

INDIANS IN BUFFALO COUNTY

Plains Woodland Culture -- (300-1000 AD)

The first people to live in this area were hunters and gatherers of the Plains Woodland Culture. They planted some corn and gourds but most of their food came from what they found growing around them.

They traveled by foot because horses had not yet been brought to the plains area.

Tools such as scrapers, arrowheads, and cutting tools were made from rocks.

Pottery jars were a simple, cone shape with thick walls. Pottery was made by mixing clay with sand and fine gravel. A design on the outside of the jars was made by repeated rolling of a coiled cord or cord-wrapped stick up the side of the jar. There was no lip or curved rim at the top of the jar.

Upper Republican Culture -- (1000-1450 AD)

These later Woodland Indians were possibly the ancestors to the Pawnee Indians. They lived in earth lodges and raised crops such as corn, beans and gourds.

Besides chipping rocks to form tools, other tools were made from wood and bone. The awl was made from splinters of bone, probably deer or antelope. It was sharpened on an "abrader", a piece of gray sandstone.

Clay pots, shaped with flat bottoms and broad shoulders, were decorated with diagonal, horizontal, vertical, and wavy lines.

Beads, bracelets and other ornaments were made from shells, bones, and porcupine quills. A stone called hematite was rubbed against a harder stone surface to produce red paint.

The Horse

Coronado and other Spanish explorers brought horses to the New World. Gradually they spread across the plains and Indians began to use them.

"Next to corn and the buffalo, the horse was the greatest gift ever made to the Indian. It changed their whole life. It made it easier for them to get food. It made it easier for them to travel. The squaws and children were happy to have the horse. He pulled the tepee poles. The babies could ride on his back or on the travois. The travois was a kind of baby cab made of poles, and hitched behind the horse, with the poles dragging on the ground. The horse was the Indian Automobile."

(from NEBRASKA OLD AND NEW, by Sheldon, page 9)

Pawnee Indians -- (ca.1500-1857)

The Pawnee Indians hunted in this area. Their permanent homes were east of Buffalo County. They lived in earth lodges but carried tepees for shelter on hunting trips.

The travois was used for carrying loads. It was formed by tying long poles, usually the tepee poles, to the sides of a horse allowing the pole ends to drag on the ground. A hide was stretched between the poles and the load, often including babies or ill members of the party, was placed on the hide. Dogs sometimes pulled smaller travois.

On hunting trips the Pawnee were hunting for deer, buffalo, elk, and antelope.

SUMMARY OF ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY MADE OF INDIAN SITES IN BUFFALO COUNTY

1st site -- probably Upper Republican Culture, possibly during early phase

2nd site -- Upper Republican, late phase

3rd site -- (Southeast of Amherst) Plains Woodland Culture

Pots - made of clay mixed with sand and fine gravel.

Cordmarking - Decorative texture made by repeated rolling of coiled

two-strand cord or cord-wrapped stick back and forth.

Bone awl - Made from splinters of bone, probably deer or antelope.

Hematite - Red stones. Flat surface indicates it was rubbed against
some surface to produce paint.

Abraders - gray sandstone with grooves made by rubbing

Stone materials -

Republican River jasper - color range from red-orange to buff and
olive green. Waste flakes from formation of arrow heads. Jasper
found in south central Nebraska (especially in Republican River)
and in adjacent northern Kansas.

Chert - found in southeastern Nebraska. Light to dark gray, turns
blue-black with heating; frequently includes fossils.

River cobbles - probably gathered from the Platte.

Tools -

Projectile points made of jasper and some chert

Scrapers made of chert and jasper

Headed wedges made of cobbles

Headed bifaces used as cutting tools

Hammerstones used as hammers.

The site was regularly used as a temporary camp by a "foraging economy".

FROM COME BACK LETTERS written in August-September, 1923.

Letter # 36:

"I came out to Kearney in 1878....When I first came out there we often saw Indians on the street...."

Letter # 54:

"We came to Kearney 50 years ago 1873 Sept....We came late in the evening on the Burlington, Pawnee Indians were lying on the platform wrapt in there blankets....(T)here were Several hundret of them campd on the Island south of Kearney. first day of April 1874 we had our first fire a frame building I think third lot south of the Opera House families roomed up stairs my sister Mrs. H Achy lost a bright colored shawl(✓) (A)n Indian had found it among there household goods(,) things had been carried out doors(.) They took it away from him(.) She got it again that day."

Letter # 199:

"I will say that my father Dave Looker came with his family of two little girls to Kearney in 1875. I was about 4 yrs(.) old at the time and remember distinctly that Buffalo Bill and his Indians had just arrived in town starting out with his first show coming direct from North Platte to Kearney. It was no uncommon thing to see Indians on the street every day."

Letter # 178:

"About the 10th of September 1872 the Pawnee Indians stopped and camped for a short time. There were between 400 or 500. Then they went West to hunt buffalo and about the middle of October they came back(.) (A)t that time I had arrived in Kearney, [she arrived Sept. 19] and it

sure was a great sight for me to see real wild Indians. I was not very much impressed with them, as they were so dirty. The braves all rode ponies and the poor squaws and their papooses strapped to their backs and leading two or perhaps three ponies loaded with their belongings and meat. Some looked so tired and some had one or two or perhaps three girls or boy(s) running along by their side, all on foot. As the ponies had all they could carry. When the boys are about fifteen years old they were braves, and did not have to work any, and carried a bow and arrow. I sure felt sorry for the poor squaws. I saw them sit and pick lice off the children(')s heads and eat grass-hoppers and any think that was too dirty for any one else to eat."