

Dec 17, 1928.

Supt. E.D. Mossman,
Standing Rock Agency,
Fort Yates, North Dakota.

Dear Sir:

I have your letter of December 14. Supt. Jermarck advised me to write to you a while back, but my little girl has taken pneumonia for the third time this year, and I had to let everything go.

About the same time I heard from Supt. Jermarck, Miss Frances Denamore suggested that I get in touch with you, and that you would assist me, she thought. I know how men in your position regard wild-eyed journalists, who gather a few notions about Indians and then misrepresent everything you have told them. For twenty years John H. Seger, Agent to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes down here, was a close friend of mine. I believe I understand how you feel about this.

But I am not a journalist. I am a historian and author of several books on the West, and in these I try to put forward the truth without prejudice or apology. The laudatory biography is as out-of-date now as the savage attack. What people want is not a hero or a villain, but a man painted as he was. In any case, as a teacher in the State University here, I could not afford to publish cheap stuff. I am a Rhodes Scholar, and you need have no fear that I will misquote you. If you know my books, you know that they are serious attempts to give the facts and the truth. As it happens my publisher is also the publisher of Supt. McLaughlin's book, which you have recommended. From these statements you can rest assured that I am no yellow journalist trying to get something hot for the Sunday edition. I have lived among Plains Indians most of my life. My next book will be about Sitting Bull, and I am prepared to go to some trouble to get the facts. I hope you will help me.

What you say about the man's behaviour at the council after the Custer fight is just what I expected, from what I know of him. That is what I need- exact accounts of what he said on various occasions, how he influenced his followers, how he gained ~~that~~ his influence and how he lost it. Opinions of a man's character are useless in writing a biography unless they are backed up by true accounts of things he did and said. The reader expects the author to prove every point by a true story. That is the trouble with Sitting Bull's life: there are too many opinions (pro and con) and too few stories.

The reader does not care whether the man they read about was good or bad. What they want is to see him do his stuff, to understand how he got that way, to get at the man's way of thinking.