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Article Summary: The first written records of Plains Indians date from European explorers' visits in the eighteenth century. Archeology fills many gaps in historical records and can be used to verify their accuracy.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Karl Bodmer, Etienne de Véniard sieur de Bourgmont, Pedro de Villasur, James Mackay, Lucien Fontanelle

Expeditions: Lewis and Clark Expedition, Pike Expedition, Stephen Long Expedition, Yellowstone Expedition

Nebraska Archeological Sites: Engineer Cantonment (Washington County), Fort Charles (Thurston County), Fontanelle's Trading Post (Sarpy County), Bordeaux Trading Post (Dawes County), Cantonment Missouri (Washington County), Fort Atkinson (Washington County), Fort Kearny (originally Otoe County, later Buffalo County), Fort Robinson (Dawes County), Rock Creek Station (Jefferson County), the steamboat *Bertrand* (Missouri River), Cuming City and DeSoto (Washington County), Lincoln Pottery Works (Lancaster County), Daniel Freeman homestead (Gage County)

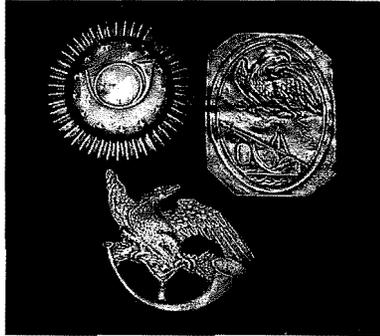
Photographs / Images: 1820s tableware excavated at Fort Atkinson; Fort Atkinson military insignia; Karl Bodmer painting, "Bellevue Agency Post of Major Dougherty" (1833); Bodmer portrait, "Mahinkacha, Missouri Man" (1833); schematic map of Euroamerican sites dating back as far as Fort Atkinson; military artifacts excavated at Fort Atkinson; excavation at Fort Kearny State Historical Park in the 1970s; artifacts excavated from the Cheyenne Outbreak barracks; Archaeologist Carlyle Smith in ruts of the Oregon Trail (Garden County); whiskey bottles recovered from the wreck of the steamboat *Bertrand*; Oregon Trail items: a horseshoe, mule shoe and bit (Rock Creek Station State Historical Park, Jefferson County); unglazed jug collected during the excavation of the Lincoln Pottery Works; small crock reconstructed after Pottery Works excavation; large firing kiln exposed at the Pottery Works site



