



Plains Archeologists, standing in the center of a sixty feet in diameter ancient house site on Behrns Farms, Cass County, September 7, 1932. Left to right:—W. Ost, E. E. Blackman, J. C. Samms, Clifton Amsbury, Carl E. Guthe, Charles R. Keyes, G. L. Waters, Lee Daniels, W. D. Strong, George Lamb, Earl H. Bell, S. C. Dellinger, Ed. Murphy, B. C. Refshauge, G. H. Gilmore, Alvin McReynolds, Ellison Orr, A. E. Sheldon, A. T. Hill.

PREHISTORIC MAN IN NEBRASKA AND THE GREAT PLAINS REGION

Remarkable Discoveries in 1932—Progress in Exploration—
Western Plains Conference of Explorers at Lincoln, September
5-6-7, 1932.

Exploration of Nebraska for evidences of prehistoric man began as far back at least as 1856 when Isaac Pollard, a Vermont emigrant homesteader at Nehawka, took notice of burial mounds on his farm, excavations in its limestone hills; the extraction of flint nodules from the limestone; flint chip work shops where aborigines had converted the flint into edged tools and weapons. In 1901 the Nebraska State Historical Society, at the special instance of J. Sterling Morton and Robert W. Furnas, employed Mr. E. E. Blackman to make a preliminary archeological survey of Indian sites in the state. In 1907 the discovery by Mr. Robert F. Gilder and other of skulls, skeletons and other aboriginal remains at depths between five and twelve feet at Long's Hill, north of Omaha, started a nation-wide discussion of the question of preglacial man in Nebraska. In 1914-15 Dr. Fred H. Sterns of Harvard University made a brief survey of Indian house sites along the Missouri river front. His chief discovery was finding remains of Indian house sites near Rock Bluff at depth of 12 to 15 feet below the surface.

Explorations in western Nebraska made by Harold Cook of Agate during the past 15 years have yielded considerable results and records. A multitude of minor excavators and "diggers" have carried on the search for stone age implements and pottery during the past sixty years. The result of most of this amateur exploration were the accumulation of a lot of "specimens," without record of their place of discovery or conditions under which they were found.

In 1930 systematic organization of the search for prehistoric evidences of man in Nebraska was begun under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, by the appointment of Dr. Carl E. Guthe, of Michigan University, as a general director for the Mississippi Valley field. Joined with him in direction of the work in Nebraska and the plains region was Dr. W. D. Strong, then of the University of Nebraska, now of the Smithsonian at Washington.

Under the plan, the first general conference of plains archeologists and explorers was held in September, 1931, at Vermillion, South Dakota. The attendance was not large, but the interest was great. A good beginning was made. The second conference was held in Morrill Hall, of University of Nebraska, at Lincoln on September 5-6-7, 1932, under a call by a committee appointed at Vermillion in 1931 consisting of Earl H. Bell, Lincoln; Chas. R. Keyes, Mount, Iowa, and George Wills of North Dakota. Attendance at this meeting was larger than at Vermillion and the interest very much greater. The roll of those present included a group of university-trained anthropologists, a larger group of amateur explorers and a number of others interested in the general results. The recorded list of those present at the Lincoln meetings is as follows:

Clifton Amsbury, Berkeley, California
Erwin H. Barbour, Lincoln, Nebraska
Earl H. Bell, Lincoln, Nebraska
E. E. Blackman, Lincoln, Nebraska
L. A. Daniels, Gering, Nebraska
S. C. Dellinger, Fayetteville, Arkansas
Tim Erickson, Villisca, Iowa
R. F. Gilder, Omaha, Nebraska
G. H. Gilmore, Murray, Nebraska
Melvin R. Gilmore, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Carl E. Guthe, Ann Arbor, Michigan
A. T. Hill, Hastings, Nebraska
Paul A. Jones, Lyons, Kansas
Horace Jones, Lyons, Kansas
Charles R. Keyes, Mt. Vernon, Iowa
Maurice E. Kirby, Vermillion, South Dakota
George F. Lamb, Williams, Nebraska

Paul Mortensen, Cotesfield, Nebraska
 Edward Murphy, Weeping Water, Nebraska
 Ellison Orr, Waukon, Iowa
 W. A. Ost, Nehawka, Nebraska
 W. H. Over, Vermillion, South Dakota
 B. C. Refshauge, Aurora, Nebraska
 Paul Rowe, Glenwood, Iowa
 J. C. Samms, Hastings, Nebraska
 Addison E. Sheldon, Lincoln, Nebraska
 W. D. Strong, Washington, D. C.
 G. L. Waters, Lincoln, Nebraska

