

# ORIGIN STORY

## ROGER ECHO-HAWK\* ON THE ORAL TRADITIONS THAT HELP US UNDERSTAND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SKIDI FEDERATION



\* **Roger Echo-Hawk** is a historian, artist, and scholar. As a member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, Roger's research interests include Pawnee oral traditions, concepts of racial identity, and the intersection of American Indian storytelling and the work of J.R.R. Tolkien. Learn more about Roger's work: [www.roger-echo-hawk.com](http://www.roger-echo-hawk.com).

**L'har-e-tar-rúshe, Ill-natured Man, a Skidi (Wolf) Pawnee, painted by George Catlin.**

*Smithsonian American Art Museum*

*Long ago, as night fell over the earthlodge cities and hunting camps of Pawneeland, people would gather to tell stories.*

*There would follow long hours of singing and laughter and narrative journeying.*

*As distant stars wafted above, the*

*Pawnees told many kinds of stories -*

*including traditions handed down from*

*ancient times. What kind of light does*

*oral tradition shed on ancient history?*

*From the beginning days of archeology*

*in Nebraska, as excavations and surveys*

*proceeded in the Pawnee homeland,*

*scholars occasionally pondered this*

*question. But in recent decades the study*

*of oral tradition and archeology has begun*

*to open fascinating new vistas on the*

*history of ancient Pawneeland.*

# THE ORIGIN OF THE SKIDI FEDERATION

In 1859 the Pawnees founded their last earthlodge city in Nebraska. Kicpiírahaatus (Wild Licorice Creek) was built near the mouth of Kickítuks (Beaver Creek) and Ickári´ (Many Wild Potatoes River, the Loup River). In Skidi tradition, Beaver Creek was associated with an ancient community known as Turíkaku (Center Town). This was the home of Closed Man, the founder of the Skidi Federation. The symbolism of this oral tradition was important in 1859. The four Pawnee bands were then experimenting with political unification under a new confederation led by Pitaresaru, a Chaui Pawnee leader. The selection of the location for a new Pawnee metropolis surely reflected the symbolism of the Skidi Closed Man tradition.

About 1902 a Skidi priest named **Roaming Scout** shared his account of the founding of the Skidi Federation with Skidi scholar James R. Murie. Closed Man and his people dwelt on the Kíckatus or Flat River (the Platte River) and they moved to a stream known as Beaver Creek and as Kicpiírahaatus (Wild Licorice Creek). "They made their village on Beaver



**Roaming Scout.**

*Photo Lot 89-8, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution*

Creek. Here they selected a place where the people were to get together, each set of people to receive their ceremony..." After they moved to Turíkaku, Closed Man contacted neighboring folk living in various directions, inviting them to form a ceremonial federation: "Closed-Man now sent the errand man to invite the neighboring people to come and receive their ceremonies." And the errand man traveled west and north "and kept on finding people here and there..."



**The village of Kicpiírahaatus (Wild Licorice Creek), near present-day Genoa, 1871.**

The date of this event is unknown, but it happened before the Skidi acquired horses. Can archeology help shed light on this history? The locations of Pawnee sites dating back several centuries before Pawnee removal to Oklahoma do not match the description given by Roaming Scout of the settlements of the Closed Man era. But the Skidi account

does evoke the settlement pattern of an earlier era - a period labeled in archeology as the Central Plains tradition (circa 1300 CE). Comparing the oral tradition to the sites of the Central Plains tradition, we can see a corresponding geography. This suggests that the Skidi handed down this founding oral tradition for about 600 years. The study of oral tradition and archeology together can enrich what we know of the ancient political and religious history of Pawneeland.

A case study: Long ago the ancestors of the Skidi brought their living community bundles together in ceremony. They handed down to the future their sacred bundles, Cuharipiru, Rains Wrapped Up; repositories of mysterious life-force. During the final days of Skidi residency at Old Town on the Many Wild



