

"Give Way Dakota," in Nancy Eubank, The Dakota Roots 12:2 (Winter, 1984)

## Give Way, Dakota!

Different ways of living take different kinds of space, and some ways take more space than others. On Manhattan Island, only 23 square miles, the tall buildings of New York City are home to nearly two million people. In Minneapolis, where most people live in single-family houses, fewer than one million people take up 55 square miles. Both the people on Manhattan Island and those in Minneapolis depend on farms far from their cities to grow their food. And they require a complex system of transportation to move the things they need to the places where they live.

The Dakota Indians who lived in Minnesota before white people settled there took their food, shelter, tools, and other necessities directly from the land around them. They hunted animals for meat and skins, netted

fish from streams and rivers, and gathered wild plants. When supplies ran low in one place, they moved to another. Their lives depended on having lots of land and being able to travel to the places where they could find the things they needed.

The Indians had agreements with each other about which bands or tribes would use certain areas for hunting, fishing, harvesting wild rice, or tapping maple trees for sugar. They did not think about "owning" land in the same way that 19th-century white settlers thought of it. The Dakota did not think that land should be closed off with fences and gates. Nor did they think that land on which all life depended could be sold. "Only very foolish men would sell their mother earth," most Indians agreed.



*When these Dakota traveled to new hunting grounds, they carried their belongings with them on horse-drawn travois (pronounced trahv wah). Seth Eastman, an officer stationed at Fort Snelling, painted this watercolor of Indians on the move in 1850.*

Special Room

People whose roots were in the farming communities of Europe saw land and its use in a very different way. Land that was fenced and plowed and planted could produce a much larger amount of food than land roamed by animals and filled with wild grasses and trees. Crops harvested from the farmland could be sold to buy other things—machinery, furniture, clothes, and foods grown elsewhere. The land itself could be given a cash value so that farmers could sell it if they wanted to move somewhere else. To these people, Indian use of the land seemed wasteful.

In the 1840s, when American settlers reached Minnesota, the Dakota lived along the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers on prairie lands that were ideal for plowing and planting. This rich land made white farmers eager to use it in the way that seemed best to them. The settlers felt that if the Indians did

not want to farm the land they should move away, whether they wanted to or not.

The Dakota did move on, forced by the U.S. government to give up their hunting grounds. This sad part of Minnesota's past—the Indians' loss of their land—is pictured on the state seal. In the foreground of the seal a farmer plows his field, while in the background an Indian on horseback gallops away. Mary Eastman, the wife of soldier-artist Seth Eastman who helped design the seal, wrote a poem about its meaning:

*Give way, give way, young warrior,  
Thou and thy steed give way—  
Rest not, though lingers on the hills  
The red sun's parting ray.  
The rocky bluff and prairie land  
The white man claims them now,  
The symbols of his course are here,  
The rifle, axe, and plow.*

