

# Standing Rock Preservation Recordings. George Herzog and Members of the Yanktoni Tribe (1928)

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Essay by Daniel B. Reed (guest post)\*



*Three informants for the Herzog Yanktonai-Dakota Collection: (from left to right) Two Shields, No Heart, and Jerome Standing Soldier - State Historical Society of North Dakota; detail from 1952-06242, 1952-5001, and 1952-3007 (<https://libraries.indiana.edu/yanktonai-dakota>)*

George Herzog (1901-1984) was an innovative music scholar whose work crossed continental and disciplinary boundaries. Born in Budapest, Herzog in his youth studied piano and music theory, familiarizing himself with the Hungarian folk music research methods of Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly, with whom he studied counterpoint. His music studies led him to Berlin in 1920, and, by 1922, he was working as an assistant to Erich von Hornbostel at the Berlin Phonogram-Archiv. In this capacity, Herzog found himself in the company of a host of scholars whose work would become known as the “Berlin School” of comparative musicology. Moving to New York in 1925, Herzog began studying at Columbia University, where he began studying with anthropologist Franz Boas, who introduced the young scholar to anthropological field methods and diffusion theory. Herzog’s own research would combine comparative musicology’s emphases on decontextualized sonic analysis and archiving of “primitive” and folk music recordings with Boasian field methods, effectively linking two significant historical schools of thought in the emergent type of music research that, in the mid-20th century, came to be known as ethnomusicology (Reed 1993; Nettl 1991).

In 1948, Herzog moved to Indiana University in Bloomington to take a position as Professor of Anthropology. He brought with him not only his own field recording collections but also collections of his contemporaries that he had assembled at Columbia and recordings from the Berlin Phonogram-Archiv; these collections constituted the core around which the institution now called the Archives of Traditional Music (ATM) was created. Among the tens of thousands

of unique and historically significant field recording collections at the ATM is the collection Herzog recorded in 1928 in Fort Yates, North Dakota, in the Standing Rock Reservation.

The Standing Rock Reservation, home to bands of Lakota and Yanktonai Dakota peoples, was established in 1889 when the US Congress divided the larger Great Sioux Reservation into six smaller units. Under the auspices of the American Museum of Natural History, 27-year-old doctoral student Herzog went to Standing Rock during the summer of 1928 intending to document a representative sample of Yanktonai Dakota music, including both older and newer songs. The resulting collection consists of 195 wax cylinders accompanied by extensive written documentation including English translations of song texts (prepared with the assistance of native Yanktonai scholar and fellow Boas student Ella Deloria), field notes and musical transcriptions. Documented by these recordings and accompanying materials are 205 Yanktonai Dakota songs representing 32 sacred and secular genres. Hoping to gain access to repertoire from as wide of a historical range possible, Herzog recorded songs sung by seven men ranging from middle-aged to elders, including Joe No Heart (born c. 1846), Wat'íbidiza (born c. 1853), Has Tricks (born c. 1867), Two Shields (born c. 1873), Edward Afraid of Hawk (born c. 1874), Jerome Standing Soldier (born c. 1880), and Fred Luis (born c. 1883) (Archives of Traditional Music).

One reason this collection is especially significant is that the song repertoires Herzog recorded represent a distinctive time period in the Yanktonai Dakota's history in relation to the colonizing force of the United States government. As anthropologist Erik Gooding observes, Herzog's collection includes songs from sacred ceremonies that were banned by the US federal policy. The presence in Herzog's collection of songs from both the Sun Dance (banned in 1882) and the Ghost Dance (violently suppressed, most infamously at the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890) demonstrate that ceremonial songs continued to be sung decades after colonial efforts to eradicate the religious practices from which they came (Gooding 1997:3-5).

The presence of these sacred songs in the collection notwithstanding, the majority of the songs Herzog recorded at Standing Rock were secular in nature. Gooding hypothesizes that the relatively large percentage of social dance and personal songs in Herzog's Standing Rock collection evidences the reduction of religious ceremonial practice resulting from US government suppression. To illustrate this point, Gooding notes that a collection recorded at Standing Rock by Frances Densmore from 1911 to 1914 includes far more religious and ceremonial songs than does Herzog's collection made just 14 to 17 years later. Specifically, "ceremonial and religious songs make up 41.2% of the Densmore collection and only 10% of the Herzog collection" (Gooding 1997:12).

Language is yet another reason that this collection is so important. Yanktonai Dakota, a dialect of the Siouan language Dakota, is among those languages considered to be endangered or becoming extinct. Wilhelm K. Meya, CEO of The Language Conservancy, states that as of 2019, approximately just 1,500 speakers remained, and that number likely fell below 1,000 during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Meya 2022). Recordings such as those in Herzog's Standing Rock collection often serve as vital resources in language and cultural revitalization efforts.

In sum, George Herzog's 1928 Standing Rock collection endures as a gem of our national recorded heritage, significant for its place in ethnomusicological and anthropological history, and, most importantly, for its role preserving an important transitional period in the Yanktonai Dakota tribe's struggles with United States colonialism in the form of cultural, musical and linguistic practices that remain invaluable to Yanktonai Dakota peoples and others to this day.

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*\*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and may not reflect those of the Library of Congress.*