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Article Summary: In the 1870s Dinesen lived in Nance County. There he observed the Pawnee Indians on their government reservation, struggling vainly to adapt to the agrarian, commercial society around them. He concluded that the American Indian would not be able to survive.

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\*William H Jackson photograph, 1870



*Wilhelm Dinesen, a Danish army officer, lived in America between 1872 and 1874. Part of this time was spent near the Pawnee Indians, then in reservation on the Loup River of Nebraska. (Photo, 1871, from Boganis [Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1972] by permission of author, Thomas Dinesen.)*

**A DANE'S VIEWS ON FRONTIER CULTURE: "NOTES ON  
A STAY IN THE UNITED STATES," 1872-1874, BY  
WILHELM DINESEN.**

*Translation and Commentary*  
By DONALD K. WATKINS

INTRODUCTION

In October, 1872, the 26-year-old Danish army officer Adolph Wilhelm Dinesen sailed from Copenhagen, bound for Quebec. Wilhelm Dinesen's spirits had fallen in the past two years, along with the causes he had supported; he had fought with the French army against the Prussians in 1870-1871, and in Paris he had witnessed the brutal defeat of the Commune in 1871.<sup>1</sup> In North America he would seek to regain in the wilderness the vitality and self-confidence he had lost in the wars.<sup>2</sup>

Dinesen traveled and lived in the United States for two years to the month. He crossed the frontier of civilization and twice, in Nebraska and Wisconsin, lived at the interface between Indian and white societies. In neither state did he find the land undisturbed by American exploitation of natural resources, although in northeastern Wisconsin the forest had so far resisted extensive white settlement, thus enabling the Chippewa to lead a traditional way of life.

In Nebraska, on the other hand, Dinesen observed the Pawnee Indians on their government reservation—now Nance County—hemmed in by established frontier towns such as Columbus. Far from enjoying a certain cultural integrity and freedom of movement as still maintained in some measure by

the Sioux farther to the northwest, the Pawnee in the early 1870's were a shadow of the nation whose hunting grounds had once ranged from the eastern Platte and Loup Rivers into central Kansas. Yet this shadow of historical Pawnee culture, caught in limbo between the irretrievable past and white agrarian, commercial society, was for Dinesen an excellent example of the historical necessity that Indian cultures disintegrate after contact with European mentality and technology.

In an article written in 1887, entitled "Fra et Ophold i de Forenede Stater" ("Notes on a Stay in the United States"), Dinesen recorded his views of this process as it was enacted by the American Indian and the Anglo settler.<sup>3</sup> The first seventeen pages of the forty-one page travelogue, describing the stay in Platte County, Nebraska, contain the bulk of Dinesen's insights into the cultural incompatibility which, as he saw it, doomed the American Indian to extinction. The Dane's sensitive and moving assessment of the intrinsically unjust but unavoidable contest between the two cultures echoes Alexis de Tocqueville to a remarkable extent. A close comparison of the two commentators on the American historical process suggests that Dinesen, whose knowledge of France was second only to his familiarity with Denmark, was very aware of the Frenchman's "considerations concerning the present state and probable future of the three races that inhabit the territory of the United States."<sup>4</sup> Of the two writers, Dinesen had more anthropological and certainly more intimate personal knowledge of the Indians. His sympathy for them is less abstract than that of Tocqueville, and his vignettes from Platte County in 1872-1873 blend with his sociological commentary to create an extremely readable and memorable essay.

Since the soldier, writer, and politician Wilhelm Dinesen is virtually unknown outside Scandinavia, a word about his life is appropriate. Born in 1845, Dinesen belonged to a family of gentry in which distinguished military careers were repeated in successive generations. He outdid his father and grandfather in the eagerness with which he served, first in the Dano-Prussian War (1864), then in the French army against Prussia (1870-1871). Later, after his two-year stay in America, he participated in the Russo-Turkish War on the Turkish side

(1877-1878). Dinesen oversaw his properties after his return and actively participated in both local and national political life until his death in 1895. Called Boganis by the Chippewa, Dinesen used this name as a pseudonym when his *Jagtbreve* ("Hunting Letters," 1889, 1892) were published. Like *Paris under Communen* ("Paris during the Commune," 1872, 1891), Dinesen's other writings consistently reflect his active life as a soldier, hunter-naturalist and political observer. He is not least known as the father of the writer Karen Blixen—better known in English-speaking countries as Isak Dinesen—and Thomas Dinesen, whose recent biography of his father contains entries from the diary kept during the years in America.<sup>5</sup>

In my translation of this major portion of "Fra et Ophold i de Forenede Stater," I have not commented on Dinesen's reference to "the ludicrous Quaker school" [p. 22] on the Pawnee Reservation. The education of the Pawnee children, first under the supervision of Presbyterian and later Quaker teachers, was severely moral and disciplinarian. A reading of the correspondence of the early missionary-teachers will reveal that the goal of education as practiced by most teachers was to transform the Pawnee as quickly as possible into hard-working, God-fearing replicas of the New England farmer.<sup>6</sup> Dinesen's contempt for this enterprise is understandable if only because he realized the impossibility of treating children of one culture like plants which may be instantly transferred to another cultural soil.

