



The Archeological Campaign of 1937: Introduction

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

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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](#).

Cataloging Information:

Photographs / Images: NSHS Archeological Survey in transit, Survey camp at the Ashland Site

Foreword

By Addison E. Sheldon

The founders of the State Historical Society named as one of its purposes the "complete scientific exploration and survey" of aboriginal evidences in Nebraska.

This issue of *Nebraska History Magazine* is an evidence of the present work upon the plan set forth sixty years ago. It is the third magazine since 1932 devoted chiefly to the discoveries of prehistoric man in Nebraska, as made by the State Historical Society.

Under the present plan, each year one magazine issue will be given to Prehistoric Nebraska. Three will be devoted to Nebraska and Great Plains history and biography. From time to time a bound volume will appear, containing the more important historical articles.

It is important that readers of the *Nebraska History Magazine* should secure a clear idea of the main features of the Nebraska explorations in the prehistoric field. In a general way it may be stated that the object of these explorations is to secure the best possible idea of the customs and daily life of prehistoric people who lived in this region. The best available evidence of these people is found in their houses and their graves. Both of these are buried in Nebraska soil, varying from a few inches to several feet in depth.

Painstaking excavation and examination have thus far furnished us with the size, shape and structure of these houses. Articles found in the houses show different types of pottery: flint, stone and shell items which exhibit the workmanship of the people who lived there; charcoal, ashes, and occasional fragments of wood indi-

cate the method of construction and also disclose the kind of food eaten by the people who lived in those houses.

The evidence so far indicates considerable variation in the habits and customs and the implements of people who lived in Nebraska prior to the coming of white explorers. As the process of exploration goes on, more material is secured upon which reasoning may be done and the probabilities established.

Every new field of knowledge explored builds up a word list of its own. This vocabulary may arise by taking familiar English words and giving them new meanings. It may be built up by borrowing significant words from some language like the Greek or Latin languages. It may be built up by inventing new combinations to express our conception of the articles found and the processes which have occurred.

The studies of every science, therefore, bring into use old words with new meanings and new words with fresh meanings. At first these uses are limited to a few special students. Popular interest and knowledge bring the word list into general use.

Archeology is a good example of growing knowledge of words. In the transition period it is a help to have its vocabulary briefly defined for the average reader. Such a word list for this magazine is found on page 357.

No subject has more general popular interest than the study of prehistoric life on this planet. The origin and life of man in any region is of fundamental interest to the people living there. In Nebraska these explorations and studies have grown with great strides—both in importance and public interest. This third issue of the *Nebraska History Magazine* devoted to the story of Prehistoric Nebraska marks another long forward step in this field.

The Archeological Campaign of 1937

by the

NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Under Conduct of

DIRECTOR A. T. HILL

and

ASSISTANT PAUL COOPER

INTRODUCTION

An organized program of archeological research in Nebraska is a relatively recent development. Although excellent pioneering work has been carried on in the past by a few amateur and professional archeologists, their activities were either confined to surface surveys or to excavation in limited areas. As early as the beginning of the century E. E. Blackman, archeologist for the Nebraska State Historical Society, visited and made surface collections from various sites in the state, and excavations were carried out for years by Robert F. Gilder—whose work, however, was limited mainly to the vicinity of Omaha. During the years 1912 to 1914 Frederick H. Sterns of Harvard University investigated many village sites within the state, but his work was done only in the extreme eastern section, and his report, except for a summary by Strong¹ and two brief articles,² is not available.

It is only since 1929 that organized programs of investigation into the prehistory of Nebraska have been inaugurated by the University of Nebraska, and by the State Historical Society under the direction of A. T.

1. Strong, 1935.

2. Sterns, 1914, 1915.

Hill. At that time vast areas of the state were virtually unknown so far as aboriginal remains were concerned. Because it seemed advisable to outline as early as possible the distribution of various cultures and thus to define the archeological problems to be attacked, the policy of the archeological survey of the State Historical Society has been that of sampling by excavation as many sites as possible rather than settling down to an intensive excavation of one or two sites.³

Pursuant to this general plan, the work of the Survey in 1937 consisted of excavation in several sites on the Platte river between Ashland and its mouth, and on the Missouri river from Omaha south toward the Kansas line. It was felt that Indian remains along these two great waterways, which probably served as important routes of travel for the aborigines, might illuminate various problems concerning contacts and mutual influences among the prehistoric inhabitants of eastern Nebraska. Among the important problems facing us at the present time, problems which have been formulated as a result of past archeological research in the state, are the temporal and cultural relationships of the strictly prehistoric Upper Republican and Nebraska culture. Earlier work suggested that southeastern Nebraska might yield valuable clues toward their solution.

Previous work in this area has been done by various individuals and institutions, the results of only a few of which, however, have been published. Sterns dug in twenty-seven earth lodges and investigated many other sites in eastern Nebraska, only summary accounts of which are available.⁴ Gilder's excavations have been confined mainly to the area about Omaha, while Fowke makes brief mention only of surface manifestations and previous excavations by a few individuals.⁵ The results of investigations in lodge sites in Sarpy,

3. Cf. Hill and Wedel, 1936, p. 3.

4. Strong, 1935, pp. 49-50. Sterns, 1914, 1915.

5. Fowke, 1922, pp. 152-160.

Cass and Pawnee counties by the University of Nebraska have been published recently.⁶

The 1937 field season was begun March 29, when a small party commenced work on an extensive site near the mouth of Salt Creek, east of Ashland. Here the investigation included the excavation of four lodge sites and numerous exterior cache-pits and burials. From May 12 to May 25 two houses and a hilltop burial were excavated at the mouth of Pawnee Creek on the right bank of the Platte, following which a large house on the bluffs near Louisville was investigated. The survey of the Missouri River commenced June 7, when camp was moved to the Fontenelle Forest north of Bellevue, where a large earth lodge was worked. From June 26 to July 2, the remnants of a square earth lodge were uncovered a short distance north of Plattsmouth, after which camp was moved to the vicinity of Peru, where one house pit was completely excavated and another was trenched, an occupational area was trenched, and a burial pit was thoroughly investigated. Near Brownville a series of burials and a lodge site were excavated between July 28 and August 24, also during which time a burial mound on the river bluffs southeast of Nemaha was trenched. Following this, rapid surface surveys were made south on the Missouri river and along a major part of the Blue river. The season's work closed with the excavation of two house sites on White Rock Creek, Kansas, and limited excavations in a site on the Solomon River at Glen Elder, Kansas.

