

World Wide Web

See **Internet Revolution**

Wounded Knee Massacre

Around 1889 a Paiute tribe holy man experienced a vision during a total solar eclipse, during which the moon passes between the earth and the sun, blocking the sun from view. The result of his vision was a religion called the Ghost Dance. It included an actual dance in which dancers might die for a moment to get a brief glimpse into the paradise that awaited them. Part of the Ghost Dance involved the wearing of a specially made shirt that was believed to protect the wearer from enemy bullets. All Sioux reservations were practicing this new religion. One Lakota, Kicking Bear (c. 1852–1904), and his brother-in-law, Short Bull (c. 1845–1915), traveled to Nevada to learn about the Ghost Dance. Kicking Bear then visited the great **Sitting Bull** (1831–1890) in October 1890 to tell him what he had learned. Sitting Bull was a highly respected Lakota chief whose visions of the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer (1839–1876) and his own death came true. Sitting Bull expressed doubt that the dead would be brought back to life, but he had no objections to allowing his people to dance the Ghost Dance.

Indian agents, however, had already reported to the federal government their fears about the strength and influence of the Ghost Dance movement. Now their fears were intensified, as they believed Sitting Bull would join the Ghost Dancers. To keep this from happening, forty-three Lakota policemen were sent to remove Sitting Bull from his home at Standing Rock, **South Dakota**. They entered his cabin on December 15 and woke the sleeping chief. He agreed to come with the police and asked that his horse be saddled while he dressed. Meanwhile, a large group of Ghost Dancers gathered outside the cabin, and when Sitting Bull and the police stepped outside, one of the dancers shot Lieutenant Henry Bull Head. Bull Head pulled his gun and shot back at the dancer but accidentally shot Sitting Bull instead. Another policeman then killed Sitting Bull with a shot to the head. Before the morning was over, six police and seven warriors were dead.

The Ghost Dance was officially banned on Lakota reservations, yet the dancers continued with their rituals. Many of Sitting Bull's tribe had fled to find safety with another Lakota tribe led by chief Big Foot (c.

Wounded Knee Massacre

1820–1890). Wanting to avoid further violence, Big Foot led his people and the newcomers farther south toward the reservation at Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

What Big Foot did not know is that officials had already ordered his arrest. The great chief had become ill and was growing weaker with each hour as pneumonia set in. He had no intentions of fighting and was flying the white flag (symbol of truce, or peace) when he had his people set up camp for the night near Wounded Knee Creek on December 28, 1890. As they settled in to sleep, troops of the Seventh Cavalry surrounded them on all sides.

Soldiers entered the camp the following morning and demanded the Native Americans turn over all their weapons. One of the Native American warriors, Black Coyote, was deaf; he did not understand what was going on and was not willing to give up his weapon. A soldier tried to disarm him and the firearm discharged. Chaos immediately set in, as Native Americans ran for cover and soldiers began shooting them to try to control the disorder. Big Foot was among the first killed, and his corpse lay in the snow for three days before being tossed into a mass grave.

The massacre lasted less than one hour. Although accounts differ as to the number of Native Americans killed, ranging from 150 to 400, most agree on the figure of 300, the majority women and children. Twenty-five soldiers were dead, another thirty-nine wounded.

Corpses of women and children were found scattered as far away as three miles from camp. On New Year's Day of 1891, soldiers dug a pit and piled into it the bodies they could find. Relatives had already removed other bodies. Some soldiers kept souvenirs of the massacre, items such as Ghost Dance shirts they could sell later as “relics” from the Ghost Dance movement.

Because of his actions at Wounded Knee, the man who ordered the slaughter, Colonel James Forsyth (1834–1906), was removed from command. His superior officer was disgusted that Forsyth had approved of the brutal killings of innocent women and children. It was also discovered that many Lakota warriors were unarmed. Forsyth failed to see the error of his ways and instead wrote a report praising his troops for their courage in the face of “religious fanaticism.” Forsyth was later reinstated to his position and even rose to the rank of major general. The government further insulted the Native American community when it awarded

three officers and fifteen soldiers with the Medal of Honor for their conduct at Wounded Knee.

Although fighting between the Native Americans and whites continued occasionally throughout January, the Wounded Knee Massacre is generally considered the end of the **Plains Indian Wars** as well as the end of the American frontier.

WPA

See **Works Progress Administration**

Wright Brothers

Wilbur Wright (1867–1948) and Orville Wright (1871–1912) were brothers whose lives were entwined until death. Pioneers in **aviation**, their flying machines and first successful flight in 1903 ensured their place in the history books.

The Wright brothers were quite different, but their personalities balanced each other. Both men were intelligent—Wilbur had an amazing memory, while Orville was always coming up with new ideas and inventions. The two brothers together accomplished more than either of them likely could have as individuals. Where Wilbur used his analytical skills to figure out technical problems during the invention of the airplane, Orville's positive outlook and enthusiasm kept the pair from losing hope.

Early years

Wilbur Wright was born on April 16, 1867, in Millville, **Indiana**. He excelled in his school studies. In his senior year of high school, Wilbur and his family moved to Dayton, **Ohio**. Wilbur did not graduate. He took preparatory classes at a high school in Dayton with the plan of studying at Yale and becoming a teacher.

In 1885 the young Wilbur sustained a serious injury during an ice hockey game. He was left with digestive disorders and a heart condition that would linger throughout his life. Wilbur became a withdrawn and depressed man. He gave up his plans for Yale and isolated himself from the world. He spent most of his time caring for his sick mother, who was dying from tuberculosis, a common bacterial infection. He remained devoted to her until her death in 1889.