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Article Summary: Between 1500 and 1850 many Indian peoples moved into, through and out of the Nebraska region. The climate cooled considerably beginning around 1600. That change affected the growing season of corn, the bison population and Indian migration.

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Geologic Time: Neo-Boreal period (Little Ice Age)

Nebraska Archeological Sites: Yutan (Saunders County), Ponca Fort site and Minarik site (Knox County), Ansley site (Custer County), Pike-Pawnee site (Webster County)

Nebraska Indian Cultures and Peoples: White Rock, Oneota, Lower Loup-Pawnee, Dismal River, Omaha, Ponca, Ioway, Oto-Missouria, Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Redbird, Pawnee, Padouca

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Photographs / Images: manufactured goods used for frontier trade; tipis of a Pawnee hunting camp pitched near a kill site; Oneota (early Siouan) pot; 17th century ornaments, probably Pawnee, made of marine seashells (Colfax County); schematic map of Plains area occupied by groups speaking Siouan languages (1600-1770s); finely crafted and distinctively decorated Pawnee pottery (Colfax and Butler Counties); carved vessel (Cherry County); iron hoe and bison shoulder blade hoe; cracked and mended Oneota pot; schematic map of Plains area occupied by historic tribes (1770s-1850s); Pawnee pot and the paddle used to shape it; trade goods used by historic Pawnees: brass pans and metal tools; earthlodge used by Omahas (Thurston County); Agent A L Green's 1871 sketch of the Oto-Missouria Agency (Gage County)





PART SIX

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# CULTURES IN CONTACT

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*Few if any people lived in Nebraska for 200 years following the demise of the Village Farmers. By 1600, ancestors of the Omahas, Poncas, Oto-Missourias and Pawnees were practicing the Plains economy of gardening and buffalo hunting. Native cultures were dominated by European-based culture before the end of the 19th century.*

**Manufactured goods were used for frontier trade.**



**Tipis of a Pawnee hunting camp pitched near a kill site. Although the Pawnees and several other tribes of the historic period had permanent earthlodge villages, they also lived in tipis while on extended buffalo hunts.**

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# Historic Indian Tribes

## Ethnohistory and Archaeology



Oneota (early Siouan) pot

**By John Ludwickson  
Nebraska State Historical Society**

ACCOUNTS OF NEBRASKA PEOPLES written by early European explorers began appearing in the 1600s, but it was not until the late 1800s that ethnologists recorded detailed information about the “old ways.” Archaeology supplements and enhances those written sources on Indian peoples, and the documents, in turn, improve the archaeological information.

The study of written, historic sources to learn about native peoples is called ethnohistory, and the combination of ethnohistory and archaeology is called ethnoarchaeology. Sites that contain trade goods of European origin but cannot be documented by historic sources are termed protohistoric, or early contact, sites. In Nebraska the protohistoric period begins after 1500 and ends about 1775. The full historic period extends from 1775 to the late 1800s. Cultures include White Rock, Oneota, Lower Loup-Pawnee and Dismal River as well as the archaeology of fully documented historic peoples, including the Omahas, Ioways, Oto-Missourias, Sioux, Cheyennes and Arapahos in addition to undocumented historic groups.

During the period 1500 to 1850, peoples moved into, through and out of the Nebraska region, perhaps in response to changed environmental conditions requiring new adaptations. The climate cooled considerably by 1600 to 1650. This period, the Neo-Boreal, is often called the Little Ice Age, and the effects of the climate change on the growing season of corn, on bison populations and on migration were dramatic.

### *Earliest European Contacts*

In 1541, Coronado found villages of conical, grass-thatch houses scattered for many miles along the banks of the Arkansas River in central Kansas. Called the Quivira, the people probably spoke a Caddoan language (Pawnee, Arikara, Wichita) and probably were ancestral to the Wichita. They crafted elaborate, flat-bottomed jars with applique decorations, well-made chipped stone arrow

points, hide scrapers, fine bifacial knives, and bone, antler and shell artifacts. Nebraska sites from the same period have not been discovered, which suggests that the region was temporarily inhabited only by hunters.