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Europeans and Americans

Exploration and Settlement



Fort Atkinson military insignia

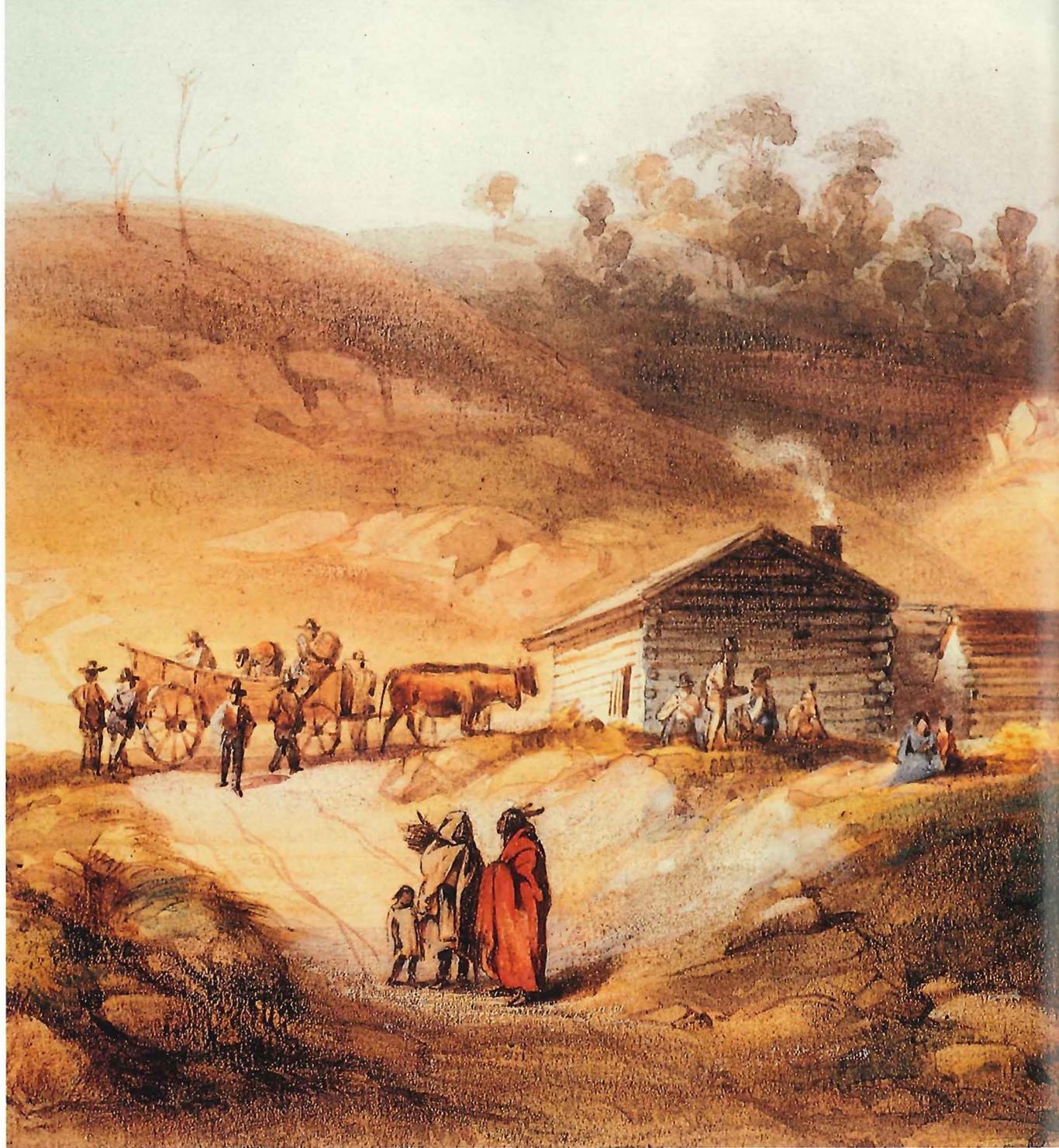
By Gayle F. Carlson
Nebraska State Historical Society

THE APPEARANCE OF EUROPEANS on the Great Plains was accompanied by a second important phenomenon — written records. Although Plains Indians had long used picture writing to record certain events, no true writing existed previously. The first appearance of writing has had tremendous implications for historical archaeologists, who use the basic techniques employed for pre-historic sites but have the important advantage of being able to consult the historical record. Types of written records and other documentation available to historical archaeologists are many and varied and include government and commercial records and maps as well as private manuscripts.

Some might question the necessity of excavating archaeological sites for which historical documentation is available. The two kinds of information are complementary and do not necessarily duplicate each other. Historical archaeology fills in many glaring gaps in the historical record. It provides valuable information on the daily life and subsistence habits of our predecessors that they often neglected to record, as well as precise locational and architectural details often lacking or only very generally provided by other means. Distributional studies of the recovered artifacts are often useful in determining activity areas within and around former structures, and the accuracy of written records can be verified through archaeology. A recent trend is the development and interpretation of historic sites for the public, and archaeological investigations are needed to aid in the reconstruction of historically significant structures.

Specialized techniques have been developed to deal more effectively with the kinds of information encountered at historic sites. Fascinating, almost bizarre, techniques have been used to assist in determining approximate dates

