

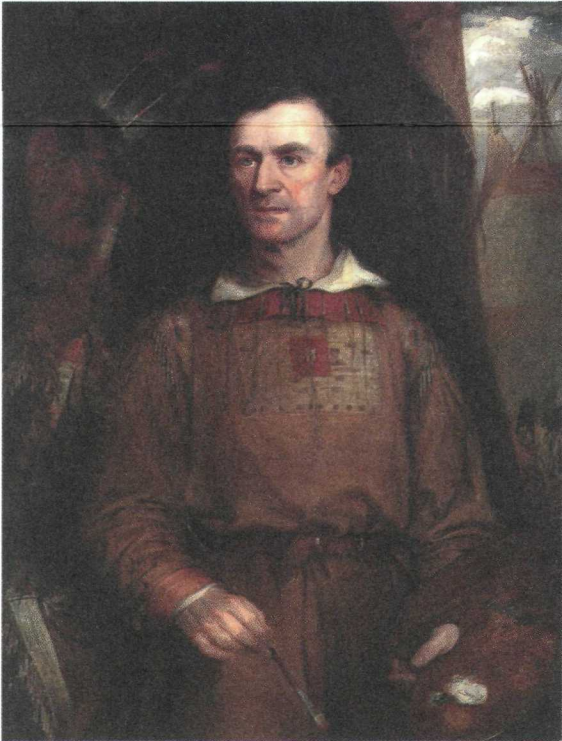
Pipestone

National Monument
Minnesota

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



George Catlin



George Catlin

George Catlin was born in Pennsylvania in 1796. He trained as a lawyer, but gave that up when a tribal delegation visited Philadelphia and sparked his interest. He decided to devote his career to painting America's Indigenous people in their own lands. As a painter, Catlin was largely if not entirely self-taught.

Catlin spent 1830 to 1836 traveling west and producing 470 portraits and portrayals of Indigenous life from nearly forty different tribes. In 1832, he painted the Assiniboine, Blackfoot, Crow, Plains Ojibwa, Cree, Hidatsa, and Mandan peoples.

It was during his travels among various tribes in the early 1830s that Catlin noticed many leaders and warriors using pipes made of a richly-colored red stone. When he asked about the stone, he was told of a quarry near the dividing ridge between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

The site was considered sacred ground where people from many tribes met in peace to quarry the stone. Catlin became very interested in finding the source of this remarkable stone, and set off in search of the pipestone quarry.

In 1836, despite objections from Santee Dakota tribes, Catlin insisted on visiting the pipestone quarries. The Santee told Catlin that the area was off limits to whites, but Catlin later admitted that his curiosity and determination increased with their resistance. At the quarries, he took a sample of pipestone with him and sent it to Boston to be analyzed. The geologist who received and analyzed the stone named it Catlinite in Catlin's honor, since this stone's mineral composition was new to science.

The number of European-Americans who visited during the 1830s increased, with shorter and shorter time between visits. By the end of the decade, the steady stream of explorers had begun to bring the quarry to the attention of the non-Indigenous world.



Catlin's most famous piece at the pipestone quarries, 'On the Coteau des Prairies' depicts people working in the quarries, the Three Maidens, and Winnewissa Falls in the background.

Other Early Explorers

George Catlin was not the first white man to visit the quarries. There are several accounts of others visiting the Pipestone area before 1836. Even as early as the late 1600s, Europeans knew of its existence.

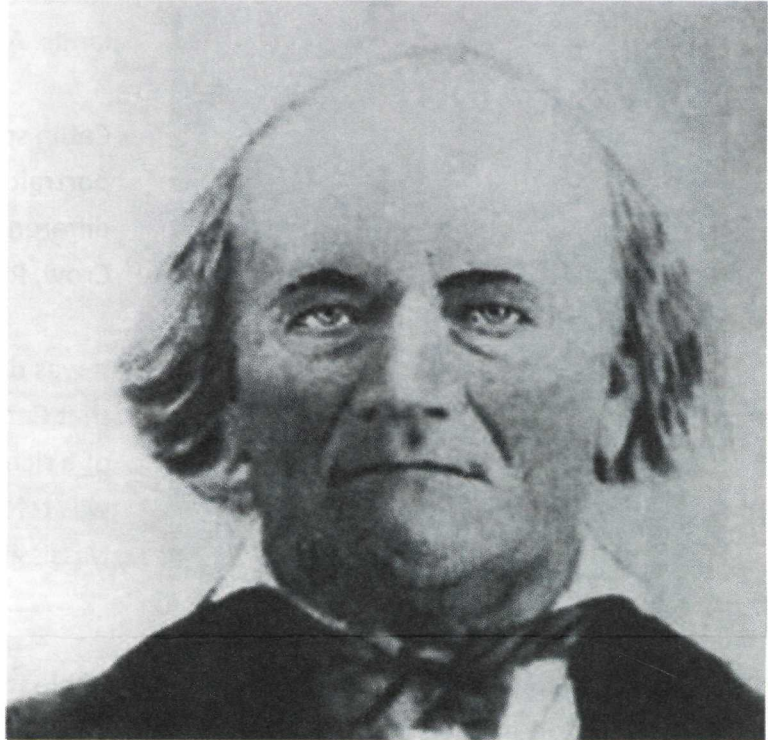
Charles Le Sueur (1657-1704)

In 1700, Pierre Charles Le Sueur, a French trader who defied French regulations by traveling deep into areas Europeans had not explored, identified the "Hinhanetons" of the "village of the red-stone quarry." Most likely, he reached the vicinity of what is today Pipestone National Monument and encountered the Ihanktonwan (Yankton Sioux) Tribe.

Philander Prescott (1801-1862)

In September of 1832, the American Fur Company sent Philander Prescott to what is now the state of South Dakota to hunt beaver. After a number of days on the trail with his brigade and family, Prescott located the pipestone quarries. He wrote, "The next morning we moved off in search of water, for where we camped water was scarce and the horses could not get enough. About noon we arrived at the famous place called the Pipestone Quarry."

Prescott and his party blasted the quartzite above the pipestone, collecting enough stone to make about twenty pipes. He described the deposit as follows: "When I was there diggings were about 100 yards long, and at the south end the diggings are about ten feet deep. The pipestone is about a foot thick, but in seams from 1/4 to 3 inches thick; in the deep part of the quarry there is more clay and the pipestone is speckled. Otherwise it has pale, white spots, and some has deeper red spots. And some is a pure red and smooth as marble, and fire does not crack it."



Philander Prescott

Joseph Nicollet (1786-1843)

French scientist and geographer Joseph Nicollet led three American expeditions to map the upper Mississippi between 1836 and 1839. His journeys resulted in a remarkably accurate record of an area more than half the size of Europe. Nicollet's journals tell us that he learned much from the inhabitants of this region, particularly from the Dakota and Ojibwe. In 1838, he traveled to the Pipestone Quarries, where he documented Indigenous people quarrying pipestone. He and several men on the expedition carved their initials into one of the rocks near the waterfall. The Nicollet Inscription can be seen near Winnewissa Falls on the Circle Trail.



Joseph Nicollet