

SHERIDAN AT THE REINS: CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE CAVALRY,
SHERIDAN, AND NATIVE AMERICANS DURING THE INDIAN WARS, 1868-1877

A CREATIVE PROJECT

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BY

NATHANIEL C. ADAMS

DR. DOUGLAS SEEFELDT – ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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This project is currently available at:

<http://historyweb.digitalhistory.bsu.edu/ncadams/sheridanatthereins/>

Sheridan at the Reins: Changing Perceptions of the Cavalry, Sheridan, and Native Americans

During the Indian Wars, 1868-1877, first began with an examination of the Union Cavalry

during the Civil War and the lasting changes to the cavalry of the U.S. Army following the War.

This paper will trace the process of taking this initial research to its conclusion as a 3-credit

CRPR 698: Creative Project in digital History.

During the Fall of 2017, I conducted a study of the Union Cavalry at Gettysburg as a part of the Seminar in Modern Historiography under the guidance of Dr. Abel Alves. During this study the initial ideas of this project were born. Examining the historiography of the Battle of Gettysburg revealed the lack of scholarship focusing on the involvement of the Union Cavalry in this turning point of the war. During this same semester I was exposed to the U.S. Cavalry of the West in the Mythic West course under Dr. Douglas Seefeldt. Through coincidence I soon found myself immersed in scholarship pertaining to the United States Cavalry of the late nineteenth century and discovered the focus of my studies. That semester's work also included a digital history seminar with Dr. Seefeldt where attained an understanding of the valuable skills of a digital historian. This seminar allowed me to create my own digital project that I used to present the evidence found in primary and secondary works pertaining to the cavalry's involvement in the Battle of Gettysburg. This project introduced me to digital textual analysis and detailed digital mapping tools. In these studies I was exposed to General Philip H. Sheridan who made a name for himself in the Civil War as the commander of the Union Cavalry Corps. Upon further examination I discovered that Sheridan proved influential in the West following the War as well as an Indian fighter. Sheridan became the link between these two fields of study, an interest in

which was further fostered by an independent study conducted with Dr. Seefeldt on the changing historiography of the United States Military in the American West. These courses prepared me for working on this creative project. This project is much larger in scale than my previous digital work. In *Sheridan at the Reins* I examine 34 government documents, 79 articles, two memoirs, and numerous secondary works that cover over a decade of fighting between Native Americans and the U.S. Army. In the seminar project I examined the actions of the cavalry during the battle of Gettysburg and where they were during the battle through spatial and textual analysis. This project broadens the scope and depth of the analysis of the cavalry to include articles written by the officers and in newspapers at the time that focus on the role of the United States Cavalry in the West. The examination of these articles expanded beyond the actions of the cavalry but also includes the opinions of the public and officers of them, the Indians, and of Sheridan during this time. This project also includes an analysis of newspapers from across the country.

Primary source analysis may be the largest portion of this project but the secondary source comprehension should not be overlooked. Since the beginning of my graduate studies in the Fall of 2017, I have reviewed relevant secondary scholarship on the topics that pertain to my project. Have a detailed understanding of secondary works is important to any good research. In this case, a detailed understanding of the changes taking place in the Union Cavalry during the Civil War and the American West after the Civil War proved vital to my research.

The idea for this research topic has changed over time. Initially this work was intended to focus on Phil Sheridan and the Union Cavalry in the last years of the Civil War. Further discussion with Dr. Seefeldt during our independent study led me to change this examination to the years following the war to merge together all the research I had conducted during my studies. Having selected the time period to examine this topic in, I began combing through our library to

find the primary sources that I would eventually examine. I gained access to the *Army & Navy Journal* through our library from the years 1863 and 1876 in which I searched for articles relating to Sheridan and the cavalry. The library also provided me access to the *Reports of the Secretary of War* from 1865-1877 which provided me with a wealth of statistical evidence pertaining to the Army during this period. Next using the *New York Times* (EBSCO) historical newspaper database I conducted searches on topics pertaining to the cavalry in the West and acquired over a hundred and sixty articles from the *New York Times*. At this point in the project I had some two hundred primary sources to examine pertaining to the cavalry in the Indian Wars. As I completed my acquisition of these sources, my projects approach to the newspaper articles shifted from focusing on just New York to examining a number of states from across the nation including Montana, South Carolina, Illinois, and New York to achieve a broader understanding of national public opinion. This change took me to *Chronicling America* from the Library of Congress and a variety of newspapers from these states. Once the articles and editorials I wanted to examine were determined, I began converting the PDF documents into plain text, often typing each one by hand into a text document. Fortunately the works from *Chronicling America* were converted to text documents on their site which dramatically reduced the time needed to prepare the document for text analysis. This process of acquiring and converting these documents took roughly six weeks.

This creative project needed to be digital for multiple reasons. Articles and editorials from the 1860s and 1870s tend to be much larger and harder to read than publications of today. One of the reasons I used *Chronicling America* was because it was impossible to read through the hundreds of lengthy articles from the *New York Times* database. Using digital tools for this analysis facilitated comparison of trends, themes, and differences amongst these articles in both

military and civilian publications. To conduct a detailed examination of these materials, I used Voyant. Voyant, a “web-based reading and analysis environment for digital texts” (<http://voyant-tools.org/docs/#!/guide/about>). Voyant allows users to upload their own corpus of digitized texts that can then be analyzed through the different tools contained within Voyant. Some of the most useful tools for my own project have been Cirrus, Contexts, Links, BubbleLines, and TermsBerry. The Cirrus tool is a word cloud tool that shows the highest frequency terms within a corpus. This is a useful starting point for an analysis of documents. Seeing which words appear most frequently reveals important themes within these articles. Similarly, TermsBerry not only allows the user to visualize frequently used terms, but it also shows the number of documents within the corpus that the terms appear. The Context tool proves to be the most useful in this examination. It shows a word (selected by the user) with a few words that come before and after it, typically five before and after. This helps to explain the different contexts that an important word like cavalry is used in the text.

There is a wide range of other digital tools and resources used in this project including Templated, Google’s Ngram, Timeline JS, and ArcGIS. Templated is a website with free downloadable HTML and CSS templates for use. Google’s Ngram is “an online search engine that charts the frequencies of any set of comma-delimited search strings using a yearly count of n-grams found in sources printed between 1500 and 2008.” Timeline JS is a valuable “open-source tool that enables anyone to build visually rich, interactive timelines.” ArcGIS is a valuable spatial analysis tool that can “connect people, locations, and data using interactive maps.” All of these tools facilitated the creation of this project and displaying it in an interactive digital format.

The last part of this project and a crucial aspect to its presentation was determining the right design for it. I worked on organizing this project throughout the course of the research but it was not until all the digital tools were gathered that the digital template started to take shape. Choosing what order to approach the analysis became thematic and each of these digital tools amplified various aspects of the analysis in different ways. For all of the editing of my HTML and CSS pages I used Notepad ++. Once I finished editing and making revisions with the guidance of my advisor, I used FTP client Filezilla to upload files that I created onto the server that hosts my project. Without these digital tools and the creation of this digital project I would not have been able to write a conventional print thesis that conveys this statistical information in an effective way. First, the size and quantity of articles would have been considerably smaller due to the length of the summer semester. Second, using these tools allowed me to create an interactive digital medium that displayed far more information and engages the audience more than a print thesis would have. These tools don't do the work for you; they facilitate the presentation of scholarship. Digital scholarship has continued to become more prevalent with modern technology and it is important for historians to embrace these digital tools to continue to provide new forms of scholarship.