

FRANK BIRD LINDERMAN

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1869 — 1938

"Sign-Talker with a Straight Tongue"

FRANK BIRD LINDERMAN (1869-1938) earned a notable niche in Western literature by recording faithfully Plains Indian tales, legends, and customs. And, in the end, he succeeded as a writer because "he was a Dane before he was a talker."

LINDERMAN WAS BORN on September 23, 1869 in Cleveland, Ohio, but moved to Montana's Flathead Valley when he was only 16. After enjoying a variety of careers — including logger, cowhand, writer, newspaper editor and politician — Linderman, with his wife and three daughters, moved to the west shore of Flathead Lake in 1917. There he devoted his full attention to writing. Before his death in 1938, he published 7 volumes of traditional Native American lore, 2 trapper novels, 2 recorded Indian biographies, one volume of poetry, a juvenile nature tale, and numerous periodical pieces.

LINDERMAN HAD BEEN a friend of Montana's Native American people since his earliest days in the state (even playing an instrumental role in the establishment of the Rocky Boy's Reservation for the Chippewa and Crow in 1916). In his writing about these peoples, Linderman proved to be a perfectionist. He diligently researched tribal stories, and always checked his interpreter's translation through his expert use of sign language. Frank Linderman may have begun as an amateur ethnographer, but his publications reflected a writer of immense integrity, clarity, and humanity — an absolutely trustworthy observer and recorder, a "realist listener."

THE "SIGN-TALKER WITH A STRAIGHT TONGUE" was adapted into the *Blackfoot, the Crow, and the Crow* tales. His biography of the great Crow Chief Plenty Crow, *Admitted Crow*, remains a classic that reveals the confidence placed in Linderman by Montana's Indians. *Plenty Crow* included:

"I am glad I have told you these things, Sign-Talker. You have told my heart, and I have told yours."

