

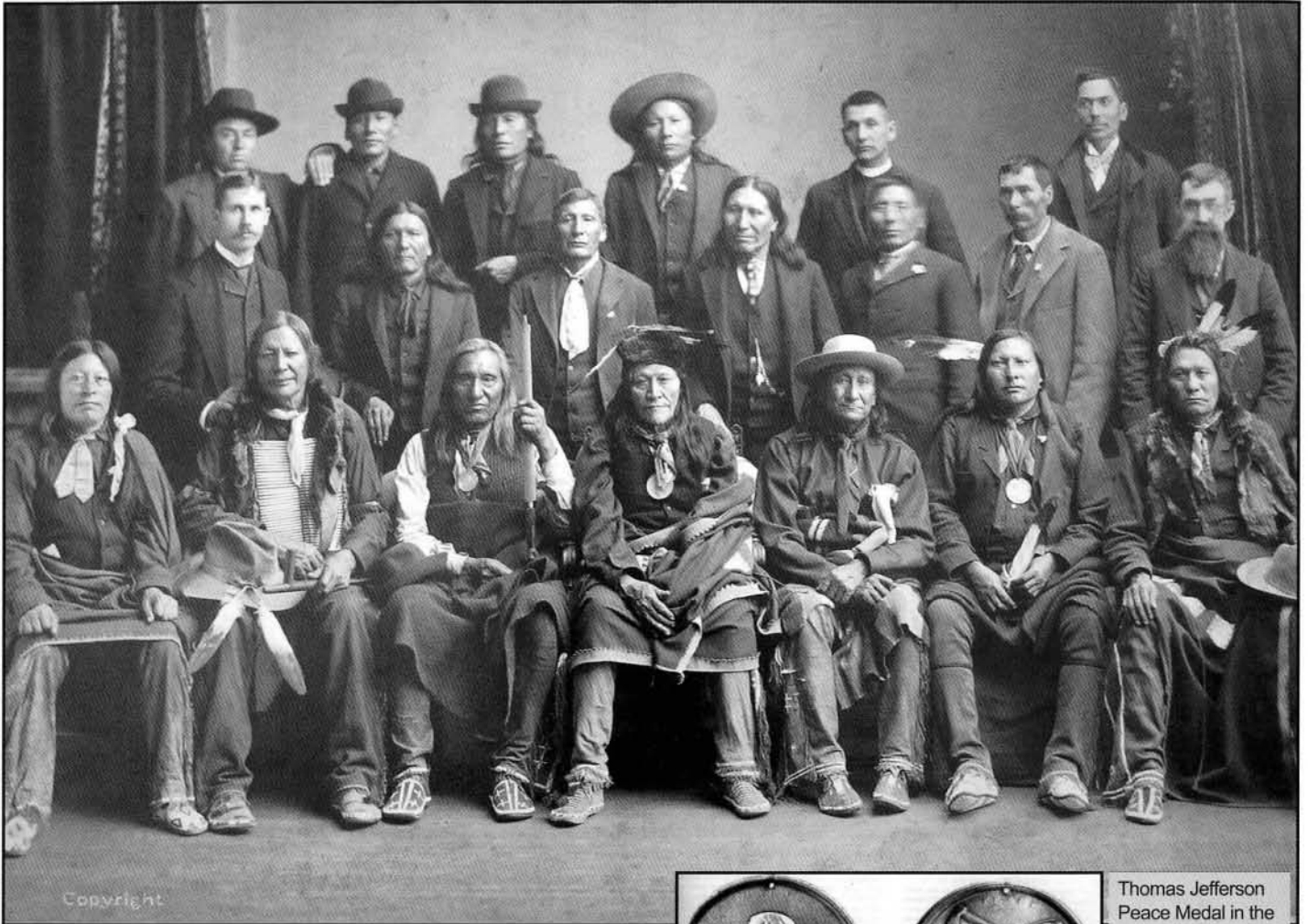
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Peace Medals and the Great Father

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Peace Medals &



the Great Father

From colonial times through the 19th century English, Spanish, French, and Russian governments and trading companies often gave silver “peace medals” to tribal leaders as symbols of allegiance. These medals bore the likeness of the ruling monarchs and became popular in the business of empire-building to both native and European leaders.

