



## The Archeological Campaign of 1937: Conclusion

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Article Summary: This is one of a series of 1937 archeological site reports that can be accessed individually. The series includes: [Ashland Site](#), [Pawnee Creek Site](#), [Cornish Site](#), [Fontenelle Forest Site](#), [North Plattsmouth Site](#), [Majors Site](#), [Williams Site](#), [Heywood Site](#), [Osborne Site](#), [Whitten Site](#), [Morehead Site](#), [Indian Cave](#), [McKissick Site](#), [Conclusion](#).

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## CONCLUSION

The more general results of the 1937 Survey may be briefly summarized. Its activities were confined to the southeastern corner of the state where several village and burial sites on the Platte and Missouri Rivers were investigated. Although the area is not culturally homogeneous, by far the most abundant remains are manifestations of the Nebraska aspect, while other complexes appear to have definitely limited distributions.

The peoples who carried the Nebraska culture apparently were in undisputed possession of at least a large part of eastern Nebraska. How far west their villages were established is still uncertain, although we know they were at least as far away from the Missouri as Ashland. The immense number of house sites scattered over the area point either to a large population or a long period of residence, and the isolation of many of them and the loosely arranged and unfortified position of small groups indicate a peaceful, unmolested existence.

The semi-permanent square earth-lodges of these people, situated either on the bluffs or terraces, are always within a short distance of rich easily-worked bottom lands on which crops of corn, beans, sunflowers and perhaps other vegetal forms were raised. That nature's gifts of wild edible fruits and nuts were not scorned is indicated by the finding of charred specimens of walnuts, hazel nuts, acorns and plum pits, and these are certainly a minor part of a long list of plant foods, for our information is dependent upon the rare occurrence of suitable materials being burned to the proper degree. From the streams fish were taken by means of hooks and probably nets, and mussels were collected in large quantities. It is probable that hunting expeditions were fairly local events, for game must have been abundant particularly in the timber along the streams. The rarity of bison bones may not be an accurate index of the extent to

which this animal was hunted, for prior to the introduction of the horse it is doubtful that more than the utilizable parts of a carcass would be transported any great distance to the village. It is doubtful, however, that the bison was as important a factor in the economy of these people as it became after the introduction of the horse.

The various sites thus far excavated are not homogeneous, but exhibit a considerable amount of variation—almost exclusively in the ceramics. Although differences in form are limited, the components differ widely in tempering material, the frequency of handles, and the presence of certain foreign elements such as incised body decoration. While in the majority of sites grit-tempering is predominant, two lodges investigated during the season yielded pottery in which crushed shell is most commonly included with the clay. In certain houses handles and lugs are very numerous, while in others they appear rarely. Incised body decoration, although never remarkably abundant and almost absent in some sites, is in a few instances fairly common. Other than in pottery, however, the various components are remarkably uniform, the pipes, stone and bone artifacts and the house types being virtually identical.

As has been previously noted, there are certain pottery traits whose origins appear to be outside this culture. These include the use of shell as a tempering material, incised shoulder area decoration, and a low wide body with a low unobtrusive rim. While these traits are found separately with otherwise typical Nebraska aspect ware, there frequently appear distinctly foreign vessels of dark gray or black ware in which they are combined. These vessels are similar to certain Middle Mississippi types and some of them may be actual importations, the influence of which probably accounts for the presence of incised decoration and shell tempering with globular pots of the usual Nebraska aspect form.



A Middle Mississippi influence is further suggested by the rare occurrence of angular-shouldered vessels, and occasional bowls also suggest an outside origin.

The presence of collared rims in many sites is apparently indicative of contacts with Upper Republican peoples, and occasional rims identical with those made by the latter strongly argue for the contemporaneity of the two aspects. Particularly interesting is the rare combination of a rim of this type with Nebraska aspect body shape and handles and with body decoration of an eastern type.

As a result of investigations to date, it is apparent that a number of variants of the Nebraska aspect exist. Because certain areas, particularly along the Missouri north of Omaha and along portions of the Elkhorn, are as yet virtually unknown, the full extent of the variations is probably not yet revealed but will become clear with excavations in these regions.

The burial pattern of the Nebraska aspect is as yet a rather uncertain factor, for though it seems probable that secondary burial after exposure of the bodies was practiced, thorough investigations of burial sites have been few and in most instances little evidence has been adduced for a certain identification of the interments with the earth lodge villages. Such identification was impossible for any of the burials excavated by the Survey in 1937; in fact, the small amount of cultural material recovered in general pointed rather definitely to affiliations with other complexes, as yet undefined.

The problem of the age of Nebraska culture remains has been often discussed and there is no need to go into detail on the subject at this time. Suffice it to say that no evidence has yet been reported to cast doubt upon its pre-Columbian position. In view of this fact, speculation as to its authorship is futile. Its frequent assignment to the Mandan lacks archeological support and is

not even borne out by traditional accounts of the movements of that tribe.

