



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Funeral services were held January 9 for the last full-blooded member of the Mandan Indian Tribe, Mrs. Mattie Grinnell, who lived to be 108 years old. Mrs. Grinnell died January 6 at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Rose Fournier, in Twin Buttes, North Dakota.

Living through more than a century of tremendous changes for her people and her land, Mrs. Grinnell retained to the end an amazing vitality, charm and spirit.

In 1968 at the age of 101 she took part in the Poor People's March on Washington. She tended a large garden every summer and prided herself on having "the cleanest garden around Twin Buttes." She was very interested in the young and found the Vietnam War upsetting. She said that she prayed every day for peace in the world. Her daughter said that she remained alert and in good health during her last year.

Mrs. Grinnell had her own theory on her longevity. "I still use Indian medicine. That's why I'm over 100 years old."

She had a great appreciation for her Indian heritage. She knew the religious ceremonies, dances and legends and was, as she asserted, the only one who knew how to prepare the corn balls and sun-dried meat used in tribal ceremonies. She acknowledged that education was very important for the young, but added that her people should make more use of what they had been taught by tradition.

Mrs. Grinnell, herself, had only four years of schooling. She had to drop out when her father became ill and she was needed to help with the work at home. A few years before her death she jokingly remarked that if she had gone 12 years she would have been in the White House.

She was almost certainly the last person to receive approval for a Civil War Widow's pension. She received hers in 1971 when friends and Bureau of Indian Affairs officials urged her to submit an application.

Born at Like-A-Fish-Hook village on the Fort Berthold Reservation one year after the Civil War, Mrs. Grinnell was married twice. Her first husband, John Nagel, died in 1904. He was a German immigrant farmer who had served with the Third Regiment of the Missouri Volunteer Cavalry from 1861 to 1864. Her marriage to Charles Grinnell in 1907 ended in divorce in 1935.

She is survived by four children, all from her first marriage, 40 grandchildren, 28 great grandchildren and 5 great, great grandchildren. Three children from her second marriage are now deceased.

Three years ago an article about Mrs. Grinnell was published in "North Dakota Horizons." The author wrote of her that she had the "face of nobility, proud, lined with the passing of 105 winters and the pains of her people, regal, shadowed with the timeless despair of the reservations, but calm and stoic in quiet acceptance of burdens."

She lived a full life.

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