While Coronado was among the Quivirans, a delegation representing a chief called Tatarax arrived from the most extreme northern province of Quivira called *Harahey*. Not mentioned after 1541 by later Spanish or French explorers, the people of Harahey may have been a group of Quivirans dwelling on the Smoky Hill River in northern Kansas. It has been suggested that the Harahey people were protohistoric Pawnees in the Loup River region of Nebraska. Archaeological evidence cannot confirm Pawnee presence in Nebraska prior to about 1600.

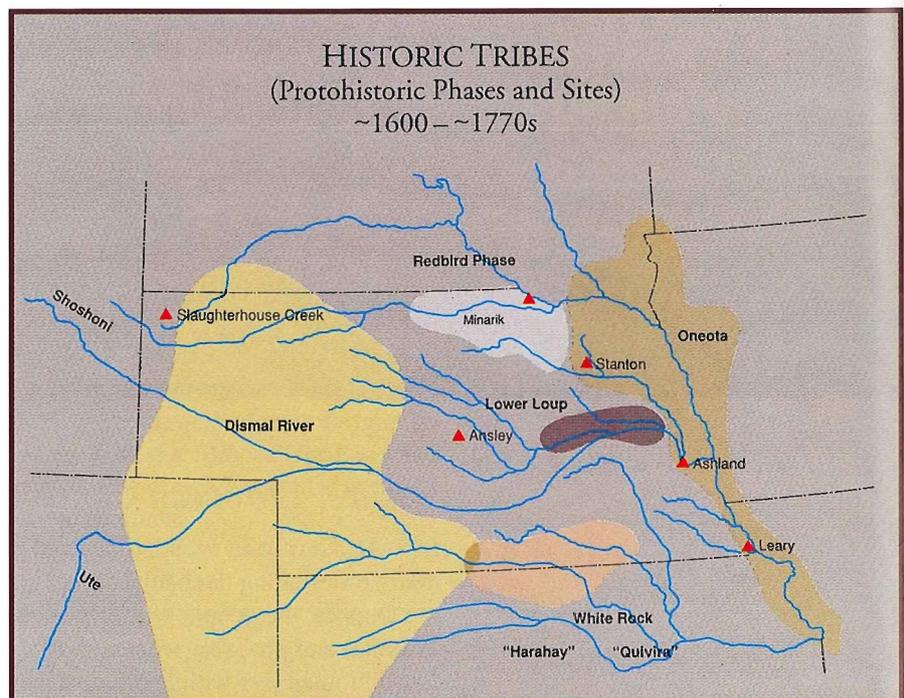
Another possible identification for the people of Harahey is what archaeologists call the White Rock phase, situated along the lower Republican River. The White Rock people occupied the central Plains from about A.D. 1300 to about A.D. 1650. They were among the earliest people to practice the economy that typified the historic period. They occupied villages on the Solomon River and White Rock Creek, a tributary of the lower Republican River in Kansas, during spring garden planting and autumn harvesting seasons. The rest of the year was spent on long-range bison hunts into southern Nebraska, where their hunting camps have been excavated.

White Rock material culture links it to sites farther east called Oneota, such as the Leary village in extreme southeastern Nebraska. Oneota has been linked with Siouan-speaking people such as the Ioways, Otos, Missouriias and Winnebagos, and perhaps with the Kansas and the Osages. The White Rock people also may have spoken a Siouan language. Why would Coronado's Quiviran hosts, who presumably spoke a Caddoan language, call these people Harahey and their chief Tatarax, both words with Caddoan meanings? The words are very early examples of *calques*, literal translations of words from one language to another. The practice was common in later Plains history. For example, the Skiri Pawnees were most commonly known to the French as the Pani-maha, a Siouan word. The Omaha chief Ompatonga, whose name English speakers translated literally (i.e. calqued) as Big Elk, was also commonly known by the Pawnee version of his name.