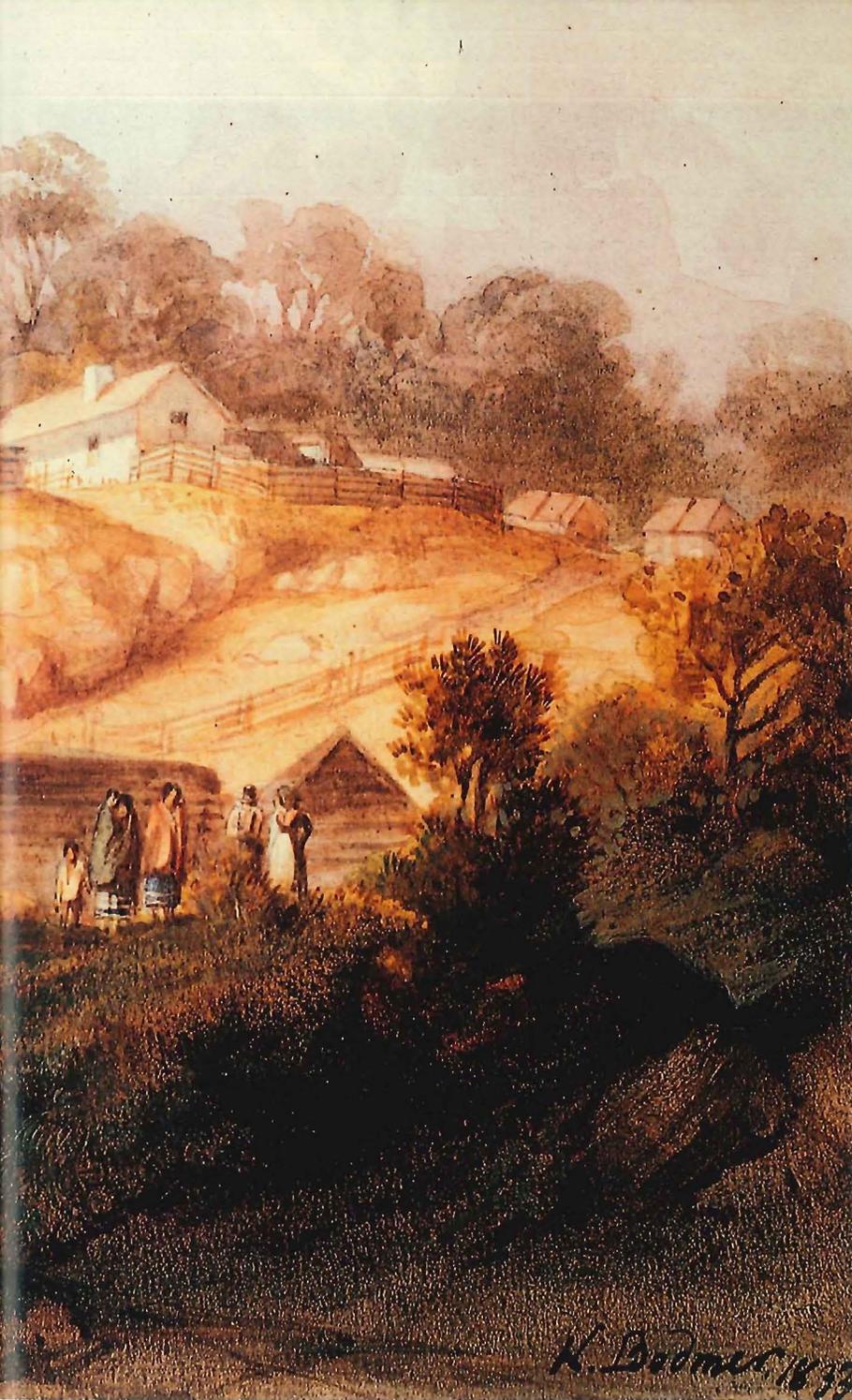
Tableware from the 1820s excavated at Fort Atkinson.



Swiss Artist Karl Bodmer's "Bellevue Agency Post of Major Dougherty" (1833) provides a rare view of early contact between European-based cultures and those of native Nebraskans. The cluster of buildings on the upper slope to the right was excavated by the Nebraska State Historical Society in the 1970s.

of site occupation by measuring the diameters of clay pipestem bores, by measuring the thickness of window glass and by calculating the proportions of the various ceramic types present in a site's artifact assemblage. The amount and types of decoration present on ceramic items help determine the relative economic level of former inhabitants. Several specialized studies of specific artifact types, such as glass beads, gunflints and smoking pipes, have made valuable contributions to our knowledge of place and date of manufacture and other details about material culture.

Euroamerican archaeological sites may be categorized in several ways. A method found useful in Nebraska separates sites into the general categories of Colonial and Early American Exploration, Fur Trade, Military, Transportation, Urban and Industrial and Farm and Ranch.



This portrait of “Mahinkacha, Missouri Man,” was painted by Karl Bodmer in 1833 when he visited eastern Nebraska with German Prince Maximilian. Mahinkacha, whose name means “Maker of Knives,” wore bundles of wampum in holes pierced through his ears, a style then common among tribes of the region.

Colonial and Early American Exploration

Several sites belonging to this category have been firmly documented or excavated, and future research should aid in the identification and investigation of those important resources.

The sites are evidence of colonial European and early North American powers entering the area from the south and the east to exert their influence over native inhabitants and to gather information about the area. Visits to Nebraska were of a temporary nature, and the virtual absence of archaeological remains reflects that situation.