The first day's program consisted in the arrangement of exhibits upon tables. The exhibits were brought in by the individual workers. Each exhibit was labeled with its place of discovery and descriptive name. Each exhibitor gave a brief account of his work during the past year, the nature of his discoveries and a discussion of the material which he had on exhibition. Critical questions brought out most interesting additional information. The entire day was eagerly occupied in examination and discussion and followed by a reception to members at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Earl H. Bell, 1710 South 25th, Lincoln.

The second day's meetings were principally given to addresses by Dr. W. D. Strong, Dr. E. H. Barbour of Lincoln; Mr. A. T. Hill of Hastings; Dr. Melvin R. Gilmore of the University of Michigan; Dr. Chas. R. Keyes of Mount Vernon, Iowa; Mr. Paul Rowe of Glenwood, Iowa; Mr. Tim Erickson of Villisca, Iowa; Ellison Orr, Waukon, Iowa; Dr. S. C. Dellinger, of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Dr. Strong's Address:

Dr. Strong gave a brief summary of the prehistoric provinces of Nebraska, as derived from prehistoric remains. These include:

1. The Missouri River Front.
2. The Loup and Platte valleys.
3. The Republican and Southwest Area.
4. The Sandhill Region.
5. The Western Plains Region.

The most important discoveries of the past years have been made at Signal Butte, which is about 22 miles southwest of Scottsbluff, an isolated peak of the Wild Cat Mountains. Mr. Thomas L. Green, banker of Scottsbluff, first called attention to the conditions at this butte. Excavations under the direction of Dr. Strong in the summer of 1932 made a vertical cross section about 18 feet in depth. At least three separate strata of human occupation were found, separated by considerable strata of soil deposits showing no human occupation. The testimony of these inhabited strata indicated to the explorers a period of perhaps 10,000 years from the time of the first human occupation until the present. These chronological estimates are subject to con-

siderable change, but beyond doubt the site indicates a period running into thousands of years.

Comment by Dr. E. H. Barbour

In Dr. Barbour's address attention was called to the finding of extinct fossil bison in the Custer County region. Professor Meserve at Grand Island and Mr. Schultz, graduate student in Paleontology of the University Nebraska, found ancient arrow points imbedded in the bones of these fossil bison. In the excavation at Signal Butte a pile of bison bones was found three or four feet deep and an Indian arrow point in the same area. The site of these bones at Signal Butte indicates an old river channel. These finds were just above the Brule clay. They were authenticated by witnesses. Dr. Barbour found no volcanic ash or dust in the Signal Butte strata.

Remarks by Mr. A. T. Hill of Hastings

Mr. Hill had found square houses and round houses in his excavations, some of them, sometimes, in the same area and apparently the same age. He found house sites of Nebraska culture in the form of depressions. On the surface a square house appears just as round as a round house. But in excavating and finding the original house posts and floor some houses are found to be round and some square. In the central part of the state housesite depressions are quite slight. Mr. Hill's method of exploring a housesite is, first, to locate the fireplace. This is done by boring near the center with an auger. From the fireplace as a center the house opening is located and the row of posts and post holes worked out which shows the structure. The earth should be dug down to the hardened floor which is easily determined in some cases and difficult in others. Then the entire floor space is worked out, the dirt thrown back and the floor examined for post holes, caches beneath the floor and prehistoric implements and remains. The old plan of opening up a house by trenching is wrong. It fails to give an accurate picture or discover what may be hidden on the floor and beneath.

Nebraska culture houses are nearly always on benches, bluffs and ridges. By examination of the pottery, implements, ashes and animal remains one can discover the relation of the culture of an ancient house to the lodges and tribes of the historic period.

Dr. Melvin R. Gilmore, of Michigan

Dr. Gilmore was called upon to discuss his explorations in the Missouri river region and his study of the present day Missouri river Indians. He said the type of house was just as important as the stone implements in determining the culture. He considers the shape of the house stable, being transmitted through many generations and consequently there is a real difference between square house site people and round house site people.

