



The Archeological Survey of 1937: North Plattsmouth Site

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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: House 1: entrance, rim sherds and handles, ground plan, artifacts

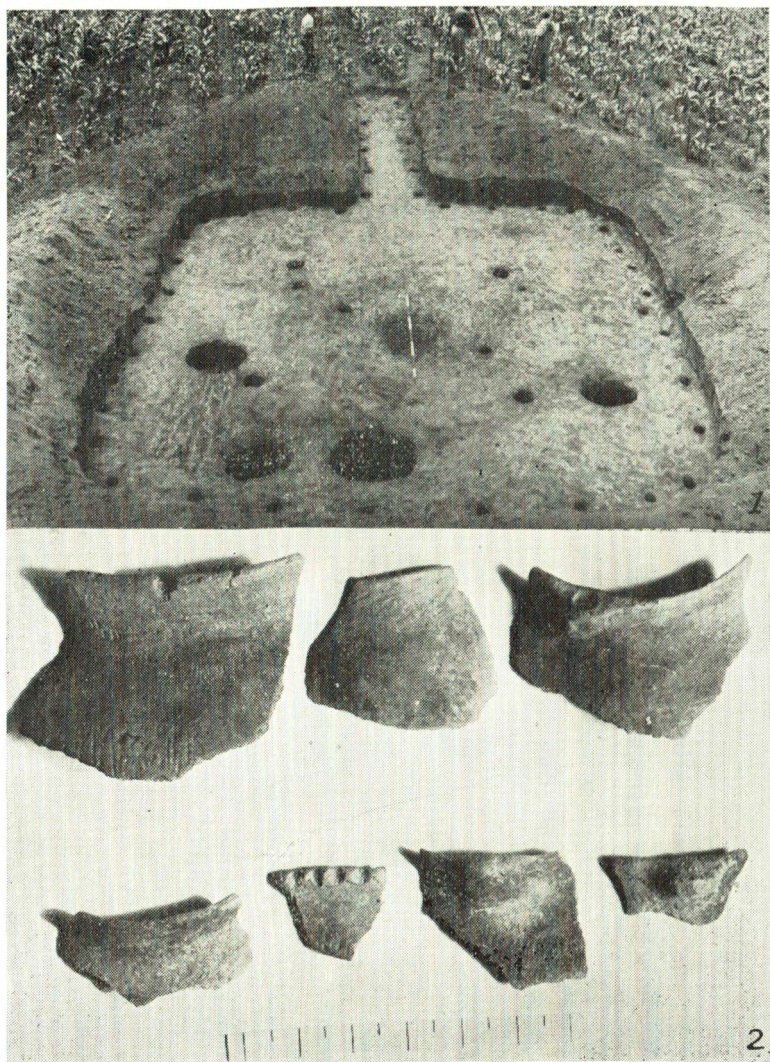


PLATE XV

1. House 1, North Plattsmouth Site. Entrance to south.
2. Rim sherds and handles, House 1, North Plattsmouth Site.

NORTH PLATTSMOUTH SITE

Immediately north of the city of Plattsmouth and south of the Platte River a series of sharp, narrow ridges parallels the course of the Missouri River. On the ridge immediately bordering the valley of the latter stream there are three small eminences which appear to be artificial and which mark the location of human burials. All of them have been rifled, and on the day we arrived at the site several boys were engaged in desultory digging in them. The adjoining ridge to the west, broader and timbered with oak, elm, and occasional maples, where not cultivated, had been selected at one time as the site for several dwellings which were scattered for some distance along the axis of the ridge. The Survey had been preceded here by several earlier excavators. Dr. Gilder reports that Sterns investigated lodge sites near the northern limits of Plattsmouth, and he himself dug a house in the timber at the north end of the ridge, the only site still apparent here as a well-defined depression. G. W. Bishop spent several weeks digging a short distance south of Gilder's excavation.

The lodge site excavated by the Survey (Plate XV, 1), was in a long-cultivated field, as a consequence of which the surface showed no trace of a depression. Gilder informs us, however, that a depression did exist here when he first visited the site.