I have also not described at length the famous Sioux-Pawnee encounter at Massacre Canyon (Hitchcock County, Nebraska) on August 5, 1873. It was not unusual for Dinesen to have escaped death in battle. In this case the circumstances which kept him from joining John W. Williamson and Lester B. Platt on the hunting party may have saved him from death in the massacre that is often called the last major battle between two American Indian tribes. The Pawnee, decimated by their contact with "civilization" and by decades of Sioux attacks in Nebraska, gave up their home on the reservation soon after the massacre and moved to Indian Territory in 1874-1875.<sup>7</sup>

Of the many reports about the American Indians and life on the frontier that were published in Scandinavia in the nine-

teenth century, Dinesen's essay is one of the most accurate with regard both to descriptive details and to a general appreciation of the role that economic necessity plays in shaping different cultures. The flood of immigrants to the trans-Missouri West in the 1870's, combined with the apparent complete dependence of the Plains Indians on the buffalo, no doubt led Dinesen to forecast the extinction of the peoples and cultures he valued so highly. Hunting and love for the variety of nature were deeply experienced aspects of Dinesen's life, and in his empathy for the Indians he seemingly could not imagine Indian culture surviving much longer than the Indians' free access to the wilderness. Dinesen clearly underestimated the cultural adaptability of Indian peoples—insofar as they were able to survive the direct threats of disease, alcohol and starvation—and perhaps his unrelieved pessimism is the one romantic element in his view of Indian cultural identity. He is romantic in his longing that the primitive freedoms of a relatively simple hunting economy might never be replaced by a more reliable but also terribly prosaic and regimented agrarian life. It is not difficult to understand why Wilhelm Dinesen later—from the confinement of European civilization—looked back on his stay in frontier America as the happiest time of his life.

It should be noted that at the time Dinesen was writing, little ethnological research had been done on the Pawnee, and therefore his views do not always conform to those accepted today.

### THE TRANSLATION

From "Notes on a Stay in the United States,"

By Wilhelm Dinesen

In the late summer of 1872 I traveled to America. I was sick at heart. I had taken part in the Franco-Prussian War. I had seen disappear all hope for a redress of the outcome of 1864 and was thereupon a witness to the civil war in Paris. Both events sickened me. Afterwards I lived by turns in Denmark and France, but I was dissatisfied, restless, tired, listless and weak. I doubted my own ability to accomplish anything at all. Some personal difficulties compounded this feeling, and I conse-

quently dropped everything and traveled to America. I believed I needed work, necessary and daily activity, physical exertion. At that time I did not realize, as I do now, to what extent I needed rest; otherwise I would have gone immediately out to the flat endless prairie and the blue cloudless sky where, as far as the eye can see, all is grass and more grass. Or I would have taken to the dense, dark and deep forest, which a person can walk through for a day and a night without seeing the smallest creature, without hearing a sound, not even the wind sighing in the trees. The man who has not done this, who has not been alone—completely alone, dozens of miles from the closest human being—does not know how healing the peace of the forest is. It was up in the forest, the virgin forest of Wisconsin, where I settled for a couple of years. I arrived there by indirect paths, which I now take the liberty to describe.

I sailed on a ship of the Allan Line from Liverpool to Quebec by way of Queenstown on the north coast of Ireland. It was an enjoyable trip in spite of the monotony, which was interrupted once by a ship and another time by a pair of icebergs. Four or five gulls followed us across the Atlantic, greedily diving on the ship's refuse, and now and then a school of dolphins approached the ship in closed ranks or one by one in long jumps like a detachment of soldiers. They enjoyed racing alongside and past us. We reached the New World in the evening; we saw a lighthouse on the coast of Newfoundland and took on a pilot. In a few days we entered the inland sea and the majestic St. Lawrence River. Its high banks are covered with coniferous forests, but the ax has cut many clearings and one house after another shows up along the shore. The river narrows and one sights waterfalls streaming down into the river, forts on the steep colorful cliffs under which wharfs can be used at high tide. During the ebb tide the river is quite low, and ships must keep to the middle of the channel. Quebec, which is still half French, is built up the slope. On a promenade on top there are a number of cannon among which I noticed some old Danish brass cannons, presumably mementoes from 1807.<sup>8</sup>

Nothing remarkable happened during the trip to Chicago except that the mail car caught fire and burned up. It was in front of us and the sparks flew about our ears as we raced to the



*L. W. Platt, teacher-trader to the Pawnee, operated this trading post on the reservation near Genoa in 1870. The name of the post office here was Kitskotoos.*

next station. The country is monotonous and boring, mostly low, swampy, burned-over woodland; one sees few animals and birds. If one is not Americanized, it is wearisome to read everywhere advertisements in huge letters on poles, trees, houses and even on rock faces in the middle of rivers. The countryside is more lively around the Great Lakes; it is attractive, rolling and well-cultivated land, a transition from forest to prairie.

The name Chicago is of Indian origin and means "skunk." The Pottawattomie, who still lived here in the beginning of this century, called it that. Only a pitiful remnant of this tribe, now of greatly mixed blood, still exists far to the west beyond the Missouri, and they will soon disappear. The name "Chicago" told the tale: a swamp pool through which a muddy, black and stinking river slowly emptied into Lake Michigan. Just a few years ago, after the fort of fifty years ago had changed into a gigantic city and the Indian trader's hut had become incomparable department stores, this nauseating river stank so badly

in the summertime that a person might get sick in its vicinity. But one fine day people hit on the idea of reversing the river's flow by channeling the clear water from the lake down the Illinois River to the Mississippi and into the Gulf of Mexico at New Orleans. No longer did muddy water empty into Lake Michigan from where it reached the Atlantic by way of the Great Lakes and Niagara.

Chicago, like all newer American cities, is traversed by railroads; the perfectly straight streets, uniform in width and equidistant from each other, run either north and south or east and west. One knows exactly the distance walked between street number 1 and street number 100, but the monotony is tiring. The entire business district was energetically rebuilt after the great fire in an incomparably magnificent way. In the couple of weeks I wandered around in Chicago I seemed to be the only person who had nothing to do—everyone was running around with tongues hanging out.