These 17th century ornaments, probably Pawnee, are from Colfax County. Made of marine seashells, they are similar to ornaments from the eastern United States.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, eastern Nebraska was occupied by groups speaking Siouan languages related to modern Omaha, Oto and Ioway and to Caddoan-based languages including modern Pawnee and Arikara. Western Nebraska was the territory of a group of Dismal River or Plains Apache people during the late 1600s and early 1700s.





## *Siouan Villagers*

Siouan-speaking tribes migrated to the central Plains by the early 1700s. Oneota sites such as those near Rulo and Ashland suggest Siouans may have been in Nebraska even earlier. Even though Oneota culture and economy was oriented to an eastern Woodlands setting, they adopted or created many traits that made life on the Great Plains more successful. The most apparent are earthlodge architecture and bison hunting. Those village-dwelling people should not be confused with nomadic, bison-hunting Siouan-language-family tribes such as the Lakota.

### *The Yutan Site: An Oto-Missouria Earthlodge Village*

The Omahas, Poncas and Oto-Missourias lived in villages of up to 2,000 people along the rivers of eastern Nebraska. Their villages have left impressive archaeological sites, including the Oto-Missouria village near Yutan. The Otos immigrated into eastern Nebraska about 1700, building the Yutan village about 1775; remnants of the Missourias, from Missouri, joined them in the 1790s. The village was occupied until 1837. It was the first major Indian settlement seen by fur traders on the journey up the Platte to western bison-hunting and beaver-trapping ranges.

The Nebraska State Historical Society conducted excavations at Yutan in 1935, 1958 and 1971. Houses excavated were true earthlodges unlike the square, wattle-and-daub, Village Farmer houses. They were distinctive Plains circular dwellings with four, six, eight or even 10 central roof support posts around a central hearth. The walls consisted of peripheral posts against which

**Finely crafted and distinctively decorated pottery was a hallmark of the Pawnees during the protohistoric period. The bowl is from Colfax County. The other pieces, which include four pots and a small bottle, are from Butler County.**

# WORKING TOGETHER

Roger C. Echo-Hawk, Department of History, University of Colorado

*Native Americans and archaeologists have engaged in stormy disputes in recent decades over the treatment of human remains and the conduct of anthropological research involving native populations. With the settling of these disputes, however, many archaeologists and Indians have begun to explore areas of common interest. The advancement of more cooperative relations between these groups requires the development of projects that can bring both communities together as partners rather than as opponents.*

*One area that holds great promise is reconciliation of archaeology with Indian oral traditions. In the following essay, reprinted from a longer article, "Working Together — Exploring Ancient Worlds" (Society for American Archaeology Bulletin, Vol. 11, No. 4), the author, a Pawnee tribal historian, reasons that Indian origin stories may have roots in the same historical circumstances that gave rise to the archaeological record — a controversial view, but one which explores a new world of emerging common ground between Indians and archaeologists in a way that respects the contributions of both groups.*

## Ancient Worlds

The first people dwelt in a land of lingering darkness. In some Native American origin stories, humans emerged from this region to witness the sun's creation or the ordering of night and day. Thousands of years later, many Indians said that their ancestors entered the world from a dark place located underground.

Other oral traditions, however — told in both Asia and America — describe the creation of earth from a watery world, and these stories do not typically associate darkness with the first people.

Many archaeologists believe that humans from Asia entered North America more than 11,000 years ago. As Ice Age glaciers absorbed water, sea levels fell hundreds of feet and "Beringia" appeared in the far north, linking Asia to Alaska. Some of the oldest human sites in eastern Beringia can be found above the Arctic Circle, where darkness lingers over the earth. Other scholars believe that humans followed the coastlines of Beringia by boat into the Americas — a route which does not pass through the Arctic Circle.

Climatologists believe that the Ice Age was swept by windstorms of much greater power than present-day hurricanes and tornadoes, and in one Indian tradition, the first people were created in the heavens and placed on earth by tornadoes. Other Indian stories say that the climate underwent a swift change when the animals (who reigned over the earth) caused summer to appear. Paleoclimatologists have found that a very sudden global warming event may have occurred 11,700 years ago at the end of the Ice Age. This date coincides with the earliest accepted archeological evidence for the presence of humans in Alaska.

Many Native American oral traditions refer to the existence of dangerous "monsters" and giant animals in ancient times, and other stories are set in a period when animals and

birds ruled the world. Paleontologists describe Ice Age America as a realm dominated by giant animals, or "megafauna." Mammoths, mastodons, and giant sloths towered over human hunters; and fearsome short-faced bears, great cats, and other creatures could have made the New World a dangerous place for unwary people.

In many Indian traditions, a great flood covered the earth in ancient times, and some stories associate this event with the end of the age of monsters. Traditions of a mighty deluge can be found in oral and written literatures from around the world. The end of the most recent Ice Age, some 12,000 years ago, could have involved cataclysmic flooding. As the glaciers slowly melted, for example, the sudden release of a massive ice sheet into the ocean would have brought worldwide flooding. The end of the Ice Age also coincides with the extinction of many species of megafauna around the world.

The first Americans made artifacts and left sites which archaeologists can study for insights into the distant past. The ancient ancestors of modern Native Americans also created verbal documents about their experiences, and successive generations of Indians heard these stories as accounts of actual, not fictional, historical events. If Native American origin traditions shed light on the lifeways of people who settled in North America during the last Ice Age, then Indian literature preserves a remarkable legacy of documents about ancient human history in the New World.

other posts leaned inward. The walls were covered with grass and finally with a thick layer of earth that continued onto the roof, leaving only a central opening for the escape of smoke from the central hearth. A tunnel-like entry passage projected from an east or south wall. In contrast with prehistoric houses, there were few subfloor storage and refuse pits. Deep subterranean storage and refuse pits outside the earthlodges stored corn and other garden surplus. The village was home base for the entire yearly round of activities, but for most of the year the people were away on hunting expeditions.

Historic village sites contain many artifacts, reflecting both dense populations and the accumulation of material over the decades-long occupation of each village. Early protohistoric sites (A.D. 1600 to A.D. 1775) contain pottery as well as stone, bone and antler tools made by the people themselves, but few trade goods. Later sites, like Yutan, contain increasing quantities of metal knives, hoes, kettles and other artifacts obtained from European or American traders, while native-made artifacts gradually disappear. Beaver and river otter bones were abundant at the Yutan village. The bones reflect the intensity of Oto-Missouria hunting of furbearing animals for their pelts, which they traded for manufactured tools and ornaments at posts such as Bellevue.

### *The Poncas and the Redbird People*

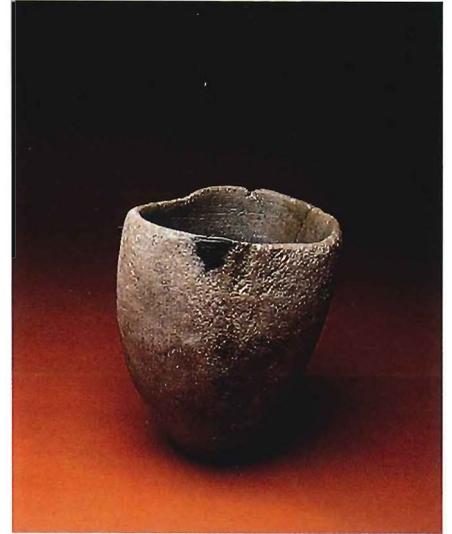
Ponca and Omaha oral history indicates that those people immigrated into northeastern Nebraska about A.D. 1700. The historically documented Ponca Fort site in Knox County of 1780 to 1800 was excavated in 1936 and 1937 by the University of Nebraska. European trade goods, iron, brass and glass tools and ornaments were common. Some of the pottery fragments from Ponca Fort resembled a type made by the Arikaras to the north, suggesting that some Arikaras also may have lived at the site. A physical anthropologist who examined skulls of the Ponca Fort people found that some resembled Poncas and some did not. He attributed the different looking skulls to the Arikaras. Redbird phase sites also were excavated in 1937 and 1938.