A trench running from north to south across a suspected occupation area indicated the presence of a house pit, whereupon complete excavation was begun. For a depth of 12 inches the soil was a dark rich humus, beneath which was a relatively light fill—well mixed, however, with cultural detritus consisting of charcoal, burned earth and occasional artifacts. Immediately above the floor, which showed no evidence of puddling or other special treatment, a thin stratum heavily loaded with burned material yielded pottery, stone, and bone objects. Around the margin of the straight-walled pit,

which was 25 feet from front to back and 24 feet wide, were the moulds of wall posts strikingly uniform in size and depth, and between each corner and the center, at a distance of from $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 feet from the latter, was a larger and more deeply-set post for roof support. From an average depth of about 18 inches beneath the surface at the walls the floor sloped rather sharply down to the central fireplace, a shallow circular depression 33 inches in diameter, beneath which the earth showed the effects of the fire. A covered entrance passage, 14 feet long,

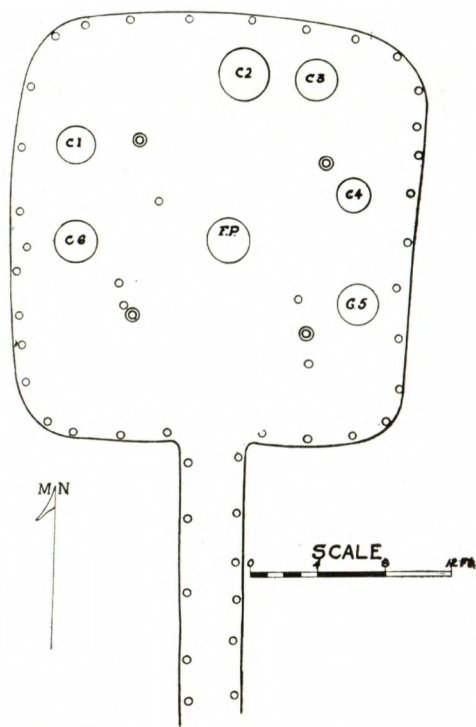


FIGURE 7. Ground plan of House 1, North Plattsmouth Site. O, post moulds; double circles, center post moulds; C1-C6, cache-pits; F. P., fireplace; , edge of house pit.

sloped gradually to the surface from the south wall of the house.

Of the fact that the structure which stood here was burned there was abundant evidence, which included (besides the stratum of charcoal and burned earth at the base of the fill) many charred posts and the presence on the floor of bone materials, particularly a number of bison shoulder blade implements, which had been subjected to rather intense firing. The walls and the floor of the pit, however, appear to have suffered little from the conflagration, for they are nowhere intensely blackened or reddened.

Beneath the floor near the back and side walls were six pits for the storage of the corn and other possessions of the people who lived here. The walls and floors of these cache-pits (which were invariably jug-shaped but varying considerably in size) were never burned, nor were evidences of any lining material found. The fill within them was on the whole relatively light and clean appearing, although strata of burned earth or ashy material were occasionally included and artifacts were present in moderate quantities.

The ceramic complex here, the evidence for which consists of 1866 sherds, of which 142 are rim and handle and 1724 are body fragments, is practically identical with the characteristic ware of the Fontenelle Forest Site, although the foreign appearing elements in the latter are absent. Body decoration is totally lacking, no shell tempering has been observed, and collared rims are present on only three fragments. Furthermore, low wide vessels are not present, and, with the exception of three small bowl fragments, a globular pot with a constricted neck and a flaring rim of varying height seems to be the exclusive form. Miniature pots of roughly this same form are fairly numerous. As in the pottery from the preceding site, rim-decoration is confined to the juncture of the lip and outer surface of the rim, where scalloped effects were achieved by notching and pinching the plastic clay

between the fingers, but the potters here left most of their vessels plain; only 15 of the 127 direct rims are decorated. Handles and lugs, probably two oppositely placed on a vessel, are a characteristic feature of the pottery. Of the total of 35, 9 are loop handles, and the remainder are lugs, 16 of which are perforated. A crude miniature water bottle of thick, light red ware is the only complete vessel among the numerous pottery specimens. It measures $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches in height, 2 inches in greatest diameter and has a neck $\frac{7}{8}$ inch high.

