

**George Bent. (1843-1918):
Metis Survivor of the Sand Creek Massacre**

Mark S. Anderson has written a biography of Bent: *Halfbreed: The Remarkable True Story of George Bent—Caught between the Worlds of the Indian and the White Man* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004). Bent was born in 1843 to the prominent white trader Colonel William Bent and his Tsis tsis tas (Cheyenne) wife, Owl Woman. William Bent built an elaborate adobe fort on the eastern Colorado plains, near present day La Junta, known as Bent's Fort. It was the only privately owned, fortified placement in the west. Due to its placement on the Santa Fe Trail, and because of Bent's association with the Cheyenne, this fort became a major merchandise center on the southern plains.

George Bent was raised as a Cheyenne Indian. Bent's mother died in childbirth when he was four years old and his father remarried to his wife's sister, Yellow Woman, the mother of George's half brother, Charles. After receiving an education in white schools, Bent fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War and went on to become a Cheyenne warrior. When the war came, George (age 17) and the younger Charles joined the Confederate Army and served under General Sterling Price. He served at the battles of Wilson's Ridge, the Battle of Pea Ridge then in Van Dorn's campaigns in Arkansas and Mississippi. He was captured at the siege of Corinth, taken to St. Louis then paroled to return to his father's new fort on the Upper Kansas. But in 1863, George Bent returned to his mother's people, the Southern Cheyenne; just as the Indian wars in the Plains began.



George Bent and his wife Magpie

He survived the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre having been severely wounded in the hip-and then fought for revenge with the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers. Bent later served as a prominent interpreter and negotiator for whites and an adviser to tribal leaders. He rode with the great Indian leaders Red Cloud, Tall Bull, and Roman Nose, and he knew frontier legends Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill Hickok, and George Custer.

Bent married Magpie, a niece of Black Kettle, and they lived in his lodge for three years. He served as interpreter for Black Kettle during the Treaty negotiations of October 1867. However, he remained involved fighting on the Indian side right up to 1874. When Bent passed away on May 19, 1918, he was survived by six children, Mary, William, Daisy, Lucy, George Jr., and Julia. Magpie, his wife, died May 10, 1886. Bent's other wives, Kiowa Woman and Standing Out, passed away in 1913 and 1945.

Toward the end of his life, George Bent set the historical record straight and preserved the memory of the Cheyenne Indians as a free people. He worked with historians and ethnologists of the day such as George Bird Grinnell, George E. Hyde and, James Mooney. They all agreed that what they knew of nineteenth-century Cheyenne life came largely from George Bent. As a Metis, Bent lived between two worlds right up until the time of his death in 1918.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute