



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: Toward Plains Caddoan Origins: A Symposium

Full Citation: Waldo R Wedel, "Toward Plains Caddoan Origins: A Symposium, Introduction," *Nebraska History* 60 (1979): 131-133.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1979OriginsIntro.pdf>

Date: 1/4/2012

Article Summary: This is one of a series of articles based on presentations at a mini-symposium "Toward Plains Caddoan Origins: A Symposium" held at the Smithsonian Institution in November, 1976. By way of introduction, this article presents nine questions addressed at the symposium

Toward Plains Caddoan Origins: A Symposium

INTRODUCTION

*Waldo R. Wedel
Smithsonian Institution*

The papers that follow grew out of a day-long work session, or mini-symposium, held at the Smithsonian Institution in November, 1976, with support from the Smithsonian's Office of Academic Programs. That, in turn, had its origin in repeated informal conversations, in Washington and at regional professional gatherings, involving visiting research fellows and staff members at the United States National Museum of Natural History. Particularly involved in the preliminary discussions were Douglas R. Parks, linguist; Douglas H. Ubelaker, physical anthropologist; Mildred M. Wedel, ethnohistorian; and Waldo R. Wedel, archeologist. Our common ground was a shared interest in various sorts of data bearing on the origins, culture history, and relationships of the Plains Caddoan-speaking peoples, specifically the Pawnee, Wichita, and Arikara, and a concern with what appeared to be a diminishing interest among scholars in Pawnee and Wichita prehistory.

The more we aired our respective problems, our hunches, hopes, and disappointments, the deeper became the feeling that a focused work symposium with participants from various subdisciplines of anthropology might be a worthwhile approach. Favorable responses to letters of inquiry, sent before institutional support was assured, brought the following people together: Roger T. Grange Jr., University of South Florida, Jack T. Hughes, West Texas State University, and Waldo R. Wedel, Smithsonian Institution, archeology; Douglas R. Parks,

Mary College, and Rudolph C. Troike, Center for Applied Linguistics, linguistics; Mildred M. Wedel, Smithsonian Institution, ethnohistory; Garland J. Blaine, Oklahoma City, and Martha R. Blaine, Oklahoma Historical Society, ethnography and folk history; Alexander Lesser, Hofstra University, ethnology; Douglas H. Ubelaker, Smithsonian Institution, and William M. Bass, Richard L. Jantz, and P. Willey, University of Tennessee, physical anthropology.

Approaching the symposium topic as an archeologist, and therefore with certain undeniable professional and personal biases, I formulated some questions designed to point up the sort of problems that seemed to me particularly relevant and troublesome, and for which data from disciplines other than archeology might be enlightening:

1. Is the proposed Upper Republican to Lower Loup to historic Pawnee sequence still reasonable or valid? If so, where should we look for the sites to fill the gaps?

2. What about the suggestion that the protohistoric Arikara and Pawnee are to be identified with an archeological complex (Chouteau Aspect) on the Middle Missouri, whence the Pawnee moved southward to their Nebraska locale after ca. A.D. 1550-1675?

3. Is there archeological evidence bearing on Skiri-South Band relationships through time, especially on some claims that the Skiri may have preceded the other Pawnee bands into the Platte-Loup locale?

4. What can physical anthropology tell us about Pawnee, Arikara, and Wichita interrelationships and their distinctiveness from other historic Plains tribal entities?

5. How do the historic Plains Caddoans relate morphologically to the prehistoric populations, who are widely regarded by archeologists as their probable ancestors?

6. What can the linguist or ethnographer tell us about Skiri vs. South Band vs. Arikara relationships? And what is the possible significance of this in terms of population splits and movements?

7. Are the data of glottochronology pertinent?

8. Is there linguistic or ethnographic data bearing on the question whether late prehistoric or early historic villages were clan-specific, in contrast to the large multiband towns of the 19th century, that is, the American period?

9. Do early historic documentary materials have any relevance to the problems arising from the growing mass of archeological material?

The 1976 minisymposium proved to be an exciting and stimulating affair. It was historically oriented, but utilized as well some of the newer methods of investigation and analysis being pursued by younger scholars in the field. It was loosely structured but not chaotic. The free exchange of information by prepared papers and open discussion generated new ideas and viewpoints, sharpened our perception of problems, and helped define significant areas of agreement and disagreement. It seemed worthwhile, then, to hold an open symposium at a gathering of regional specialists. The 36th Plains Conference, meeting in Denver, Colorado, in November, 1978, provided the opportunity, and the program chairman, Dr. Bruce Rippeteau, made time and space available.

For one reason or another, not all of those who participated in 1976 were able to join in the Denver sessions or to provide papers. For the opportunity to reach a still wider audience with even more diverse interests, we are most grateful to the Nebraska State Historical Society and its director, Dr. Marvin Kivett, for his ready acceptance for publication of the papers given in Denver and subsequently revised. We hope that publication will stimulate latent or lagging interest in some of the problems to which we direct attention or which may occur to readers.