Two other occupations of southeastern Nebraska are represented by less abundant remains. People carrying an Oneota culture came in here probably at a relatively recent date, too recently to have had any contact with the bearers of the Nebraska culture. Their influence on the culture of groups who were settled here at the time was, however, very marked, and their culture in turn was probably altered to a pronounced degree.

Traces of occupation by a people with a Woodland culture have been found at various points in the area, but as yet it has been impossible to define the complex or complexes of which the few artifacts recovered are a part. As these materials are most often found buried beneath several feet of soil, it is suspected that they are older than the earth lodge villages, but direct evidence of this is lacking. The single stratified site in this section of the state, the Walker Gilmore site, does, however, produce in the lower level remains which appear to have some affiliations with these other remains, although the present evidence indicates significant differences.

As a result of the summer's work a clearer picture of the archeological situation in southeastern Nebraska emerges. Further evidence on the variations of the Nebraska aspect and its relationships to other manifestations has been collected, a contribution has been made concerning the problem of the western extension of the Oneota culture, and data on the presence in this area of an apparently widespread Woodland manifestation have been accumulated. Furthermore, the archeologically unknown areas of Nebraska are being steadily diminished, and the continuation of the present program of research will ultimately unfold the history of man's life in this state as completely as the archeological record can reveal it.

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**MEANINGS OF SOME WORDS IN THIS MAGAZINE**

- Artifact.** Any object made by man.
- Aspect.** See "Addenda."
- Cache.** As here used it means a pit—in which, presumably, corn, dried foods and other articles were stored.
- Cancellous.** Pertaining to the spongy portion of bone.
- Canine Ulna.** The bone of an upper front leg of wolf, dog, or other animal of the family Canidae.
- Catlinite.** A red shale used by the Indians for pipes; named for George Catlin, explorer. Found at Pipestone, Minnesota.
- Celt.** A stone axe, but without groove for the attachment of a handle.
- Ceramic.** Pertaining to pottery and its materials.
- Complex.** A combination of cultural traits occurring together; various things combining as a whole.
- (Chiwere Sioux.** A branch of the widespread Siouan family, including the Winnebago, Oto, Iowa and Missouri tribes.
- (Dhegiha Sioux.** A branch of the Siouan family, including the Omaha, Ponca, Kansa, Osage and Quapaw tribes.
- Diagnostic trait.** A trait which characterizes a certain culture and serves to distinguish it from other cultures, making it distinctive or individual.
- Diastema.** A natural space between two successive teeth or series of teeth.
- Diorite.** A well known stone (a combining form) of grayish white or green color; sometimes contains mica or quartz. A variety of trap rock.
- Exhumation.** The removal of a body or bodies from a grave.
- Flexed.** Bent, as an arm.
- Focus.** See "Addenda."
- Glenoid cavity.** The concave surface of the inferior joint of the shoulder blade.
- Hematite.** A red, soft iron ore used as paint by Indians.
- In articulation.** Bones lying in their proper relation to one another, as in a flesh burial.

**Mandible.** The lower jaw bone.

**Metapodial.** A bone of the metacarpus or metatarsus—i. e., one of the bones in the palm of hand or foot; or, in the case of animals, in corresponding structures.

**Midden.** An accumulation of refuse, usually from cooking and eating.

**Ossuary.** A large grave for communal burials—a service in which the skeletons were removed from temporary graves and deposited with much ceremony in a single large pit.

**Ovoid.** Egg-shaped.

**Pattern.** See "Addenda."

**Pecking stone.** A stone used like a hammer for shaping stone artifacts.

**Phase.** See "Addenda."

**Pre-Columbian era.** The period before the discovery of America by Columbus.

**Post-contact period.** The period which began with the first contact of the whites with the Indians of the region.

**Proto-historic.** Referring to sites, in which evidence of contact with whites is found, but of which there is no mention by chroniclers.

**Scapula.** A shoulder blade.

**Scoria.** Volcanic lava or pumice.

**Sherd.** A fragment.

**Stone cist.** A box-like structure built with stones.

**Stratigraphic.** Relating to the strata or layers of material showing different periods of occupation.

**Toggle-head harpoon.** A harpoon point made of antler with a barb.

**Woodland-like.** Similar to objects found associated with the Woodland Pattern.

## ADDENDA

**The Classificatory System:** As in other sciences, the accumulation of data has led archeologists to a classifactory system which seeks to bring some order out of a chaos of facts. The purpose of this system is to show the relationship of the culture found at any site to cultures found elsewhere. As it is closely comparable to the classification used in zoology, we may most easily illustrate the use of the names given the various divisions in the archeological system by indicating their equivalents in the zoological system.

**Archeological**

Pattern  
Phase  
Aspect  
Focus

**Zoological**

Order  
Family  
Genus  
Species

It is apparent that a focus would include all sites which show an identical culture, while the remaining divisions include sites with progressively more remote relationships.