Redbird phase sites occur in the heart of Ponca territory, and it has been suggested that they are remnants of protohistoric Ponca villages of 1600 to 1750. The artifacts, however, look older. At the Minarik site, a Redbird village at the foot of Ponca Fort hill, a burial was found in an earthlodge floor containing European trade goods — glass beads, brass cone tinklers, an iron arrowhead and an iron digging tool. It was first thought to be the burial of a Redbird person. A Ponca village of the 1850s, however, had also occupied the spot, and the burial was of a Ponca person intrusive into the hundreds-of-years-old Redbird house floor. The idea that Redbird people were related to the Poncas was partly based on that error.

Archaeologists must always be cautious that data from one period does not become mixed with that from another site where there have been repeated occupations by different people. The ethnic identification of the Redbird phase people is now uncertain. They probably were related to the early Arikara or Pawnee incursion into the region during the 1600s.

### *Pawnee Villagers*

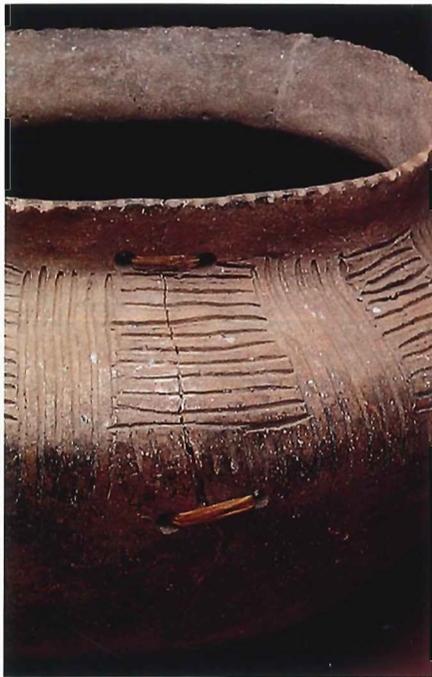
The Pawnee tribe left an impressive archaeological record in Nebraska. Many Pawnee village ruins remain along the lower Loup and Platte valleys from Howard County to Saunders County, and there are several outliers in the Republican basin. Hunting camps have been discovered in the Sandhills and in western Nebraska and Kansas.



**This flat-bottomed vessel carved from a block of soft stone from Wyoming was found in Cherry County. It may have been made by Shoshonean-speaking people who migrated from the west.**



**Iron hoes, more efficient than bison shoulder blade hoes, were popular trade items among village tribes during the historic period.**



The edges of a crack in this Oneota pot were drawn together with sinew laced through small holes.

In the late 18th and 19th centuries, eastern Nebraska was occupied by tribes based in permanent villages of round earthlodges. They raised crops in large gardens and made extended bison hunting trips far from the villages. Western Nebraska was the territory of Lakota Sioux, Cheyennes and Arapahos, tipi-dwelling, bison hunting nomads.