I soon continued westward, through Omaha on the Union Pacific Railroad to the small town of Columbus, Nebraska. Here the treeless prairie, one hundred miles (this and later references are to English miles) west of the Missouri River, has a character different from the states east of the Missouri, where all cultivated land must be fenced. This is not the case in Nebraska, even though it too is being settled. I spent a month near Columbus at the home of a fellow Dane, an educated man who had found his way out here to the front line of civilization.<sup>9</sup> I spent my time there pleasantly by hunting. The flat prairie is almost always burnt over before winter begins and one finds game—rabbits, hares, prairie chickens, turkeys, deer and wolves, ducks and geese—only in overgrown ravines or along rivers and streams. But in general, hunting is poor there in America where the white man has settled; he destroys the game immediately. At that time one could still find good hunting grounds in Nebraska. In addition to the species I mentioned, there were antelope, elk and buffalo, but they are fast disappearing. The Indian hunts with a bow on horseback, but he kills no more than he needs. The Mexican—who has a significant amount of Indian blood—also hunts the buffalo on horseback, but with firearms. Neither of these two, however, destroys this noble animal. It is the Yankee, the Anglo-Saxon American who shoots

hundreds of bullets into the herds from a safe blind, wounds a great number of animals, skins those he kills and leaves the carcasses behind. I once went on a winter hunt for buffalo with five Americans, but I left their party after a short time. One man was to shoot; that was his job. Two were to skin the animal, one was to cook and the last was to keep in touch with the outside world. Each of them had put in a certain amount of money and they bought a wagon and the necessary equipment. They looked forward to a tidy profit but it was their bad luck that the wagon driver froze to death one day. The others died either of starvation and exposure or at the hands of Indians. It still can happen that trains will be stopped on the prairie by a herd of buffalo, but whoever wishes to hunt this great animal had best hurry, for it will soon have completely disappeared.

One day my Danish friend and I drove over to the county seat in order to have some legal documents signed by an official whose authority corresponds to that of our "herredfoged" ["district judge"]. He was building a new barn and was sitting on the tie beams nailing on laths. We yelled our errand up to him, and he came down and took us into a hut where there was writing equipment. He mumbled a pledge while he hastily gulped down some food, we swore to it (in America people take oaths at every opportunity), we signed our names and then drove home as he crawled back up onto the roof.

On another occasion I was out walking with my host when we were hailed by a neighbor, a genuine American, Mr. Stull. He said it was lucky he had run into us because there was a couple who wanted him to marry them (he had civil authority for marriages), and now we could serve as witnesses, especially as the girl was of our nationality. Thereupon we met a young Swedish girl who did not know a word of English and an American who knew only English; they wanted to be married. We translated some questions; the girl answered "ja." Vows were taken, a document was written up and we witnessed that as far as we knew she was the right girl with the right name, unmarried and of good repute. Thus they married and went their way.

One day I told this Mr. Stull that I wished to live with an American family, and so I finally came to live with his parents in Columbus. His father had at one time emigrated with his

young wife to the then sparsely settled state of Illinois. When he had grown old he sold his property and moved west to where money went farther. Then he had provided each of his sons with a farm in the vicinity of Columbus and had built a house in town for himself, and his wife and daughter. We lived completely a la American, we ate wheat bread, pork and cranberry tarts three times a day and in general spoke as little as possible. When in the morning Mr. Stull had seen to his horse and cow and chopped a little wood, he went into a store where he spent most of the day. In my innocence I thought he was a loafer, but no, he was working. Many farmers came into the store and when they were in financial trouble they could, if their property represented adequate collateral and if two good guarantors could be found, borrow money from Mr. Stull at an annual interest rate of 33  $\frac{1}{3}$ %. I gradually got the hang of the business, which was both simple and lucrative. He did not speculate, but loaned money at 33  $\frac{1}{3}$ % and bought safe financial claims—against the state for example. If, for instance, the county needed to have a school built in the fall and paid for it with a promissory note due the following spring, Mr. Stull bought the note from the contractor at half its value. In addition he received the legal interest rate of 12%.

Since I often went with Mr. Stull to the store where he was on the lurk, I became well known there for my useful knowledge of languages and was soon hired as postal clerk, a job I did to the satisfaction of all. I was commended as “the right man in the right place.” The merchant himself was the town’s postmaster, for which position he received an annual wage from the United States of one dollar along with the right to attach P.M. (Postmaster) to his name. The store was a large room in a wooden structure. From the street the building looked quite imposing, but the uppermost part of the facade was just a screen that went unnoticed because it joined similar facades on adjoining buildings. The post office was the middle section of the counter; here stood a large case with compartments open to the rear which appeared to the public in front as numbered windows, each of which had a Yale lock. I ran down to the station twice a day when mail arrived from New York and San Francisco, heaved my mailsack into the mail car and got in return another from which I distributed the newly arrived



*The Clothier House was built in Columbus in 1869 by C. D. and G. W. Clothier. Lumber for the hotel was produced at the John Rickly sawmill. A bus for passengers is at the front entrance and a dray for baggage at the side door.*

pieces of mail. From behind the case I put the mail, some of which bore only the name or just the box number, into the various compartments and thus the people standing in front could see who had mail and could take their own things. The merchant, in turn, plied his wares among the crowd of people attracted by the mail.

After some time I felt nothing more could be learned in this position so I applied for a job and was immediately hired by a Mr. [John P.] Becker, who dealt in grain in the same town. He was a rich "self-made" man who talked little and "stak til sin bussiness" ["stuck to his business"], as they say in American Danish. Trading was carried on in a tiny wooden building right alongside the Union Pacific tracks.<sup>10</sup> The building was divided into two areas by a partition, the one reserved for Mr. Becker and me, the other for the public. In the latter area a metal stove stood in the middle of the floor. In the bitter cold weather when it was filled many times a day with corn, the stove soon got red-hot and then cold again just as quickly. There was an iron footrest around the stove and enough chairs to fill all the area around it. A sign on the front door announced: "Shut the door, and when you have spoken about bussiness [sic], do the same thing with your mouth." This applied to conversations with Mr. Becker and me, for the guests could talk among themselves as much as they wished. They came and went at their pleasure, said neither hello nor goodbye, kept their hats on, warmed themselves up, smoked a pipeful, spat with the stove as a target and generally loitered. Behind the partition there was a tall desk with writing material and the pointer of the scale located outside the window. A continuous strip of paper ran from a hole into a basket; on this tape the New York prices of various commodities were written telegraphically in the usual Latin letters. The business—limited to the trading of corn and wheat—was carried on like this: the farmers brought a sample and we made an offer after checking the latest price on the tape. If our offer was accepted, the driver drove onto the scale outside. We noted the weight and then the wagon was driven onto a ramp situated under a roof so that the grain could be emptied directly into railway cars. Then the empty wagon was weighed and the farmer received his money. It was a splendid business.

When I became familiar with this work, I sought employment in an office run jointly by two men: a real estate agent and a lawyer. They complemented each other, for the one surveyed land and drew maps while the other prepared legal documents. I had the opportunity here to learn about the United States' excellent, simple and understandable laws regarding the subdivision of land, the first requirement of settlement. The situation is not the same everywhere; the old eastern states were partly settled before the current laws had developed, and in those states that belonged to other nations, earlier and divergent laws had been in use. But the effect of the latter laws is gradually disappearing, and the farther one proceeds from the Atlantic into the country, the more uniform the states' land laws become. For example, in Nevada, Utah, Colorado and Wyoming, subdivision is based on mathematically expressed celestial coordinates.

The United States government regards the wild, uncultivated and unsurveyed land as property of the original inhabitants, the Indians. The assertion has been made in America that the Indians never owned land but simply occupied it, and much has been written on this subject. But, as I said, the government views the Indians as independent nations. The first white men to make contact with Indians were fur traders or Catholic missionaries, generally French; consequently, a great number of names dating from the time white men arrived in a region are more or less French or French-Indian, names later mangled by their English spelling. "Illinois," for example is a blend of French and Pottawattomie and was earlier pronounced in the French manner. One of many instances I know of is a small town called Bjutimor; it was Butte-des-morts, the Indians' burial site. On the whole the French mixed with Indians better than did the Anglo-Saxon race.

The manner in which the land changes hands from the red man to the white is, with slight variations, the same everywhere. The process is everywhere identical. The first white men are generally well received by the Indians; they live with them and are eventually adopted by them. Soon more white men come and after a few years the Indians' entire existence is disturbed, his conceptual world is confused, his necessities and his desires have changed, and his religious ideas are dislocated. The Indian

is pressed with new requirements for life, and he uses all means to fulfill them. It is not worth his time and labor to produce the old weapons, clothing, tools and foods, for the white man has everything better in this regard—and they also have whiskey: fire water. No effort is spared to possess the white man's weapons, clothing, food and most of all his fire water, and for its sake the Indian will sell everything: his precious belongings, his horses, his women, his land.

The first whites who settle in Indian-owned areas do so at their own risk; the government in Washington has no part in it. But naturally, it does not take long before disputes and resultant bloodshed take place, and United States troops appear on the scene. The brave and bellicose Indians defend their land and independence, but of course they are beaten in the long run and must either clear out or sue for peace. A number of leading men are then sent to Washington, where they are completely corrupted. They return bewildered with an Indian agent, a white man who is to live among them and protect their interests because they have concluded an agreement with the Great Father in Washington and now stand under his protection. From now on the Indians are mistreated and cheated in every way; it is sometimes necessary to decimate their ranks repeatedly with the help of soldiers, but in general they are taken care of by whiskey, immorality, smallpox and other diseases, along with the extinction of their means to live, that is, the wild game. Then they sell their land to the government in exchange for a "reservation," a small rectangular piece of land that they may not leave without the agent's permission. On this reservation they might for a few years lead an idle and nasty existence, given barely enough to eat and a blanket a year by the government, that is, unless the agent cheats the Indians out of the blanket. When the white man had become tired of having these miserable beggars around, they are sent to the west, where they are again moved a couple of times, and the last one dies in a poor house. Such is the sorry lot of the Indian. His fate cannot be otherwise—even though his is a noble and self-sacrificing race, his days are numbered, he is doomed. When one empties a pond of its water the fish die, and one might imagine that if everyone without pure red blood were to leave America and let the Indians go their own way, the red man would still

die out: his blood has been poisoned.

[There follows a brief description of American methods of subdivision—range, township, section et al.—along with a discussion in abstract terms of the transition from territory to state and a state's representation in Congress.]

Anyone who has applied for American citizenship can take 80 acres of government land anywhere he pleases, and one can very cheaply acquire more in various ways, for example, by setting out a plantation of trees in a treeless state. Finally, land can be bought from the government for five crowns per "tønde" [Danish land measure: 1.36 acres], that is, \$1.20 per acre.

The land that concerned us in the office in Columbus belonged either to the state or the Union Pacific Railroad, which had acquired all even-numbered sections for twenty miles on either side of the railway. The land had earlier belonged to the Pawnee Indians, who 40 years ago were a powerful and warlike tribe of approximately 30,000 people living along the Platte River, which is called "Kitskotoos" in their language.<sup>11</sup> They were hard put to defend themselves against their enemies, the mighty and proud (Dakota) Sioux; therefore the Pawnee allied themselves with the white men when the latter crossed the Missouri River. But after contact with the Europeans they quickly decreased in number; they had sold the land and lived on a reservation where the government had erected [1865] a huge stone building to serve as a school run by Quakers and lady teachers. The Indian children, many of whom were half white, attended school there; but the old Pawnee, now consisting of only about 3,000 poor wretches, lived down by the river in two towns from which they wandered to railway stations in order to beg. At this time game was scarce in this region, so twice a year they headed southwest on buffalo hunts. As soon as I came to America, I tried to make contact with Indians, who have always interested me a great deal. Here and there I had seen an individual civilized Indian, who perhaps had little red blood. The Pawnee were the first full-blood Indians I saw. A small colony of them often pitched their tents in the thickets by the river right outside Columbus; when the train arrived, a couple of Indians usually stood on the platform

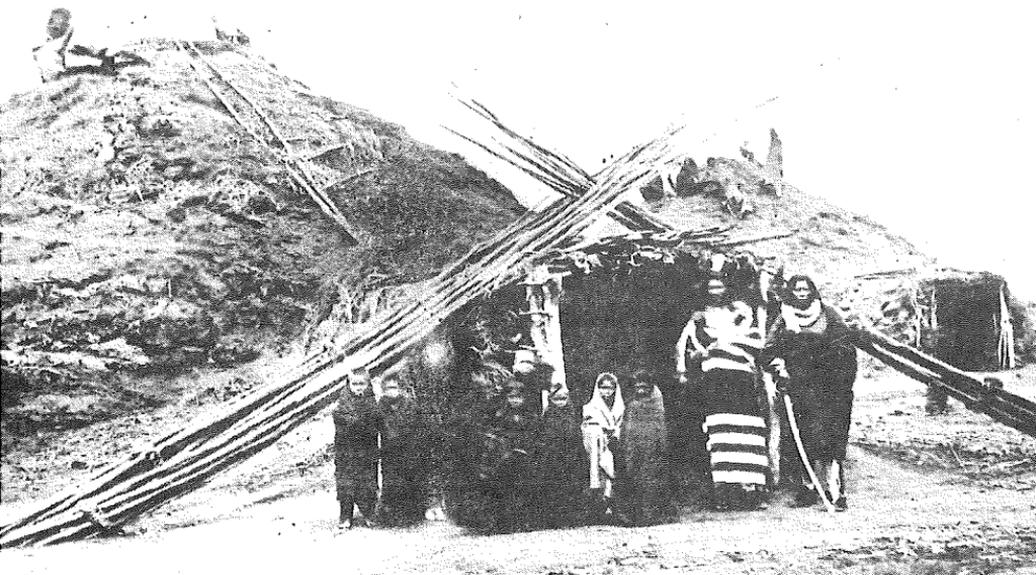
wrapped in a red or gray blanket, selling trinkets.

A month after I began work in this office, the United States government requested that we survey some land farther west, and fourteen of us headed out with three wagons onto the open, flat, arid but spring-green prairie. Only streams could slow our trip, but they could be forded at most places, and in part they are what are called "lost creeks"—they suddenly disappear under ground and emerge at another spot. For surveying we used a solar telescope [*sic*], an excellent and beautiful instrument which, however, only the foreman and I knew how to operate. Otherwise I had a lot of time left over to hunt. A couple of Indian families moved along with us and I hunted with some of them. The Indians are masters at stalking game. Now and then one of my red friends would disappear in the grass, which was about two feet tall along the river, and come into sight again far off creeping along the ground and hiding behind rocks and knolls. We flushed game out of the brush or set fire to large dry areas in order to raise animals. It was a splendid time for me. I received four dollars a day and enjoyed myself.

When we returned to town, I again had the urge to go out onto the prairie. An opportunity to do so presented itself when I got acquainted with an old man who traded with the Pawnee and who had lived among them for thirty years. His name was Platte [*sic*] but was usually addressed in the Indian [Pawnee] language as Kitskotoos. He lived right on the border of the Pawnee Reservation, about a quarter-hour's walk from the Indian village. He owned a piece of land, did some farming and cattle raising, maintained an inn for travelers and a store that was always filled with Indians who traded buffalo hides, furs, buffalo meat and Indian curios—in addition to the blankets they received from the government—for food, sugar, tea and cloth. Mr. Platte, as I mentioned, had lived with these Indians for thirty years. He had come from Iowa with his wife and had seen the tribe both in the days of its glory and its quick decline. He gave me much interesting information about these Indians and their battles with the Sioux, who had a few times burned my host's buildings during attacks on the Pawnee.<sup>12</sup> But it was the proximity of the white men that destroyed the tribe. After the construction of the Union Pacific, Nebraska became a favored



*The Pawnee Indian School, Genoa, capable of housing and instructing 100 boys and girls, was constructed in 1865 (photo, 1872). Phoebe Sutton and Elvira G. Platt were among the teachers. John W. Williamson, federal employee, and Stacey Matlock, trader, are in foreground. . . . Earth lodge homes of the Pawnee were photographed by William H. Jackson in 1870.*



goal of emigrants, whose number constantly increased. In 1872 100,000 people arrived, not people who came and went just as quickly as in the mining states; these were settlers, farmers. The land is wonderfully suited for agriculture and cattle raising.

Texas cattle, tended by mounted drovers, are brought here in large herds of several thousand head before they are sent east. When I was in Nebraska there remained huge unoccupied tracts of land for these cattle, but along the railroad the land had become more and more settled. The level, stonefree, virgin soil was easy to turn. The crops were corn and wheat. People plowed, sowed and reaped—everything was done as simply as possible. Once I was offered a proposition whereby we would buy a few sections, pay to have them plowed, harrowed and planted in the fall, leave them alone until the summer and then pay to have the crop harvested. Everything was computed exactly, the expenses and probable harvest, and I do not doubt that after a year there would have been a significant profit—unless we had been ruined by grasshoppers—in spite of the cost of the land and the fact that the grain yield is by no means as great as we are used to in the fertile areas of Europe.

It is fairly easy to get ahead in Nebraska if the newly arrived settlers have some money to begin with. Then they can immediately buy a “ready-made house”—which is shipped from Chicago in numbered pieces and can be erected in a couple of days—a few horses and cows, and the most necessary tools. But even a family without means coming from the east with all their belongings in a canvas-covered emigrant wagon, cow trailing behind, can with determination and energy make a go of it here. Such a family begins by choosing a piece of land, and of course the land’s quality and location have a great influence on the family’s future. They then build a sod hut and work as large a piece of land as can be managed. At harvest time the neighbors make common cause, most effectively in a group of eight men that works on the various properties in turn. The wheat is brought to a rented steam engine [threshing machine], which is set up in the middle of the field; the grain can be sold as soon as it is sacked on the spot, the unneeded straw is burned, and a normal harvest will allow a family to move into a wooden house. The corn is allowed to stand until winter when it is picked as the opportunity arises; it is used for fuel as well as for

bread and cattle feed.