The personnel of the 1937 Survey consisted of A. T. Hill, director, Paul Cooper, assistant, George F. Lamb, foreman; John Adams and Donald Suttie, students, and George Glantz, Hiram Craig, Paul Jaenicke and Ivan Luckey.

In conformity with the general plan of work the equipment of the survey was chosen to secure mobility. Transportation was effected by the use of three cars and

6. Bell and Gilmore, 1936, IV.

a cabin trailer, the latter serving also as a kitchen and dining room, while three light tents served as dormitories. All equipment, which included those instruments necessary for the careful excavation and preservation of specimens and accurate recording of data, was made as light and compact as possible, in order to eliminate unnecessary loss of time in moving from site to site.

Because of the large amount of excavation accomplished and limitations of space, the following purports to be no more than a preliminary report on the main results of the Survey during the season of 1937.

Our indebtedness to the many who contributed to the success of the summer's work is great. The continued support of the Historical Society is an important factor in increasing our knowledge of aboriginal life in Nebraska. Mr. John L. Champe of Lincoln assisted the survey in ways too numerous to mention, and landowners and tenants were invariably willing to permit excavation and were unfailingly cooperative in all ways. To the following we are indebted specifically for excavation privileges:

Messrs. Harry Beetison, Earl Nichols, Oscar Lind, Axel Nelson, Otto Olson, Martin Stenburg and Mrs. Emma Olson, all of Ashland; Mrs. A. J. Cornish of Omaha, the Fontenelle Forest Association and Dr. Harold Gifford of Omaha; Messrs. Frank Shryock and George Stone of Plattsmouth; Messrs. Frank Heywood, James Majors, Sam Majors and C. D. Williams of Peru; Mrs. Julia Whitten and Mr. Will Osborne of Brownville; Governor J. H. Morehead; Mrs. S. E. Russell, Webber, Kansas; and Messrs. John McBlair, Ed Butler, Albert Staley and F. O. Glitzke of Glen Elder, Kansas.

Others who cheerfully gave us their time and the benefit of their knowledge of the different localities in which we worked and in some cases parted with sample artifact collections are:

Mr. James Pharoah of Peru; Messrs. William Ramer, Everett Rowell, Henry Smith, and Clifford Hamm of Barada; Mr. C. K. Erickson of Bigelow, Kansas; Mr.

Lee Bohner, Barneston; Mr. C. O. Warne of Webber, Kansas, and Mr. Ernest Norris of Glen Elder, Kansas. Assistance in the actual excavation was given by Dr. G. H. Gilmore and Mr. John Gilmore of Murray; Mr. Harold Gates and son, and Mr. Francis Conkle of Peru. Both Dr. Gilmore and Dr. R. F. Gilder of Omaha were welcome visitors on the dig because of their intimate acquaintance with the archeological problems of this area.

The survey members were the recipients of special kindnesses from Dr. and Mrs. R. F. Gilder, Mr. and Mrs. C. D. Williams, Mr. and Mrs. James Majors, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Suttie and Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Roberts of Omaha.

To these and all others who helped make the 1937 survey both pleasant and successful, we extend our sincere gratitude.

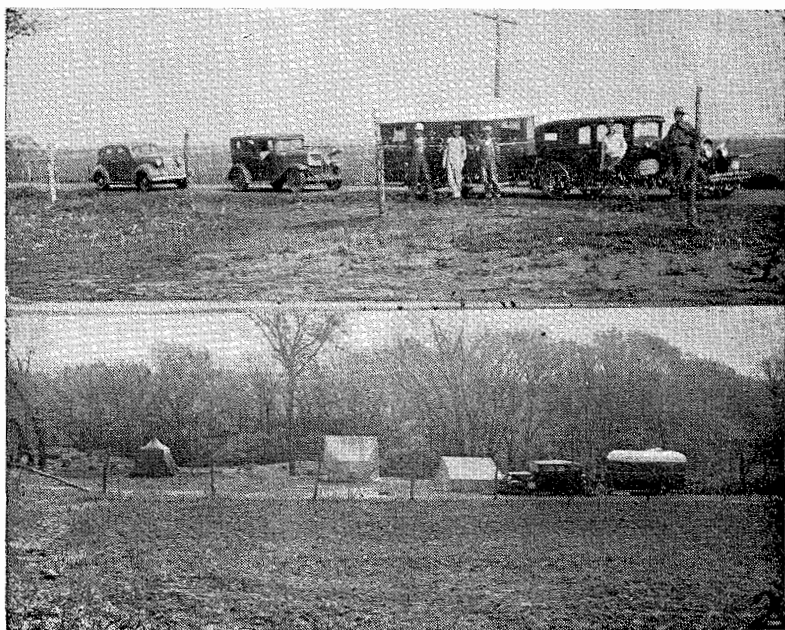


PLATE I—1, 2

1. Nebraska State Historical Society Archeological Survey in transit.
2. Camp of the Survey at the Ashland Site.