Soon after achieving its independence, the United States recognized that North American Indian leaders coveted peace medals and adopted the distribution of these tokens as part of its diplomatic protocols. From George Washington (1789-1797) to Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893), the U.S. Mint struck a new se-



Thomas Jefferson Peace Medal in the Museum of Western Expansion, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri.

Figure A (above): The Sioux Delegation to Washington, D.C. from Dakota Territory photographed by the Studio of Charles Milton Bell, 1891. Row one, left to right: High Hawk, Fire Lightning, Little Wound, Two Strike, Young-Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses, Spotted Elk, and Big Road. Middle row, left to right: F.D. Lewis, He Dog, Spotted Horse, American Horse, Major George Sword of Pine Ridge Reservation Indian Police, Louis Shangrau, and Bat Pourier (interpreter). Back row, left to right: Zaphier [Zephier?], Hump, High Pipe, Fast Thunder, Reverend Charles S. Cook, and P.T. Johnson.

Courtesy Marquette University digital collections and the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records.



Figure B (left): Left Hand, an Ojibwa leader from Oklahoma-Indian Territory photographed by the Studio of Charles Milton Bell, no date (after 1873). Left Hand's medal apparently was not received on this trip to Washington because medals distributed after 1873 were oval, not circular. This medal corresponds most closely with those distributed earlier by Presidents Buchanan and Lincoln. Courtesy Marquette University digital collections and the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records.

ries of silver peace medals for each presidential administration. The face featured an engraved likeness of the current "Great Father" or President whereas the verso on most contained the motto "Peace and Friendship" with clasped hands and a crossed pipe and tomahawk. Tribal leaders received the medals at treaty signings, visits by government officials, and at White House visits to the President in Washington, D.C.

For 20 years beginning in 1873, the Studio of Charles Milton Bell in Washington, D.C., photographed many of the native visitors to the White House who often dressed in their full ceremonial attire. Among them was this Sioux Delegation (**Figure A**) and Left Hand, an Ojibwa leader (**Figure B**). Other studios near Indian Country also photographed delegations as this Osage Delegation (**Figure D**) that presumably was traveling either to or from a visit to Washington.

By the 20th century, political realities had changed. Subordinate federal officials now represented the Presi-



Figure C: Among these Sicangu children on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, the eldest girl is believed to be wearing heirloom medals acquired from her relatives. She appears to be wearing Lincoln medals. Photographer unknown, ca. 1915-1925.

Courtesy Marquette University digital collections and the St. Francis Mission Records.



Figure D (left): The Osage Delegation photographed by the Studio of Prettyman and Cornish, Arkansas City, Kansas, ca. 1891. Courtesy Marquette University digital collections and the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records.

Figure E(below): Among these elders gathered on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, ca. 1930, note the peace medal worn by the man to the left. Photographed by Reverend Michael J. Halligan, ca. 1930. Courtesy Marquette University digital collections and the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records.





Figure F: Oglala elders presenting a pipe with an ornate stem to John Collier while he visited the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Collier met with tribal leaders as representative of the Great Father and Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Note that at least one elder in the delegation is shown wearing a peace medal. Photographed by Reverend Stephen E. McNamara, S.J., 1934.

Courtesy Marquette University digital collections and the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records.

dent and peace medals were no longer given. But the medals received previously remained cherished possessions as evidenced by the photographs of distinguished elders (**Figure E**) and those descended from them (**Figure C**). Furthermore, the ceremony and gift exchange reminiscent of past White House visits continued to occur on rare occasions as in the giving of this pipe to a presidential representative (**Figure F**).

For Further Study

Diplomats in Buckskins: A History of Indian Delegations in Washington City, Herman J. Viola, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 1981

Indian Peace Medals in American History, Francis Paul Prucha, Rivolo Books, Bluffton, S.C., 1994 reprint

Marquette University Digital Collections,
<http://www.marquette.edu/library/MUDC/>

“Prints from the Boyce Collection of Charles Milton Bell (1848-1893) Photographs” in Guide to the Collections of the Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives,
<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/index.htm>

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