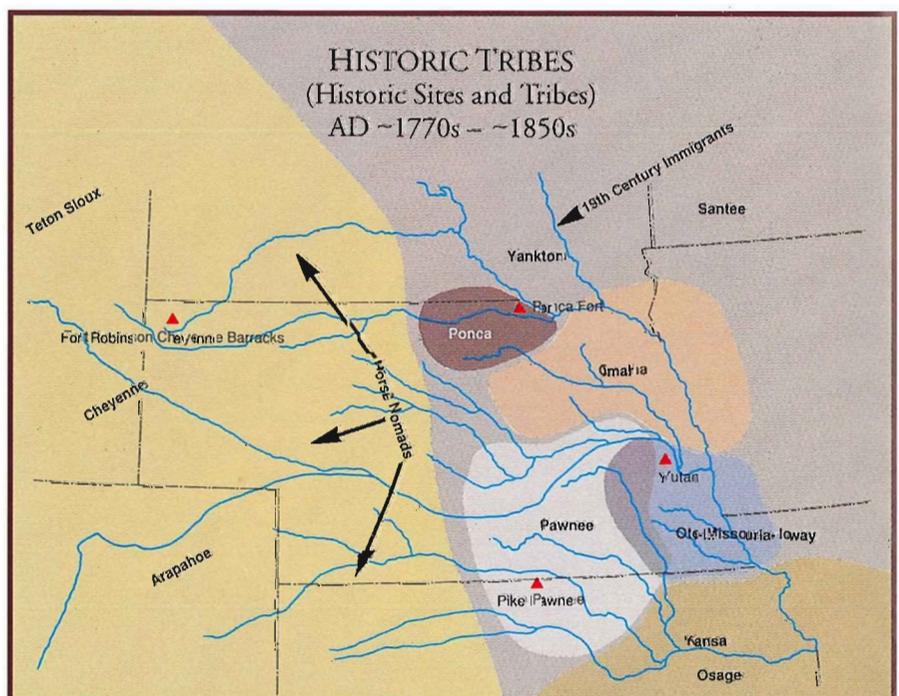
The direct historical approach to archaeology can sometimes be used to identify otherwise unidentifiable sites. The direct historical approach logically proposes that archaeologists first excavate known, well-documented villages of a particular people and define their assemblage of unique traits. Successively older sites are then excavated to trace those traits and thus the people further back in time.

That method successfully identified the protohistoric culture of the Pawnees' ancestors. Material from excavations at documented Pawnee earthlodge villages of the early 1800s was compared with material from villages in Nance and Colfax counties, termed Lower Loup, dating to the 1600s and 1700s. Enough historic Pawnee traits were present in the material culture from earlier sites to allow Lower Loup to be identified as Pawnee villages of the early contact, or protohistoric, period. Precontact sites failed to possess the traits identical or even similar to Pawnee material culture. The thread of Lower Loup ancestry was lost, and a break in the direct historic chain of evidence occurs between 1400 and 1600. One interpretation of Pawnee oral history is that they immigrated into Nebraska from the south about 1600. Once in Nebraska they borrowed the Plains-adapted material culture from the Siouan-speaking Mandans and Hidatsas from North Dakota and South Dakota.

#### *A Protohistoric Pawnee Bison Hunting Camp*

The archaeology of Siouan and Pawnee earthlodge villages is spectacular, but excavation of smaller sites such as hunting camps is no less important to understanding past human behavior. A crucial skill for archaeologists is discerning what questions archaeology can reasonably answer. One of the knottiest problems is what people ate. Archaeological sites often contain crucial evidence of the kinds, quantities and proportions of food the people at a site grew, hunted, gathered, processed and ate.

The Ansley site, a Lower Loup hunting camp with the remains of two tipi floors, each with a nearby refuse dump, was excavated by the Nebraska State Historical Society in Custer County in 1981. It serves as an example of the process used to answer the food questions. Analysis of fragmented and burned bison bones determined that eight animals were processed at the camp. The





Pawnees hunted the smaller female bison almost exclusively, and each animal provided about 400 pounds of meat. The eight bison from the Ansley site represented 3,200 pounds of meat. Every pound of bison meat provided about 635 calories, a total of more than 2 million calories at the site.

Investigators estimated the population at the Ansley site at about six people per tipi, a total of 12. Since this was a protohistoric Pawnee hunting camp, certain inferences from documented historic Pawnee hunting practices could be cautiously applied. One inference was that roughly equal numbers of adult men, adult women and children occupied the camp. The approximate daily caloric requirements of people is 2,900 calories for adult males, 2,400 calories for adult females and 1,900 calories for children. Thus an average of 2,400 calories — about 3.8 pounds of bison meat — per person per day would be needed. A total of 28,800 calories per day supplied by 45.6 pounds of bison meat would be required for the 12 people at the Ansley site.