While living with the Missouri tribe Étienne de Véniard sieur de Bourgmont of France systematically explored a large segment of the Missouri

River in 1714 and recorded his explorations. The Spanish Expedition, under the leadership of Pedro de Villasur, left Santa Fe in June 1720 intending to counteract French influences in the central Plains. At daybreak on August 13, while camped near the confluence of the Loup and Platte rivers, the expedition was attacked by a party of Pawnee and Oto Indians, possibly accompanied by an unknown number of Frenchmen.

Early American exploration sites also would be of a quite temporary nature and reflect the activities of small parties of explorers skirting or passing through Nebraska to learn more about the recently acquired territory of the Louisiana Purchase, obtained from France in 1803. Good examples are campsites of the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804 to 1805 and the 1806 Pike Expedition to the Pawnee Indians and other tribes. The 1819 to 1820 Stephen Long Expedition to the Rocky Mountains wintered at Engineer Cantonment, a small camp of log huts along the Missouri River a few miles north of present Omaha.

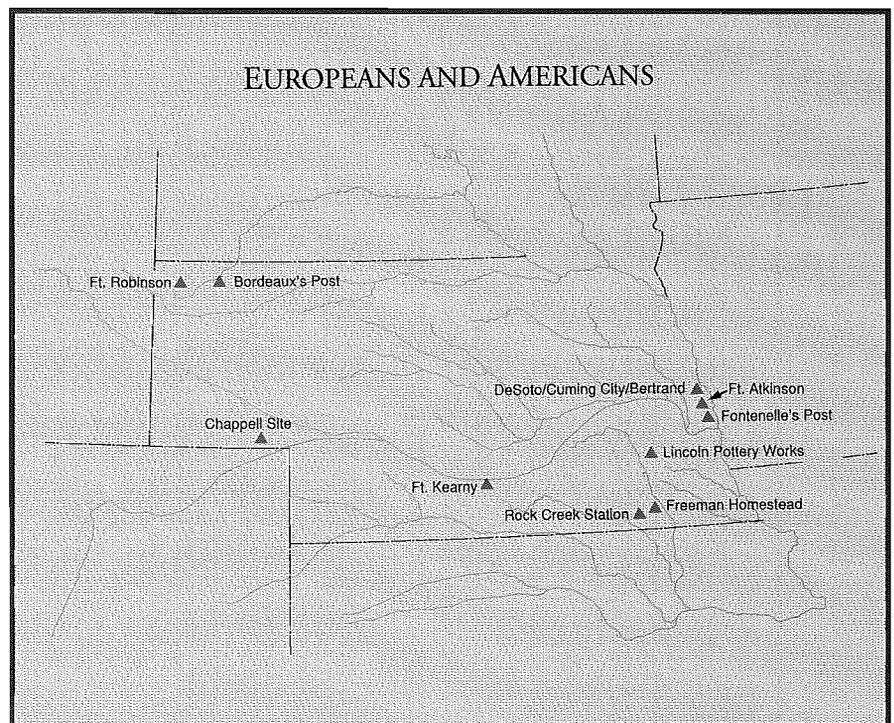
Fur Trade

During the 17th century, Nebraska Indians were starting to trade for European goods, such as glass beads and metal items. Whether the items were traded from tribe to tribe or were received directly from European traders visiting the area has yet to be determined.

One of the first trading establishments in Nebraska was Fort Charles, built in northeastern Nebraska in 1795 by James Mackay as a headquarters for trade with the Omaha tribe. Although the search for the archaeological remains of that post shown on an 1830s map continues, it may have been destroyed by the Missouri River.

Fontenelle's Trading Post in Sarpy County in eastern Nebraska was excavated by the Nebraska State Historical Society in the 1970s. Named for Lucien Fontenelle, one of its proprietors, the post probably was established in 1822 and continued as a fur trading post until 1832 when it became an Indian agency for the Omaha, Pawnee, Oto and Missouri tribes until about 1839.

Euroamerican sites dating back as far as Fort Atkinson, occupied in the 1820s, to the Lincoln Pottery Works, in operation in the early 20th century, have drawn the attention of archaeologists.





Excavations verified the identity of the post, yielded information on the life of its inhabitants and provided interpretive material for Fontenelle Forest. Excavations yielded evidence of living quarters, probable warehouses, a blacksmith shop and a refuse dump. Structural information corresponded favorably with a painting of the post made in 1833 by Swiss artist Karl Bodmer.

