the Plains peoples, the Cree (paskwawiyiniwak), the Assiniboines, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Peigans and Sarcees.

Stanley Cuthand