No other types of food remains were found. Since it was a bison hunting

**The Pawnees shaped their pots with a grooved paddle made from a buffalo vertebral spine. This one is decorated with a stylized human figure.**

camp, we can safely assume that only small amounts of other food — perhaps a few bags of shelled corn — supplemented the bison meat. Thus about 70 days of subsistence is represented. Since the site was occupied for only a few days, the meat provided a significant surplus that would have been dried, packed on dog travois and transported back to the earthlodge villages near the mouth of the Loup River.

### *The Pike-Pawnee Village*

Occupied from about 1770 to 1830 or possibly a little later, the Pike-Pawnee National Historic Landmark has been the subject of thorough historical and archaeological research. Former Nebraska State Historical Society Museum Director A.T. Hill firmly established that the site was the Republican Pawnee community visited by the 1806 Zebulon Pike expedition.

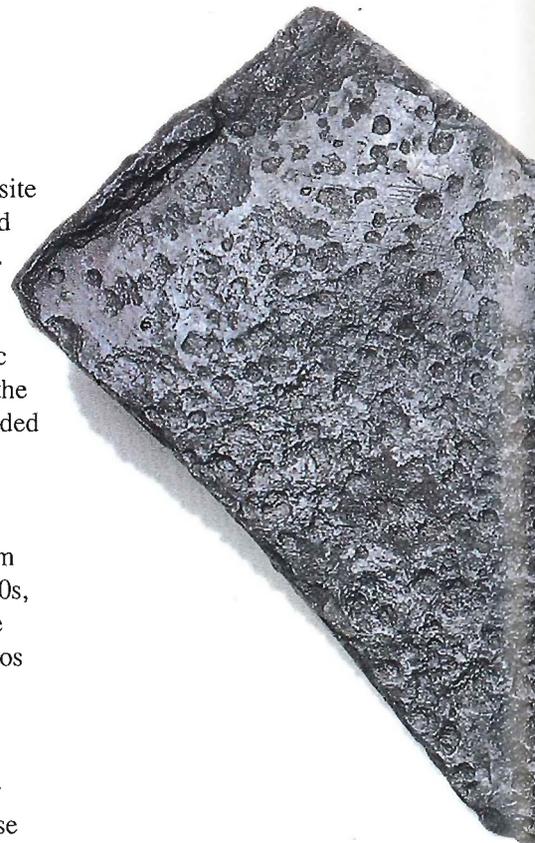
The site, which encompasses nearly 300 acres of Republican River terraces, bluffs and draws, is impressive. In addition to the primary village area of more than 100 lodge sites, five cemeteries, two hoop-game courts and a council site comprise the complex. The artifact collection from Pike-Pawnee is unrivaled among historic Pawnee village samples. Material remains form an impressive amalgamation of native and European items including pottery, stone tools, glass trade beads, gun parts and other ornaments and weapons.

Beyond the historical significance the village has attained as the location of Pike's visit, the village complex possesses great archaeological research potential. The occupation spans the period from when the Pawnees were beginning to adopt Euroamerican goods with increasing regularity through the time when they had virtually abandoned their native technologies. Several key aspects of the dramatic effects of cultural contact, both favorable and detrimental, can be studied by examining the artifacts and other remains from the community.