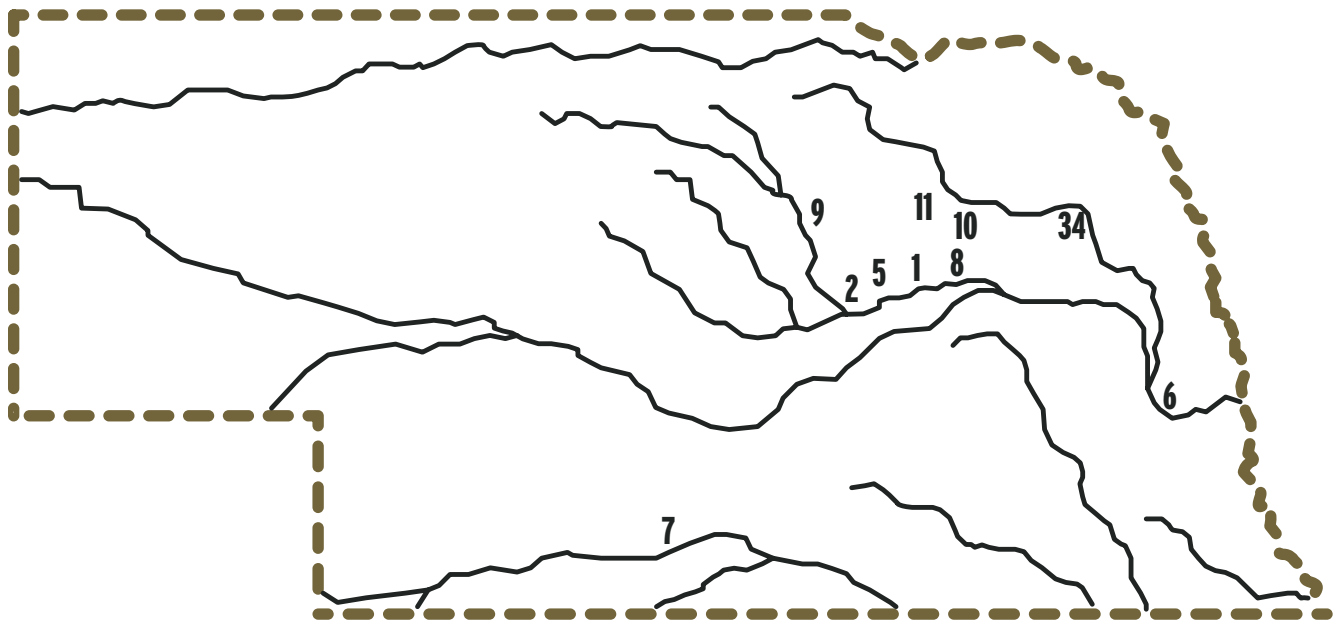
Potatoes River, Always Poor (Akapakis) was born. Perhaps about 1838. He was a grandson of Big Eagle, a prominent Skidi leader. And his father was Sitting Hawk (Pia-ti-witit), a brother to Sun Leader (Sakururisaruru), the father of Mark Evarts. George Bird Grinnell thought the name Akapakis meant Pities The Poor; Gene Weltfish translated it as Misery; my uncle John Knife Chief preferred Always Poor. Weltfish said that "kapakis" was "a term of great contempt" reflecting disdain for destitution. This helps to explain an important concept in Pawnee tradition: a person in quest of spiritual blessing should be poor in spirit. One ought to have a sense of humility, a hope for fulfillment that equates spiritual need with material impoverishment. Always Poor spoke of this to Grinnell. His father, Sitting Hawk, would tell him "to humble myself, and not to let a day pass without praying to Ti-ra-wa by my smokes. I must always remember to pray to Ti-ra-wa to give me a strong will, and to encourage and bless me in my worship to him." The name Always Poor surely reflected this sense of humility. Always Poor married three daughters of Comanche Chief. An old Skidi woman in 1914 named them as Spah-coo-wah-rookstee, Stay-sah-rah-kee-too, and Chee-too-hits-pee-ut. The three children born to this family died in childhood. In those days Always Poor became a doctor, active in the Skidi Bear Society. Displaying his powers of illusion in the annual ceremonies, he performed magical surgery with a bear claw; then he revived his dazed patient. Always Poor also inherited one of the Skidi sacred community bundles. At the ancient founding of the Skidi Federation, the Little Elk Standing Bundle (Arikarariki) resided in a community northeast of Center Town. The location of this community is unknown, but we can speculate that it existed during the era of the Central Plains tradition; it could have been located in the vicinity of the Missouri River. Long after

