

Waníyetu Wowápi Thá Mathó Wakhán (The Winter Count of Medicine Bear), recording the years 1823–1917

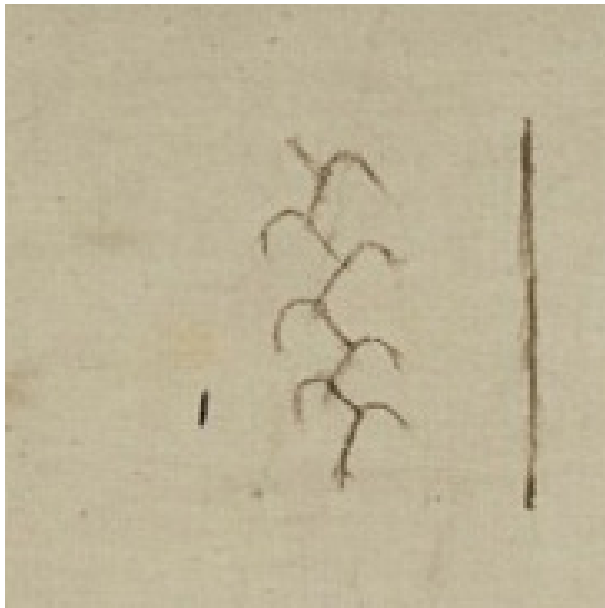


Look & Discuss

On this winter count, each year is recorded beginning on the upper-left side and spiraling inward in a clockwise direction. Dakota Goodhouse (Yanktonai Sioux) translated each pictograph based on his knowledge of Yanktonai history and his knowledge of winter counts.

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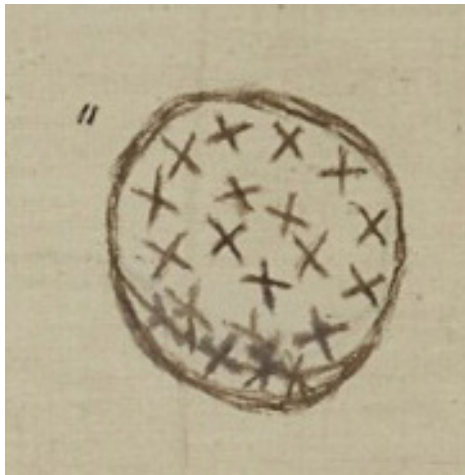
This pictograph, a stalk of corn, represents the year 1823. Goodhouse translates the pictograph as “That winter they cached parched ears of corn.”

“Cached” means stored for later use. “Parched corn” is dried corn that is cooked over high heat. It becomes a lightweight, nutritious food that stores and travels well. It can be eaten as a snack or ground up for soups and stews.

Based on this pictograph, what do you think was most memorable about 1823 for this Yanktonai family group?

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This image represents 1833: “The year the stars fell down.”

The pictograph represents a well-known event, the Leonid Meteor Shower, which occurred in 1833. This meteor shower is depicted on most winter counts and is used as the starting point for counting backward and forward.



1847: “Two white traders camped with them that winter.”

Some years were memorable because of contact between the band and outsiders.

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1851: “They hunted a red elk.”

Others recall memorable hunts.



1879: “Black Warbonnet led a successful horse raid.”

This pictograph commemorates a victory.

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1890: “They killed Sitting Bull.”

In 1890, the final conflict between Sioux and federal soldiers occurred at Wounded Knee, on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Sitting Bull, a holy man, chief, and leader of the Sioux resistance, was among those killed in battle.



1897: “His heart died.”

Many of the pictographs that follow 1890 reveal the hardships, especially the hopelessness, associated with reservation life.