Other artifacts of pottery include a single elbow pipe fragment, the only pipe recovered, (Plate XVI, 1, e), and an oval object of unfired clay, oval in cross-section, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in greatest width, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick. Opposite notches are cut into the edges near one end.

Among the artifacts of chipped stone, projectile points are the most numerous. These number 29 specimens, only 14 of which are intact. Nine of the fragmentary points, however, are sufficiently complete to make their basal form certain. Of the resultant total of 23, 3 only are side notched, the remainder being triangular and entirely unnotched. The complete points do not exceed $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, but the fragmentary specimens, although none is measurable, appear to have been considerably larger. Two additional points, also broken and thus of uncertain but apparently fairly large size, appear to have been stemmed. The care with which these artifacts were made varies widely; some are very slightly and roughly chipped, while others are carefully worked on all surfaces and edges. Our collection contains the unusually small number of nine end scrapers, which on the whole are crudely made. Except for several coarsely flaked celts and a few fragments of apparently ovoid knives and scrapers, the only other tools left here were knives and scrapers adapted from irregular flakes by a rather slight amount of chipping on the edges.

Other stone artifacts were not abundant, consisting (except for a number of waterworn pebbles which had

been utilized for pecking and rubbing and which in two instances were pitted) of several irregular sandstone abrader fragments, a fragment of a small ground diorite celt oval in cross-section, and several pieces of volcanic lava. These latter were grooved by reason of their use in sharpening awls, with the exception of one which was drilled through. The occurrence of lava in Indian sites of this region appears to be confined mainly to the course of the Missouri River. While it is found rarely in sites on the Republican River, it is completely absent from most sites away from the Missouri—where, on the other hand, it seems invariably to be present, usually in abundance. Gilder reports its presence in all house sites dug by him,³⁶ and it was found at the Leary Site in Richardson County,³⁷ at two sites on the river in northeastern Nebraska,³⁸ and in Mandan villages in the Dakotas.³⁹ This material, which floats in water, was apparently found by the aborigines on the banks of the river where it was deposited after having been transported from a source probably in North Dakota. Captain Clark mentions the presence of large quantities of it on the shore.⁴⁰

Among the bone artifacts there are several awls of the varieties common in sites of this nature, as well as one finely worked double-pointed specimen, fragments of scapula hoes and knives, a cylindrical bead, and two deer mandibles which served some utilitarian purpose. Both of the latter are rather highly polished and in each the diastema, although broken, appears to have been worked to a point, a feature which is particularly well illustrated by the specimen shown in Plate XVI, 1, b. On one a groove is worked along the back of the last molar and diagonally across the exterior surface of the mandible, and the premolars are almost completely worn away. A slight slender needle 5 inches in length resembles those described for the Fontenelle Forest Site, ex-

36. *American Anthropologist*, N. S. Vol. 9, 1907, pp. 715-716.