removal, in Oklahoma the Pawnees adopted the Ghost Dance - a fusion of the tenets of Christianity and racial Indianhood. Almost all the Pawnees took part. A few years later James R. Murie spoke of a conversation he had with Frank Leader, a Skidi ceremonialist: "He was telling me the other day that he sees the boys who he is trying to teach the old religion seem to have no interest in the ceremonies. They are given more to the Ghost Dance. It hurts the old man and I think is determined to leave the Skull and other things with it in your care." The Skidi bundles had since antiquity served as the unifying essence of "the old religion." Now the Pawnees had the Ghost Dance. This helps to explain what happened next. When Always Poor died on December 16, 1892, the Skidi buried him with a community bundle of the ancient northeast. The Skulls Painted On Tipi Bundle (Akahpaksawa) took its name from the tipi used to house the bundle - a tipi decorated with buffalo skulls painted along the bottom edge. The Rains Wrapped Up symbolized the history of the Skidi Federation; they were seen as filled with the life essences that are always in motion in the universe. Filled with their own mysterious intentions. And in those days after the Ghost Dance descended on Pawneeland, after the death of Always Poor, the Little Elk Standing (Arikarariki) bundle lingered for a time. And then one day it left Pawneeland. It found another future in America—at the Field Museum of Natural History.

For more on the founding of the Skidi Federation and the Central Plains tradition see R. Echo-Hawk, *The Enchanted Mirror: Ancient Pawneeland*, p. 72-80.

For more on the founding of the Pawnee Confederation during the mid-19th century see R. Echo-Hawk, *The Enchanted Mirror: Community and Confederacy in Pawneeland*, p. 108-117.

# GENERAL DISTRIBUTION OF SKIDI PAWNEE SITES IN NEBRASKA AT THE TIME OF CLOSED MAN



- 1 Exact location of Turikaku, said to be on Beaver Creek near Genoa, Nebraska.
- 2 General locality of Old Village, said to comprise four related communities to the west of Turikaku, perhaps in the vicinity of the later Palmer site. Also Akapaxsawa was said to be west of Turikaku, probably beyond Tuwhahukasa.
- 3 Pahukstatu, said to be located somewhere on the Elkhorn River.
- 4 Skiriraru, said to be located east of Pahukstatu.
- 5 General location of Tuwhahukasa, said to be between Old Village and Turikaku.
- 6 Tcaihixparuxti, said to be somewhere southeast of Turikaku, possibly south of Skiriraru.
- 7 Tuhkitskita, said to be southwest of Turikaku, possibly in the general direction of Medicine Creek.
- 8 Tuhitspiat, said to be somewhere east of Turikaku.
- 9 Tchochuk, Turawiu, and Arikararikuts were all said to be somewhere northwest of Turikaku.
- 10 Arikaraikus and Stiskaatit were both said to be somewhere northwest of Turikaku.
- 11 Haricahahakata is said to be somewhere north of Turikaku.

*Of these sites, only 1, 2, and 5 are securely located; all other sites are simply located relative to Turikaku. Skiriraru (4) is located relative to Pahukstatu (3).*

# SARITSARIS

## ROGER ECHO-HAWK\* ON A LEGENDARY PAWNEE CHIEF, AN AMERICAN FLAG, & WHAT ORAL TRADITIONS CAN TELL ARCHEOLOGISTS



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**Saritsaris**, painted by Charles Bird King.  
White House Historic Collection



# THE CITY OF SARITSARIS

At the opening of 20th century, Americans in Nebraska and Kansas became curious about an incident involving the Pawnees and the US flag. In 1806 an American military expedition led by Lieutenant Zebulon Pike found a Spanish flag flying over a Pawnee city. Pike demanded that the Pawnees lower the Spanish flag and raise an American flag. A century later, patriotic Americans found themselves debating where this happened: Kansas or Nebraska? Students of history began studying records and sifting through the ruins of likely sites – and they asked the Pawnees about their oral traditions. In 1899 a Pawnee named James R. Murie outlined a few details he had heard from Pawnee elders, and he pointed to a tradition told to George Bird Grinnell by a Pawnee named Curly Chief. Murie wrote: “...one man who I heard say years ago that he was a little fellow when they left the village.” Another elder was born about 1801 and “remembered when the Spaniards raised the flag over the village.” One woman spoke of her birth in that Pawnee city “and when the council were held there must have been 3 or 4 years old.” Murie added: “I was often told... how some white people came there with horses and wonderful instruments, and how another man came, and what a hard time they had getting the Indians to allow him to put the American flag up. This is one of their legends handed down for here the Indians had to show the white man how he kindled fire and how he obtain food by killing game and how they cut the meat with the flint.” Murie mentioned “one old man living” who had visited an abandoned city on the Kirarutakitsu (the Dirty Water River, Republican River). The man said that Saritsaris “is supposed to be buried on top of one of the hills near the site

of the village." It appears that Murie was recalling comments made in storytelling he heard during his earlier years. But he was also referencing a story told by Curly Chief, set down by Grinnell in 1889.

