



# Uses of Plants by the Indians of the Missouri River Region

*Melvin Randolph Gilmore*

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Melvin Randolph Gilmore, 1868-1940, received a Ph.D. in Botany in 1914. He was Professor of Biological Science at Cotner College from 1905-1911, and museum curator; a member of the scientific staff at Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York; Curator of Ethnology, Museum of Anthropology, at the University of Michigan; an adopted member of the Pawnee Indian tribe; noted authority on Plains Indians, author in scientific periodicals on the material culture of Indians in the Missouri valley, ancient customs and ceremonies, and folklore.

From inside the book:

"The results contained in the following paper are born of the desire to ascertain so far as possible the relation of the native people of the plains to one phase of their indigenous physical environment—its plant life—and their ingenuity in supplying their necessities and pleasures therefrom. It must be borne in mind that the sources of supply available to any of the tribes of the American race were greatly restricted as compared with the field from which our European race draws its supplies. Many of the plants of this continent utilized by its native people, however, might well be useful acquisitions for our people if made known to us.

Another potent reason for gathering such information while it may still be obtained, before the death of all the old people who alone possess it, is that it is only in the light of knowledge of physical environments that folklore, ritual, ceremony, custom, song, story, and philosophy can be interpreted intelligently. The intellectual and spiritual life of a people is reflected from their material life. The more fully and clearly the physical environment of a people is known the more accurately can all their cultural expressions be interpreted. The old people themselves appreciate this and have expressed themselves as glad to give me all the information they could in the matters of my inquiry, in order that, as they said, future generations of their own people as well as the white people may know and understand their manner of life. To this end my informants in the several tribes have taken pains and have shown great patience in instructing me in their lore.

"The information here collated has been obtained at first hand from intelligent and credible old persons, thoroughly conversant with the matters which they discussed. The various items have been rigorously checked by independent corroborative evidence from other individuals of the same tribe and of different tribes through a protracted period. The work of the interpreters employed has also been verified by comparison and by my own study of the languages of the various tribes interviewed.

The information was obtained by bringing actual specimens of each plant to the observation and identification of many informants, and the names, uses, and preparation in each case were noted on the spot at the dictation of the informant.

I have met uniform courtesy, kindness, and hospitality at the hands of Indians of the several tribes in the pursuit of my inquiries."

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