Dr. Keyes, of Iowa

For ten years and more Dr. Keyes has been carrying on an archeological survey of Iowa. Over two hundred pottery producing sites have been mapped in Iowa. There is a woodland culture made by people who built their houses in the woods. These houses have a distinctive type of pottery. The pots were small and thin.

Paul Rowe, of Iowa

Mr. Paul Rowe, of Glenwood, Iowa presented a working map of the discoveries in Mills county. The best Indian areas are along the bluffs. Sometimes digging 20 or 25 feet down. Finds were skulls, pottery, arrow points, stone axes. Types of pottery are characterized by difference in material, some being clay mixed with pounded shells, others clay mixed with gravel. Some pots were marked by cord impressions about the rim, others with grass or basket markings.

Mr. Tim Erickson of Iowa found many stone axes at considerable depths and of several different types.

Dr. Orr's Address

Dr. Orr of Iowa described the great plains region and its relation to the Mississippi valley. Prehistoric remains are found along the top of bluffs in mounds from two to three feet high and from sixteen to forty feet in diameter. In upper Iowa were found "enclosed areas," consisting of embankments three feet high and eight or ten inches wide. Effigy mounds are found in the form of bears, eagles and other animals, denoting the aboriginal clan which constructed them. In some places collections of skeletons or skulls were found. The original burial had been in trees and later the bones were gathered up and buried in bundles. In the northwest Iowa region graves can be found almost anywhere if you know where to find them. In these graves are pottery, pipes and flints of different sizes, with many skeletons. Clay vessels are usually found with the male skeletons. With the women's skeletons articles are usually found which they use in their work, awls, needles, etc. Remains which we have found are sometimes buried under ten or twelve feet of soil. It requires in average sites fifty years to deposit a foot of sediment. Some of the remains we found had been buried at least 2,000 years ago.

Dr. Strong, in further discussion, said that a strip in Nebraska is occupied by Sioux culture artifacts and sites. In the upper Republican valley we have prehistoric Pawnee. The South Dakota Indian sites are complicated. Some sites are surely Mandan.

Prof. Dellinger, of Arkansas, stated that in western Arkansas they found pipes of many kinds, some catlinite pipes from the South Dakota quarries. Granite stone mauls were found. In pottery they had every kind that has been mentioned, many dif-

ferent animal forms. There were hoes of yellowest flint. The Caddoan people, relatives of the Pawnee, once occupied that region. He had dug out 500 or 600 burials. In some of these the head was placed to the west, in others toward other points. There seemed to be three cultures in Arkansas.

Third Day- Trip to Rock Bluff and Nehawka

September 7, last day of the conference, five autos loaded with eager members drove east on the O street highway to Union, thence to Rock Bluff where Dr. G. H. Gilmore, of Murray, met them and with him a party of local enthusiasts and explorers. King Hill and Queen Hill are noted land marks rising from the Missouri river west shore to a height of 200 to 500 feet. Along the crest of these hills, back a few feet from the edge where the bluff slopes to the river, is a series of well defined mounds. The hills are covered with hard wood timber. Most of it is not over fifty years old.

Under the direction of Dr. G. H. Gilmore several of these mounds have been opened this summer.

It was high noon on Queen Hill. We gathered in a group about the principal mound, the Turtle Effigy Mound,—ate a lunch which the foresight of Dr. Gilmore had provided. Our eyes ranged the Missouri channel for many miles. Far on the Iowa shore stood the opposing chain of bluffs and beyond them the hills of Tabor, site of a Congregational College and early center of the anti-slavery forces. The spot where we stood was a noble site for the burial of an Indian chief. The imagination pictured the scene as it was centuries, milleniums, ago, and wished that the solitary skeleton found in the mound might speak, even in the sign language, of the past which it had once known.

Among the citizens who joined us on Queen hill, several of whom have been active in local archeological work, were the following.

Fulton Harris, Union, Nebraska
A. A. McReynolds, Nehawka, Nebraska
Joe Shera, Plattsmouth, Nebraska
J. J. Lamb, 1342 E St., Lincoln

Emil Kopac, of Oshkosh, is one of the extensive grain farmers of the high Nebraska plains. He is also one of the most active historical explorers and contributors to the State Historical Society collections. During the past year Mr. Kopac followed the old Oregon Trail, as nearly as possible, to the Pacific coast and back again, writing a series of fascinating letters upon historic locations and present conditions. The Historical Society acknowledges with deep gratitude a series of handsome enlarged photographs received from Mr. Kopac.