Asa T. Hill became a major figure in Central Plains archeology, and early in his career he got interested in the Pawnee-Pike flag incident. He began looking for Pawnee sites and reading old records, and in the early 1920s he identified what is known



**A.T. Hill with a Pawnee delegation at Massacre Canyon, August 5, 1925.**

today as the Hill site (25WT1). In 1925 he worked with a Pawnee delegation that visited Massacre Canyon, and for a few years after that, he corresponded with several Pawnees. This dialogue produced sparse results.

Archeological scholarship grew into a major academic project

in Central Plains studies, but the contribution of Pawnee oral traditions tumbled into a twilight of incidental casual interest.

During the 1970s Garland Blaine shared what he termed a "consensus" Pawnee account of the Pike incident. This story, in part, was descended from the Curly Chief tradition, but it was reshaped now as a counter-narrative to the established American account of a heroic Zebulon Pike. Blaine's story rejected the established American story of Pawnees submissively bowing to the Spanish crown and cowed into surrendering their sovereignty to Pike's firm strength of will. Blaine had the Pawnee leader (Saritsaris) declare, "I am not under him. This is my land." Then Blaine objected to the "very erroneous" historical marker in Kansas: "No one with

a few dozen men... is going to tell anyone with overwhelming numbers to take down that flag and put his up. This is what that implies down there at the site." In essence, Blaine underscored the need for a more nuanced multi-vocal view of history that looks at events from more than one perspective.

In 2018 I published my view of the Pawnee-Pike flag incident.

Here is an excerpt: Meeting with Saritsaris and other Pawnee leaders on September 29, 1806, **Lt. Zebulon Pike** issued four peremptory demands. He desired horses, a "Tetua prisoner who spoke Pawnee," an exchange of American flags in place of Spanish banners, and the dispatching of a Pawnee delegation to the American capital, Washington DC.

Responding coolly to Pike's commands and expectation of subservient obedience, the Pawnees turned down the important requests and with some reluctance finally agreed to accommodate the minor matter of exchanging flags. Then they successfully prevailed upon Pike to return their Spanish flags. For the Pawnees, all these flags came to the Land of the Three Rivers in the hands of foreign emissaries and symbolized the interest of those nations in currying favor and goodwill from the Pawnees. In their minds, these foreign flags did not signify political deference of any kind to the Spanish or Americans. They most likely reflected the importance of trade relations,



**General Zebulon Pike.**

*Library of Congress*

not political submission. In his official public diary Pike glossed over his frustrated attempts to issue decrees to the Pawnees in their own realm. He inflated the Spanish influence over the Pawnees and made a big deal about compelling the Pawnees to allegedly accede to American sovereignty by accepting a flag. Pike made the best of his failure to get actual submissive obedience from the Pawnees by hyping bloated patriotic symbolism over substance. The sobering reality was that in the absence of cooperation from the Pawnee leaders, it took some time for Pike to acquire all-important horses. As Lt. James Wilkinson described the sorry dealings, the Americans had to accept "some few purchases of miserable horses at the most exorbitant prices." In his private correspondence Pike admitted that he was finally forced to borrow some horses from the Osage delegation. Without a guide, Pike hit the road when the residents of the Hill site city set forth on their winter hunt. Pike wrote in his journal that Iskatappe, the "second chief," and another leader named "the American chief" were together leading "one third of the village." Marching near the Pawnees, Pike later wrote an account in his journal of his excitement at witnessing the way the Pawnees hunted game: "In about a mile we discovered a herd of elk which we pursued; they took back in sight of the Pawnees, who immediately mounted 50 or 60 young men and joined in the pursuit; then for the first time in my life, I saw animals slaughtered by the true savages, with their original weapons, bows and arrows; they buried the arrow up to the plume in the animal." This incident was remembered decades later in an oral tradition told by Curly Chief to George Bird Grinnell.