37. Hill and Wedel, 1936, p. 47.

38. Cooper, 1936, page 49.

39. Will and Spinden, 1906, page 165.

40. Lewis and Clark, 1904, Page 99.

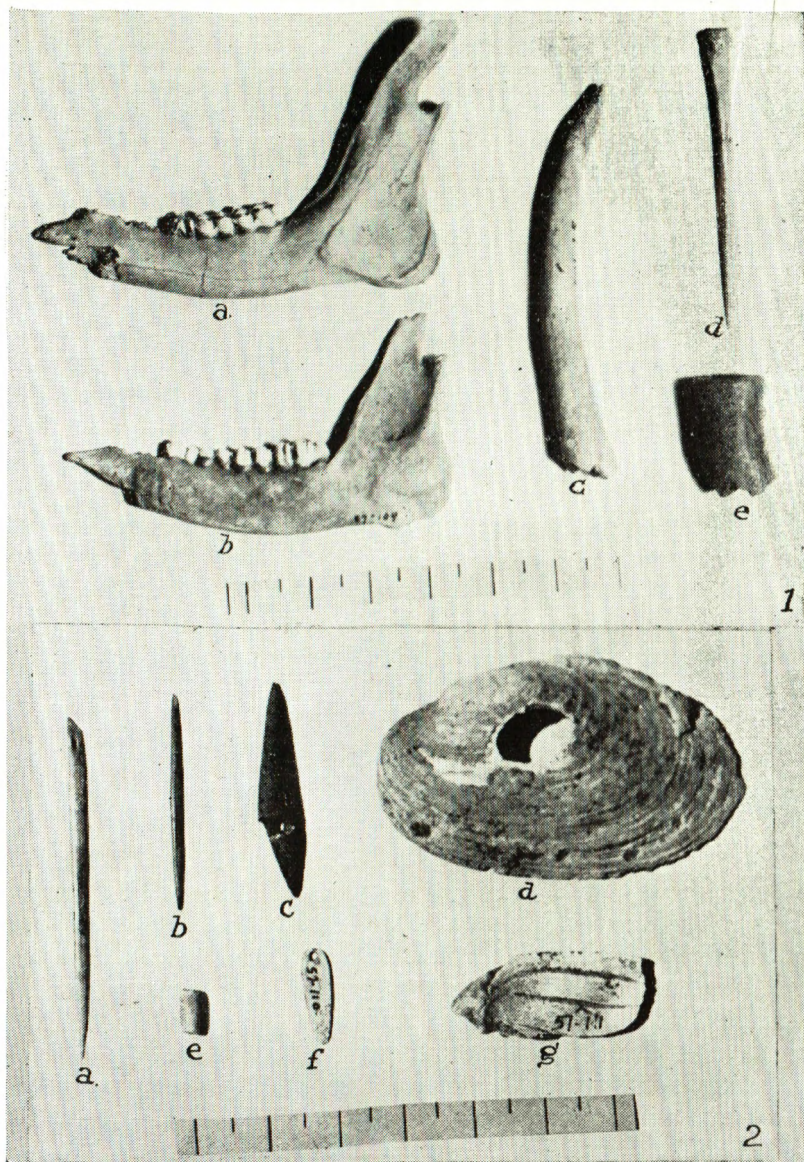


PLATE XVI

Artifacts, House 1, North Plattsmouth Site.

1. a-b, deer jaw implements; c, antler implement; d, bone awl; e, pottery pipe fragment.
2. a, perforated needle; b, double-pointed awl; c, harpoon or arrow point; d, shell hoe; e, shell bead; f, shell pendant; g, cut shell.

cept that it is considerably smaller (Plate XVI, 2, a). A shank of broken fish hook, with the unusual length of $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches, bears several notches for the attachment of a line. Also presumably for use in procuring fish is a so-called toggle-head harpoon made from an antler tip, with a perforation through the barb adjacent to its juncture with the head proper (Plate XVI, 2, c). Bone and antler projectile points have been recovered from several sites in the state, particularly at the Leary Site in southeastern Nebraska and at the Wright Site on Beaver Creek,⁴¹ where socketed and tanged arrow points were found; but, so far as present evidence is concerned, points of the type in question are confined in this area to sites of the Nebraska aspect, from which Gilder has reported a number.⁴²

Other forms made from antler are mainly of problematical use. They consist of a cylinder of the type commonly present in such sites, polished prongs, some of which have abraded or bevelled tips and may have served as flakers, and a fragment of a large thin section with two perforations along one straight edge, which was perhaps part of a bracelet.

The evidence shows that mussel shells were occasionally fashioned for use as tools and ornaments. The edges of several otherwise unmodified shells are worn as if from use in scraping, and one was perforated presumably for hafting as a hoe (Plate XVI, 2, d). A pointed and perforated section was probably suspended from a cord as an ornament (Plate XVI, 2, f); a cylindrical bead was made from shell, and several fragments bear knife-marks incidental to removing sections for some use.

Food remains consist of bones, mussel shells, and charred vegetal materials. The bones are of various species of mammals (including an occasional bison bone) and of turtles and fish, while vegetable foods used include corn, beans, hickory nuts, walnuts, and hazelnuts.

41. Hill and Wedel, 1936, pp. 57-58.

42. Gilder, 1909, Plate I, 1, i; and "Records of the Past", vol. 10, part 5, 1911, page 257.