More and more sod huts and wooden houses arose around the Pawnee Reservation. The buffalo, of course, had left the region. The miserable poor Indians, who had nothing to do, surely did what they were not supposed to do every now and then, and they were also blamed for things they did not do. Every minute a farmer came to us and wished to file a complaint; he had lost a sheep, a calf or a pony, and in all probability a Pawnee had taken it. Such a complaint was forwarded to the United States government, which in its role as the Indian's guardian was required to compensate for the loss. As previously mentioned, the government had at one time bought the land from the Indians at the price of 2½ cents per acre, about 10 "øre" per "tønde" of land. The Indians did not, however, receive the total sum—huge in spite of this low price—but rather they were credited with the interest on the money. This interest was used to build and maintain the ludicrous Quaker school, to provide the Indians with a blanket and a couple of dollars a year, and to pay claims against the Indians, etc.

The Indians are sometimes under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, sometimes the War Department. When I lived in America the Department of the Interior managed the Indians' affairs and the Quakers in particular had local control.<sup>13</sup> It is a known fact that a religious facade hides the worst villainy. Bandits and desperados, as they are called in America, can be bad enough, but beware especially of sanctimonious hypocrites and psalmsingers. America is the scene of many and great frauds, but none such as occur in the Indian Department since it passed from military to "Christian" hands. I could cite a number of outstanding examples but I will limit myself to one. All Indians under the jurisdiction of the government and an agent are, as I mentioned, to receive one blanket a year. This is the procedure: a shipment of crates with or without blankets is sent to agent A and receipts for rail-freight charges, delivery, etc. are included with the accounts of disbursements to Indians. But the crates are sent back to Washington unopened, and from there they go to agent B and so on. The Indians get no blankets, they could not protest with any hope of redress, because the agents and the bureau in Washington are in collusion. They must remain silent. Let me

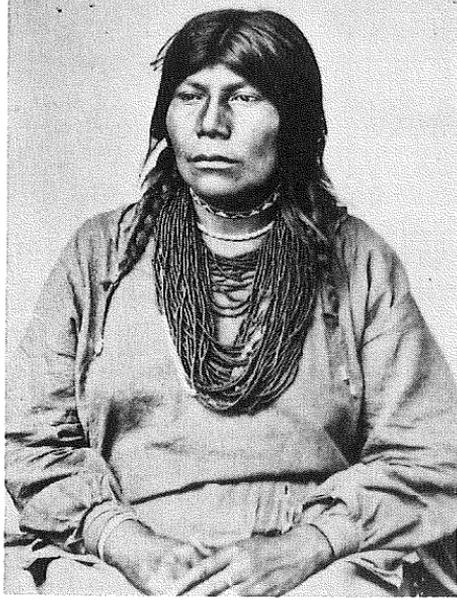
just note that in 1872 Congress felt that the Indians should have one million dollars and that it was necessary to provide ten million so they might receive the one; nine millions were drained off enroute.

There is no justice for the red man. He must give way, he must perish, it cannot be otherwise. The cultural development of the white man has killed him; he was doomed before the white man had reached the coast of America. While he lived a free and contented life, not even suspecting the existence of another continent, a race of men was evolving with an advanced culture that necessitated that the white man meet and crush the Indian. If Columbus had not discovered America, it would have been discovered in a few years. If we should fantasize that America was not yet discovered at this very minute, it would be found before the year was out and the Indian would be broken. He has been and is being mistreated, cheated, tortured; but regardless of the way he is treated, the result would be the same: he *must* die. Civilization cannot be halted and the Indian cannot stand civilization. Had he had time to develop, had he been allowed through millenia to live his own life, he could perhaps have produced a civilization capable of withstanding or accommodating European civilization. But when as it was, he stood face to face with European civilization, he had no defenses against it nor could he adopt it. His bow and arrow could not compare with the iron plate, rifles and cannon of the whites; in all respects, military and otherwise, the Indian was defenseless—he could not withstand the temptation, he could not see the danger, he could not form a resistance. As a consequence he was killed, he sold himself and his land for a drink of liquor or a rifle, and he fought against his own kind more often than against the invading thieves. There probably were ten million Indians in the United States when the white man arrived, but now there are not even one-half million and soon the race will have disappeared.<sup>14</sup> Nothing can be done about it. But the whites have been unjust in their judgment of the Indians. They demand that the Indians have the same mentality and perceptions as they themselves do—as they have in all eras. When the Spanish came to Mexico, they condemned and killed the Indians because they were not Christian. Now this strikes us as absurd and we are revolted by the atrocities

our forefathers committed and we ridicule their superstition. The Indians do not now suffer harm because they are not Christian, but it is demanded that they have the same ideas as we have or at least claim to have. The white man can see that the Indian cannot *resist* his civilization and he destroys the Indian mercilessly. But the white man will not understand that the Indian cannot *adopt* his civilization and in this regard the white man is unreasonable in his judgment of the red man. We give him a few days to acquire that which took us thousands of years. But he cannot, he will not submit like the Negro; the Indian dies when robbed of freedom and independence.

From the house of Mr. Platte, my host, one could see the two villages of the Pawnee, one large and one smaller, inasmuch as three of the nation's four tribes—each with its own chief but also with a head chief in common—lived together in one village and the fourth lived apart. The reason for this is said to be that the fourth tribe was the remnant of a related nation that had earlier been independent. This tribe had waged war against the Pawnee but had been conquered and absorbed.<sup>15</sup> Each house looked like a huge molehill or like one of our small barrows. The roof, a favorite sitting place, is decorated with white buffalo skulls. The chimney rises from the middle of the house. The entrance, covered by blankets, descends into the house. The house consists of a single large round room with the hearth in the middle, and around it in a circle are the vertical beams that support the ceiling. Along the walls are resting-places, benches and shelves. Each wigwam is generally occupied by five to eight families. In the summertime the children are completely naked and the men are almost naked when in the wigwam, but the women, on the other hand, are always dressed, although often quite lightly. In the winter everyone wraps himself in a large buffalo hide that extends up over the head.