Roger Echo-Hawk, *The Enchanted Mirror: Community and Confederacy in Pawneeland*, 2018, p. 67-72.

Walter Echo-Hawk's family history novel includes a fictionalized version of the Pike incident: Walter Echo-Hawk, *The Sea of Grass*, 2018, p. 33-51.



# LANDSCAPES

## LANCE FOSTER\* ON IOWAY ORAL TRADITIONS CONCERNING TRIBAL ORIGINS & IDENTIFYING A HOMELAND



\* **Lance Foster** is a writer, scholar, artist, and landscape historian. A member of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Lance works as his people's Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, focusing on issues relating to historic preservation, archeology, history, genealogy, architecture, planning, traditional culture, language education, natural and cultural resources, land issues like conservation for plants and animals, government-to-government consultations, and intertribal protocol.

**No Heart of Fear**, painted by Charles Bird King.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum



# **MIGRATIONS & ORIGINS: RED BANKS (RED EARTH)**

The ancient origin place of the Ioway Tribe is shared with three other groups, which all split at some point before contact with European explorers: the Ioway, the Otoe, the Missouria, and the Hochunk (or Winnebago). The place of origin as a tribe is given as Red Banks, a location at Green Bay, Wisconsin. However, the clan stories state that is actually the place where the clans came together to form a larger nation. The clans themselves came from various locations not at Red Banks (also called Red Earth, because the name in the native language, MaShuje, actually means, "Red Dirt").

Archeologists have long looked for sites at this origin place, but although the location of Red Banks is known, there is no large archeological site there.

The languages of the Ioway and Otoe, along with other Siouan speakers like the Omaha and Ponca, indicated ancient origins further east, by the Mississippi River and beyond. There were many migrations, and movements cycling through the land thousands of years ago in the Archaic and Woodland periods, when the roots of the Siouan language family took shape. Ioway and Otoe traditions hold that the clans originally came from various locations and directions. The Otoe stated each clan had its own village. This was a time when the social organization was made up of small bands. Omaha traditions talked of their origins coming down the Ohio River, and then later traveling up the Des Moines River (called by them the Raccoon River) with the Ioway. Identity is a snapshot in time,

and those traditions usually indicate those tribal identities had not yet been divided and defined as distinct groups, but were considered, in some sense, one people.

The formation of a new common identity from different bands or clans seems to be marked archeologically by the transition from the Late Woodland Period (such as at Effigy Mounds in Iowa) to the Upper Mississippian Oneota Tradition of the Mississippian Period (contemporaries of Cahokia, which is further south, and connected to the traditions of the Dhegiha people- Omaha, Ponca, Osage, Kansa, and Quapaw). That transition from regional Woodland clans to Oneota Mississippians would have taken place a little over a thousand years ago. The Ioway were connected to the Oneota by pioneering Midwestern archeologist James Griffith, and specifically tied to the protohistoric Orr Focus of the Oneota by the pioneering work of ethnohistorian Mildred Mott Wedel.

The eventual split into the Ioway, Otoe, Missouri, and Hochunk, based on evidence from linguistics, archeology and oral traditions, seem to have been finalized sometime in the 1500s, perhaps in reaction from stresses rippling up the Mississippi and through the Great Lakes from tribes closer to European colonization. That split is discussed in various oral traditions, such as the seven days of the Hochunk, in which resource competition was resolved by the movement of the Ioway seven days to the west of the Hochunk. This brings us to the next part, the homelands and movements of the Ioway according to the No Heart map.

# THE NO HEART MAP OF 1837

During treaty negotiations with the U.S. over cession of lands in Iowa, information supplied by Ioway negotiator Chief No Heart (or Nohart) conflicted with that of the Sac and Fox negotiator Keokuk. No Heart brought out a map that the Ioway had drawn to show their aboriginal homelands and the routes and villages they had lived in, apparently sometime after the split from the other three (Hochunk, Otoe and Missouri), so probably beginning in the 1600s.

This map has been written about many times, as one of the most famous maps drawn by Native Americans and is in the National Archives in Washington DC.