The Bordeaux Trading Post on Bordeaux Creek in Dawes County in northwestern Nebraska operated from the 1830s to the 1870s. It was excavated in the 1950s by the Museum of the Fur Trade with technical assistance from the Nebraska State Historical Society. The log trading house and a log storehouse were excavated and later reconstructed at the Museum of the Fur Trade.

Military

The first significant military presence in what later became Nebraska arrived in 1819 with the Yellowstone Expedition, which transported about 1,000 soldiers up the Missouri River from near St. Louis. The original plan was to establish a fort at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. The expedition only reached the Council Bluff vicinity near present Fort Calhoun by the fall of 1819. The soldiers built their first post, Cantonment Missouri, on low ground.

In the spring of 1820, Missouri River flooding inundated the fort, and it was rebuilt on a nearby bluff. The second fort, Fort Atkinson, was occupied until 1827. Fort Atkinson was rectangular and constructed of logs, with the living quarters lining the interior of the walls. Gates for access to the fort were present in the middle of three of the walls, and bastions were built at two corners. A stone powder magazine near the middle of the parade ground was the only structure inside the fort's walls. The rest of the support facilities were eventually built outside the walls.

Nine field seasons of extensive archaeological excavation have been conducted at Fort Atkinson, most by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Military artifacts excavated at Fort Atkinson include a rifle butt plate (left), hammer and flints, cap plate insignia, lead balls, pike point and cannon ball.

Excavated features include troop quarters, cellars, bastions, gates, an underground passage, a powder magazine, an armorer's shop, a blacksmith's shop, root cellars, ice houses, storehouses and latrine pits.

Much has been learned about the day-to-day life of the fort's inhabitants as a result of this extensive field work, which also yielded detailed information necessary for the fort's reconstruction by the Game and Parks Commission.

According to historical records and information recovered archaeologically by the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1984, the Fort Atkinson Council House was a story-and-a-half log structure 56 feet long by 20 feet wide. Located outside the fortified barracks area, it consisted of a large room for councils with the Indians and a smaller room for the storage of trade goods. The small room probably also served as living quarters for the Indian agent. Each room had a brick fireplace. An interesting feature of the smaller room was a pit dug beneath the fireplace and originally covered by a wooden trap door. It was apparently a safe where the Indian agent kept valuables. The building has been reconstructed to help interpret the Indian agent's role at Fort Atkinson.

In the late 1840s, as large numbers of emigrants began traveling west along the overland trails that crossed what would later become Nebraska, the need for a significant military presence was again recognized. Fort Kearny, first established at the site of present Nebraska City in eastern Nebraska, was relocated in 1848 to the open prairie on the south side of the Platte River in south-central Nebraska. Many construction techniques were used during Fort Kearny's long existence as an active military post (1848 to 1871), including frame, log, sod, adobe, brick and rammed earth. The post consisted of a loose collection of buildings around an open square or parade ground. One area, called Fort Mitchel, was fortified in 1864 and located at the southeast corner of the fort. It was a rectangular earthwork about 238 feet wide by 278 feet long with circular bastions in each corner, an earthen mound, exterior ditch and a wooden stockade atop the earthen parapet to protect those seeking shelter.

In the early 1960s, the Nebraska State Historical Society excavated several features to assist with the fort's reconstruction, development and interpretation. Completely or extensively excavated were the sod blacksmith-carpenter shop, a building on the north side of the parade ground believed to be the guard house built about 1852 and the Fort Mitchel earthworks. Partial excavations were carried out at two frame barracks on the southeast corner of the parade ground, the 1849 adobe storehouse at the southeast corner of the parade ground, the 1859 commissary warehouse north of the parade ground and an unidentified rectangular earthworks in the southeast corner of the park that may have been corrals or perhaps a fortified military campsite from the Civil War period.

As the government sought to force the free-ranging Indian groups to lay down their arms and accept terms that placed them on reservations, the need for military protection of government-operated Indian agencies increased. One of them, the Red Cloud Agency, was moved in 1873 to near present Crawford in Dawes County. A military camp was established near the agency at the confluence of Soldier Creek and the White River. The site became the permanent location of Camp Robinson, later renamed Fort Robinson.