When speaking of Indians in general, one cannot say they have these or those customs and habits, for customs and habits depend completely on the Indians' conditions of life. Since conditions are totally different in different places, customs and habits also differ. I will demonstrate this in my discussion of the two nations I know best, the Pawnee and the Chippewa, prairie and forest dwellers.



*Pawnee woman (left) as photographed by William H. Jackson about 1870. Elvira G. Platt (right, about 1900) began teaching in Pawnee schools in 1843.*

The Pawnee lived on the plains and lived almost exclusively off the buffalo. They almost never walked but rather always rode.<sup>16</sup> They had fixed villages and homes to which they returned when they had made their regular hunts twice a year, hunts which provided food for the rest of the year. Several families lived together; polygamy was common and the concept of chastity was extremely weak. The position of the woman was miserable. She was given or sold into marriage by her parents, viewed as a slave by her spouse, and her children made no great efforts to prevent her starvation. There were clans among the men. The respected and brave warriors had great power and formed a kind of council, passed judgments, and determined the punishment for errors. For instance, I once saw some young men being whipped because they had been too eager and acted contrary to the orders of the experienced hunters by charging into a herd of buffalo before it had been surrounded, with the result that it escaped. The chiefs and the holy men or priests have considerable influence.

The Chippewa, on the other hand, lived from hunting and fishing in the forest. Of course, they were not acquainted with horses; they hunted and gathered the necessities of life one day at a time. They moved constantly, following the game. Their dwelling was a small wigwam of birchbark, designed for a single family and of a size such that it could be carried rolled up from

one place to another on the back or in a canoe. Polygamy was unknown, the woman was as free as the man, and each sex had its own duties. All men were free, no one man was greater than another, and the chiefs were important only in case of feuds or war.

This marked difference between these two nations was not due to their original nature but rather was the result of circumstances and the different traits which developed in response to the circumstances of life. The Chippewa Indian needed his wife's help; she had to help move and set up the wigwam. While he was hunting she had to maintain order in the wigwam, prepare food and help the man make and repair tools. More than one wife would only have caused him inconvenience and difficulties; one wife, with whom he was in close and daily contact, was a necessity for him. He did not require partners to any great extent; each man hunted for himself and supplied his own family. Since he needed his wife and could do without male helpers, the women were equal to all men by birth and in the society. The Pawnees, by contrast, go on long hunts in a group, the game was taken in a joint effort and prepared by the women who followed, also in a joint undertaking. The home life was not a family life, since several families lived in the same wigwam and the whole nation lived in the same village. The Pawnee man could get along without his wife for long periods of time, and it was really not very important whether he had one or several wives. The man needed his fellow men but not his wife. Consequently, the woman was the man's servant and the men were divided into clans.

Much has been written about the origin of the Indians, but as far as I know no general conclusion has been reached. It is a known and demonstrable fact that there were earlier and far more civilized inhabitants of a different, non-Indian race in the United States. It is probably a futile task to try to determine where the Indians came from, and moreover it is very possible that they do not derive from any extant race of man. There are, in fact, respected scientists who believe the New World is of older origin than the so-called Old World and that the Europeans are an offshoot of the Indians. I have heard the most remarkable conjectures defended with an endless stream of presumptions, including the notion that the Indians are the ten

lost tribes of Israel. The North and Central American Indians—excepting the Eskimos, who belong to a different race—are divided into red and yellow Indians; the red Indians live primarily in the United States and the yellow in Mexico. The yellow Indians appear to be most closely related to the Chinese and the red most closely to the Europeans. Only an expert would be able to find a red Indian boy in a crowd of southern European boys. In this respect I think I am a good judge; I would see the uniqueness of his race in his eyes, for example, in which everything that is not white is black, coal black. On the other hand, I would not be able to point him out in the crowd at a distance even if all the boys were to run around. But I certainly would be able to recognize a colored boy however light-complexioned he was. It is also recognized that bone and cranial structure of the white and red races are very similar. The manner of gait is completely the same, and the white and the red man have a large number of psychological qualities in common. For this reason the white man is not repelled by the Indian, but rather views him as a rational being like himself and in an entirely different light than, for instance, the Negro.

The Indians are usually handsome, well-built people, slender, strong and agile; their noses are often very prominent and arched. They do not have a beard but generally have a thick head of hair. A special characteristic of the Pawnee—one they shared, I believe, only with the Mandan Indians, a now extinct nation—is the different and sometimes dubious way they cut their hair. The men cut their hair in terraces, but it is never long; other nations wear their hair in braids down the back.

I intended to go on a hunting expedition to the southwest with the Pawnee Indians along with another white man, a nephew of Mr. Platte, but coincidental circumstances kept me from it. The Indians bagged a lot of game but on the return trip they were set upon by the Sioux, who killed 120 (of 5-600), many of them women. Both of Mr. Platte's horses were killed, but he himself escaped without a scratch.<sup>17</sup>

At this time I left the prairie, traveled to Chicago and then northward, up into Wisconsin. . . .

## NOTES

1. Popular Danish enthusiasm for an alliance with France ran very high before and after the Franco-Prussian War broke out in July, 1870. A defeated Prussia could most certainly be forced to relinquish its territorial booty from the Dano-Prussian War of 1864: the duchy of Schleswig and its substantially Danish population. Nevertheless, the government had soberly assessed France's chances of victory and steered a neutral course, a policy that was soon justified by the success of the Prussian offensive. Dinesen had been released from regular service in the Danish army before he left for France in November 1870. He served as captain on the staff of General Billot; his war diary is extremely critical of the conduct of the French military leadership. Released from French service and decorated with the Legion of Honor, Dinesen arrived in Paris on the eve of the revolt of the communards against the French government. He remained in Paris until late May 1871, and observed the chilling outcome of the Commune, in which 15,000 citizens of Paris were summarily executed and as many killed in battle with army troops. *Danmarks Historie*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Politiken, 1971), XI, 508-521; Thomas Dinesen, *Boganis: Min fader, hans slaegt, hans liv og hans tid* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1972), 52-72.