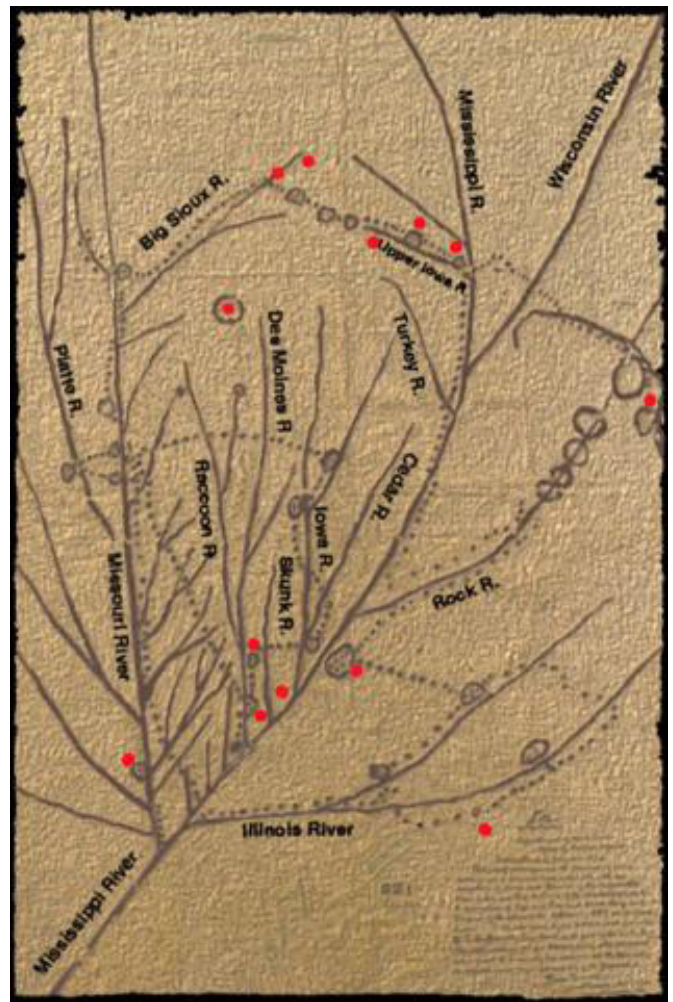
The sites and rivers on the maps have been interpreted differently by different authors. Probably the most thorough example was done by Mary Whelan as part of her University of Redlands Masters degree thesis, in which she tried to match the map through GIS to known locations of Ioway/Oneota sites. There was some correspondence but not for all the sites.

What complicates the situation is not only are there different interpretations of Nohart's map, there is a second map, by an Ioway named Wanonqueskoona, which does not match up with Nohart's map in many instances, and focuses much more on locations in northern Missouri. In addition, the original has not been located, as it was drawn for anthropologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft apparently, who had it redrawn.

In addition, there are also other oral histories unaccounted for in either map, such as Chief Mahaska (White Cloud I) saying his “father” (possibly grandfather) Wounding Arrow moved to the west bank of the Upper Iowa River from Michilimackinac, which is in Michigan! Further there are oral histories and archeological evidence which connect the origin of the loway with the area around Lake Pepin and Minneapolis-St. Paul, as well as archeological evidence showing loway-Otoe presence at the Leary site in southeastern Nebraska!

So what are we to make of this? These variations may be indications there were different groups that coalesced, split and reconnected, not just in prehistory, but during the historic period. The Iowa archeologist Colin Betts has done a recent paper comparing the two terms for the loway, “Baxoje” and “loway”, as spatially reflecting different groups, one Missouri River-focused and one Mississippi, that later merged.

This gives a hint as to the complexity of the situation, but can’t oral history clarify this further? Unfortunately, the loway had a near collapse of tribal population from about 3000 to 300 (a 90% collapse)



**The No Heart Map of 1837.**

*Iowa Historical Society*

in the 1800s, and many of the tradition-holders died or were unable to pass on the full knowledge they had.

Another difficulty is that, traditionally, people spoke little of past defeats and disasters. Contemporary elders I knew, and only a few of those, only spoke of the fact they knew they had come from up north, that there were connections to the Winnebago and others, and that the soil was richer up there.



*Of course for many tribal people, oral history is all that is needed or wanted. There is a difficult history with settlers and later archeologist who dug up Indian graves in the name of science. They often also disputed and insulted descendants. This situation is beginning to be worked though with cooperation and partnerships between tribes and archeology seeking to tell the story of this land we all have a shared future in.*