Originally a loose arrangement of unfortified buildings around a parade ground, the fort remained an active military post until after World War II. During Fort Robinson's early years it played an important role in the Indian Wars as the site of the surrender and death of the famous Oglala Lakota warrior Crazy Horse in September 1877 and the Cheyenne Outbreak in January 1879. That unsuccessful escape attempt caused the death of 64 Indians and 11 soldiers during a protracted two-week battle. Gradual changes in the fort's mission included its use as a quartermaster remount depot from 1919



Excavation at Fort Kearny State Historical Park in the 1970s located and defined the post's powder magazine, providing information for its eventual reconstruction. Fort Kearny was an active military post from 1849 to 1871.



through World War II. During the war it was the site of a war dog reception and training center and a prisoner of war camp. Fort Robinson became a state park in 1956.

Most Fort Robinson archaeological investigations have been conducted in the oldest part of the fort and have been directed toward interpreting to visitors significant historical events. Remains of three original log structures have been excavated by the Nebraska State Historical Society: the 1874 guard house where Crazy Horse was wounded, the nearby 1874 adjutant's office where Crazy Horse died, and the 1874 cavalry barracks where the imprisoned Cheyenne staged their outbreak.

The archaeology of military posts has offered a great deal of information not generally available in the written record. Most posts were not built according to firm architectural plans. As a consequence, accurate reconstructions such as those achieved at Forts Atkinson, Kearny and Robinson could not have been possible without archaeological research. Archaeological remains also have provided considerable information about the daily lives of soldiers at the posts. Topics including diet, recreation and clothing have benefitted from archaeological information, as has our understanding of the nature of trade and relations with the Indians. The written archive, particularly when originating from a military or political arena, should be viewed with caution, since records may inadvertently reflect bias. When such a dilemma faces the scholar, archaeological data may help resolve problems of interpretation.

Transportation Routes

By the mid-1840s, large numbers of emigrants were passing through what would later become Nebraska on their way west. The route also was used in 1860 and 1861 by Pony Express riders as they raced across the Plains. A great network of trails, using the Platte River Valley as the primary route, continued

Among the artifacts excavated from the Cheyenne Outbreak barracks were a broken doll, jewelry, marbles, a jack and a toy cup. The building served as quarters for the families of soldiers from 1886 until it burned in 1898.



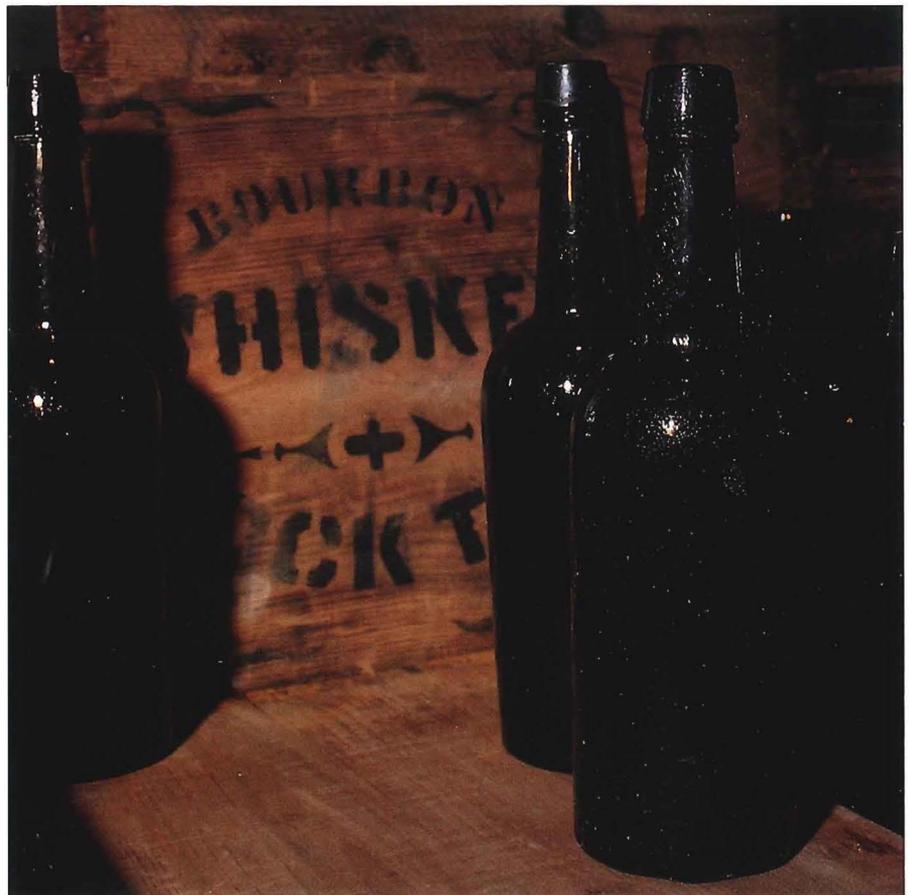
Archaeologist Carlyle Smith of the Nebraska State Historical Society stands in ruts of the Oregon Trail in Garden County in the 1930s.