2. After returning to Denmark in July 1871, Dinesen began writing his famous account of the events in Paris, *Paris under Communen*. In the revised edition of the book in 1891, the author included a new introduction in which he describes his situation in late 1872: "After I took part in the French war against Germany as a captain on General Billot's staff and later witnessed the civil war in Paris, I returned to Denmark and wrote this book and decided to publish it on the advise of friends. But I felt limp, weak and despondent; I thought I needed rest and regular physical labor in order to restore my mental equilibrium. I therefore decided to leave civilization; I traveled to North America where I lived a couple of years in the virgin forest where white men had not lived before, a place only Indians occasionally visited." Wilhelm Dinesen, *Paris under Communen*, 2nd, rev. ed. (1891; rpt. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968), 11-12.

3. Wilhelm Dinesen, "Fra et Ophold i de Forenede Stater," *Tilskueren*, 4 (1887), 778-796, 913-936.

4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, and Max Lerner, transl. George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 291-373. Dinesen may also have read Tocqueville's essay "A Fortnight in the Wilds," first published in 1860. Tocqueville, 734-767.

5. Thomas Dinesen, *Boganis*.

6. "Letters concerning the Presbyterian Mission in the Pawnee Country near Bellevue, Nebraska, 1831-1849," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1915-1918*, 14 (1918), 570-784. George E. Hyde, *Pawnee Indians* (Denver: University of Denver, 1951), 135-64.

7. Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 245-55.

8. A reference to the surrender to England of a large part of the Danish fleet in September, 1807.

9. Identified by the last name Wendelboe in Dinesen's diary. Thomas Dinesen, *Boganis*, 74.

10. John P. Becker, an early (1856) settler in Columbus. Dinesen probably worked at the Union Pacific Elevator, one of Becker's many successful business ventures. Becker had served as an Indian agent to the Pawnee in the late 1860's. A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1882), 1273.

11. No contemporary estimate or actual count of Pawnee population in the early nineteenth century surpassed the figure of 12,500 (doubtlessly inaccurate) found in

agents' reports in the 1830's and 1840's. An actual count in 1840 produced the total of 6,244. A reliable report from 1834 indicated 8,000 Pawnee. By 1872, the year of Dinesen's arrival, disease and warfare particularly with the Sioux had further reduced the Pawnee population to 2,447 by actual count. Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 292-295.

12. Lester W. Platt and his wife, Elvira Gaston Platt, arrived at the Pawnee Mission in 1843, where he later served as government farmer and she as a teacher from 1843 to 1846. Sioux attacks on the Pawnee forced the abandonment of the mission, and from 1846 to 1861 the Platts lived at Tabor, Iowa. In 1861 President Lincoln dismissed all incumbent Indian agents and superintendants and made his own political appointments to these positions. The new agent, H. W. DuPuy, promised the Platts positions at the new Pawnee Agency created by the treaty of 1857. They returned to Nebraska but were not hired by DuPuy. DuPuy's corrupt administration was then under attack by employees at the Pawnee Agency; the Platts took part in the denunciations, DuPuy lost his job, but the Indian Office in Washington also ordered all men involved in the affair to leave the reservation. Platt then set up a trading post just across the eastern boundary of the reservation, where he lived until his death in 1875. Mrs. Platt continued to teach Indian children for some time (1862-1864, 1867-1872) after her husband was dismissed. Elvira G. Platt, "Reminiscences of a Teacher Among the Nebraska Indians, 1843-1885," *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska Historical Society*, 3 (1892), 125-143; Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 135-256.

13. President Grant's well-intentioned "Peace Policy" and his support of Quaker administration of government policies, initiated in 1869, are discussed by Robert W. Mardock, *The Reformers and the American Indian* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1971), 47-66.

14. "A careful study of population conditions for the whole territory N.[orth] of Mexico, taking each geographic section separately, indicates a total population, at the time of the coming of the white man, of nearly 1,150,000 Indians, which is believed to be within 10 per cent of the actual number. Of this total 846,000 were within the limits of the United States proper, 220,000 in British America, 72,000 in Alaska, and 10,000 in Greenland. The original total is now [1912] reduced to about 403,000, a decrease of about 65 per cent." *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, ed. Frederick Webb Hodge, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1912), 287.

15. The organization of the village reflected the historical division of the Pawnee nation in four tribes. The three tribes living together were the Chaui (Grand Pawnee), Kitkehahkis (Republican Pawnee), and Pitahauerats (Tapage or Smoky Hill Pawnee). The fourth tribe was the Skidis (Wolf or Loup Pawnee), whose defeat and incorporation by the other Pawnee can be placed around 1775. Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 68-87.

16. Actually, the Pawnee were widely known for their walking and running ability, often walking to Texas or New Mexico on horse-stealing raids.

17. L. B. Platt from Baltimore, a nephew of Lester W. Platt, accompanied the white leader of this authorized hunting party, sub-agent John William Williamson. Called Bukskariwi (Curly Head) by the Indians, twenty-year-old Williamson spoke the Pawnee language and was a very jovial and popular man among both the Pawnee and the whites. Williamson was, in spite of his name, of Norwegian birth. Williamson reported that 400 men, women and children began the hunt and estimated that 100 were killed in the massacre by the Sioux on August 5, 1873. William Burgess, "The Last Buffalo Hunt," *Nebraska History*, 16 (1935), 161-65; Paul D. Riley, "The Battle of Massacre Canyon," *Nebraska History*, 54 (1973), 221-249; John W. Williamson's report in "Indian Office Documents on Sioux-Pawnee Battle," *Nebraska History*, 16 (1935), 147-155.