### *Western Nebraska during the Historic Period*

From about 1500 to 1650, people dwelling in present South Dakota hunted bison in northern Nebraska. In 1985, highway archaeologists from the Nebraska State Historical Society partially excavated a bison-hunting campsite near Fort Robinson on Slaughterhouse Creek. Scattered around a stone-lined hearth were fragments of thin pottery, stone tools and manufacturing debris. The plume of charcoal from the hearth was scattered to the south and east, indicating the camp probably was occupied during winter when prevailing winds are from the northwest. Also found were chips of obsidian, a volcanic glass, which came from a flow near Malad, Idaho, some 460 miles west of the site. Had the people traveled to Idaho to obtain this material, or had they traded for a small supply with people closer to the source? The identity of the Slaughterhouse Creek people is unclear, but they may be related to Redbird phase villagers in northeastern Nebraska or people in central South Dakota.

In about 1675, people immigrated into western and central Nebraska from the north and west. Named after sites discovered in the Sandhills in the 1930s, Dismal River sites also have been excavated in the Republican basin. Those people may have spoken an Athabascan language now spoken by the Navajos and Apaches of the Southwest and southern Plains areas. In Nebraska they dwelt in villages of lodges that resembled Navajo hogans with their five central roof supports. In historic documents they were called the Padoucas. They appear to have left Nebraska and migrated south by 1725, replaced by Numic-speaking Comanches, who also came to be called the Padouca. Those people are poorly known in Nebraska in an archaeological sense, but occasional fragments of their typical, flat-bottomed pots and carved soapstone





Trade goods used by historic Pawnees included brass pans containing red and green pigments which were applied with pieces of porous bone (top). Whetstones for sharpening metal tools accompanied ax head, scissors and fish hook (bottom).





vessels have been found in the state. They sometimes were called the Snakes in early historic documents, and the Snake River in Cherry County may be a remnant place-name from the residence of those people in Nebraska. Eastern tribes such as the Pawnees and Omahas pushed them westward.

In the late 1700s and 1800s, western Nebraska became the home of the Cheyennes, Arapahos and Sioux, who moved from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa, where they had been post-contact village-dwelling gardeners and foragers. They abandoned virtually all settled village life to become full-time

**Eastern Nebraska tribes continued to live in earthlodges even into the reservation period. This one was used by Omahas on their reservation in Thurston County.**





Plains bison hunters. They became famous as the stereotypical horse-riding Indians of the Plains. Horses diffused northward and eastward from Spanish colonial settlements in New Mexico in the 1700s, and the Plains Indians eagerly adopted them for transportation and hunting.

Nomadic horsemen, they lived year-round in conical, bison-hide tipis. The tipi was the final evolution of the conical skin tent that had been in use for thousands of years. In unplowed ground in western Nebraska, circles of stones used to hold down the edges of such dwellings against the wind are still found. Called tipi rings, those circles of stones are almost all of prehistoric age. Historic tipi-dwellers secured their tents with wooden or iron pegs.

The Sioux, Cheyennes and Arapahos numbered in the tens of thousands, yet very few archaeological sites attributed to them have been identified. A rare iron arrowhead or a glass bead constitutes the entire physical evidence of a historically well-documented campsite. Large populations of nomads can briefly sweep across vast geographic areas without leaving much of a visible archaeological record.

From the 1850s until the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890, Nebraska was the scene of several Indian-white and intertribal conflicts. A popular misconception is that most archaeological sites are the locations of Indian battlegrounds. In fact, documented archaeological evidence of Indian battles (both between Indians and Euroamericans and Indian-to-Indian) is rare.

From 1987 through 1989 the Nebraska State Historical Society conducted excavations at Fort Robinson in the location of a former log barracks, now merely an archaeological remnant. Built in 1874, it was used from 1878 to 1879 to house 149 Cheyennes, who were captured by soldiers near the fort. On January 9, 1879, the Cheyennes made a desperate break for freedom. In the floor of the barracks archaeologists found several pits the Cheyennes apparently had dug to fortify their position against the soldiers. The barracks, like the guardhouse nearby where Crazy Horse was killed in 1877, continues to be an important place to all Americans and their history.

**Agent A. L. Green sketched his Oto-Missouria Agency in Gage County as it appeared in 1871. The drawing shows earthlodges, bark-covered houses and tipis all used as dwellings.**