to be used heavily by settlers, freighters and stage lines until the completion of the first transcontinental railroad through Nebraska in 1867. Other less well-known trail systems in the state, such as the Sidney-Black Hills (Sidney-Deadwood) Trail which began in 1876 after the Black Hills gold discovery also were used heavily.

Many non-military establishments sprang up along the trails, most commonly stage stations, Pony Express stations and road ranches. Road ranches, usually operated privately, were combination general stores, blacksmith shops, hotels and liverys offering a variety of travelers' services. Some small stations and ranches also became temporary, fortified military posts during the Indian hostilities of the mid-1860s.

Rock Creek Station in Jefferson County was excavated by the Nebraska State Historical Society in the early 1980s to aid in developing the site as a state historical park. The station (occupied from about 1857 to 1867), which had a west ranch and an east ranch separated by Rock Creek, served both as a Pony Express station and as an overland stage station. The west ranch also housed a store and blacksmith shop that catered to travelers, and a toll bridge spanned the creek between the two ranches. This station was made famous by the killing, on July 12, 1861, of David McCanles and two of his employees at the east ranch by James Butler (later known as Wild Bill) Hickok and other employees of the stage station.

Excavation of the station was aided by an early photograph, but was hampered by damage done to the east ranch by occupants of a later farmstead and by cultivation of the site. The west ranchhouse and connected store were located and excavated, as was a previously unknown well. Archaeological evidence revealed that the dwelling and store had been at least partly destroyed by fire, a fact about which the historical record was mute. A second discovery



A large collection of whiskey bottles, many still filled and in their cases, are among the artifacts recovered from the wreck of the steamboat Bertrand. The vessel sank in the Missouri River on April 1, 1865, on its way to mining camps in Montana. Its well-preserved cargo, on exhibit at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge visitor center, is an excellent time capsule of the Civil War period.



was a long, connected log store with a clay-covered roof extending about 41 feet beyond the original log house and lean-to at the west ranch. The discovery was unexpected since the store had been built after the photograph was taken.

A second trail-related site, located in Deuel County in western Nebraska, was excavated in 1968 after it was located prior to Interstate 80 construction. The station sat on a section of the Oregon-California Trail that followed Lodgepole Creek. The remains of a frame or light log building, one limestone-filled pit that possibly was a temporary forge, several exterior post holes, a number of trash-filled pits and a trash dump were found. The site was probably a road ranch or stage station between 1861 and 1867 but was used again as a campsite by military personnel guarding Union Pacific Railroad crews in the summer of 1867.

Sunken steamboats, a very different kind of archaeological remains, are associated with an important early Nebraska transportation route, the Missouri River. Many early craft struck snags or otherwise went to the bottom while plying the Missouri and are now buried under many feet of silt and sand, usually under dry land representing a former river channel.

The steamboat *Bertrand* sank at DeSoto Bend on April 1, 1865, and was excavated in 1969 by the National Park Service. The 178-foot stern-wheel vessel was fully loaded with passengers and supplies from St. Louis, headed for the mining country and frontier outposts of Montana Territory. No passengers were lost when the boat sank, and reports stated that some of the damaged cargo was salvaged. Nevertheless, about 10,000 cubic feet of material remained on board and was salvaged during excavation.

The exceptionally well-preserved contents included a vast variety of foodstuffs, liquor and patent medicines, textiles, clothing and sewing supplies, household goods, mining supplies, hardware, tools and building supplies and other miscellaneous cargo. The collection represents a time capsule of

A horseshoe (upper left), mule shoe and bit, now artifacts of Rock Creek Station State Historical Park in Jefferson County, were once common items associated with travel on the Oregon Trail.

mid-1860s material culture and can be viewed and studied by visitors and scholars at the DeSoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge.

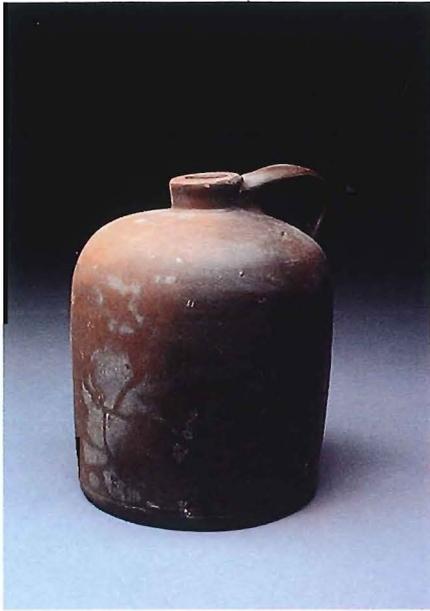
Urban and Industrial

Immediately following establishment of the Nebraska Territory in 1854, towns were established, initially close to the Missouri River and gradually at increasingly greater distances to the west. Some early towns, such as Omaha City, thrived and eventually became large cities; others experienced an early period of rapid growth and since have grown slightly or have had population declines but remain viable communities. Still others, sometimes known as ghost towns, had an initial period of healthy growth but because of changing circumstances eventually disappeared.

Territorial townsites examined archaeologically by the Nebraska State Historical Society include Cuming City and DeSoto, both established in 1855 along the Missouri River in Washington County. Salvage excavations conducted in the mid-1970s, because of impending highway construction through the two former townsites, uncovered abundant evidence of former occupation, both commercial and residential. At Cuming City, one cellar, believed to be associated with a residence, was excavated. At DeSoto, where more extensive salvage was necessary, a number of cellars, latrine pits and smaller features were excavated, as were the remains of a building outlined by brick pillars and a brick wall section. A shallow basement or crawl space beneath the building contained abundant material that suggested the building had been a saloon.

A unique example of an early manufacturing establishment is the Lincoln Pottery Works. The factory operated from 1880 to 1902 in southwestern Lincoln producing stoneware and terracotta utilitarian and decorative ceramics. The stoneware crocks, bowls, pans, jugs, jars, churns, canisters, terracotta cuspidors, flower pots and saucers filled many of the domestic needs of early Lincolnites and residents of surrounding areas.

University of Nebraska excavations in 1986-1987 uncovered the bases of three large firing kilns in use at the time of the factory's closing. Parts of the main factory building that enclosed the large kilns, part of a large storage building and a small exterior kiln were also investigated. A large sample of waster material (discarded unsalable ceramics) also was obtained. The artifacts



This unglazed jug is one of the few undamaged pieces collected during excavation of the Lincoln Pottery Works. The plant was in operation in southwest Lincoln from 1880 until 1902.

This small crock was one of many glazed pieces reconstructed after excavation of the Lincoln Pottery Works. Incomplete pieces, including the glazed pitcher, make up the bulk of the collection.





recovered and the other data have provided much new information about the technology, distribution, marketing and other aspects of this nearly forgotten, once-thriving early Nebraska factory.

Farm and Ranch

Initially the only avenue to farm ownership was some form of purchase. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed one to claim as much as 160 acres of land for a \$10 fee and, after living on the land or cultivating it for a certain length of time, to become the owner. Other legislation followed, such as the Timber Culture Act of 1873 and the Kinkaid Act of 1904. In much of western Nebraska, natural conditions favored cattle grazing rather than farming. As early as the 1860s, cattle ranches sprang up along the margins of the Sandhills and in the Panhandle.

Although little archaeological research has been conducted on the extensive remains in this category, there is much to be learned from the systematic study of remains covering the period from the earliest settlement to quite recently abandoned farmsteads and ranches. The Daniel Freeman homestead was investigated by the National Park Service in 1948. Near Beatrice in Gage County, it is recognized as the first homestead claimed under the Homestead Act. The original Freeman cabin site, other nearby cabin locations, a later brick house site, a former corral and a brick kiln site were investigated. Prolonged cultivation had damaged the site, and precise structural information could not be recovered, but investigators determined the approximate locations of the Freeman cabin and other features. A log cabin from the same period was moved to the site and restored to assist in its interpretation.

One of three large firing kilns lies exposed at the site of the Lincoln Pottery Works. Excavation of the plant provided insight into industrial activity at the end of the 19th century.