MAGAZINE SECTION

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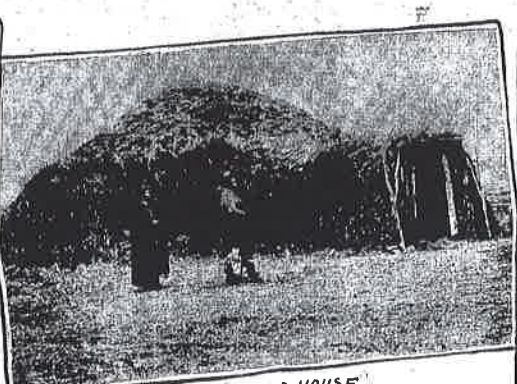
EIGHT PAGES

First Gardening in Nebraska---How Corn Came

FRANCIS LA FLESCHE, SON OF OMAHA CHIEF WHO HAS WRITTEN THE HISTORY OF THE TRIBE FOR THE GOVERNMENT

SHU'DENACI, AN OLD OMAHA PHILOSOPHER.

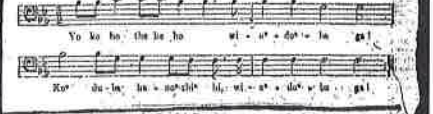


AN OLD INDIAN MUD HOUSE

SCRAPING A SKIN

DRESS UP COSTUMES WORN BY MEN AND WOMEN

MAIZE RITUAL SONG



WEIRD CORN SONG OF THE OMAHA INDIANS

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte.

Story of the Omahas' Planting and the Beginning of Agriculture in the Great Food State—Legend of the Corn and the Ceremony of the Primitive Farm Told by One of the Tribe, Showing the Thriftiness and Industry of These First Tillers of the Soil.

A story of the first gardeners in Nebraska. A study of primitive methods in agriculture in a state where corn is king and the grains and products are the precious food of the world. This is the contribution of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte of the Omaha Indian tribe, descended from the best blood of that red nation and a woman of ability and character who has figured largely in the betterment of the Indian today.

In telling the story of the Omaha, Dr. Picotte is refuting the theory that the Indian is lazy, does not want to be self-supporting and does not use his intelligence in securing for himself and others the solid comforts of life. It is a remarkable story, and will be read with interest by World-Herald readers.

Now that the farmer is preparing for the planting and the hundreds of World-Herald readers are thinking about the little garden in the backyard, the writer's story of the first corn crop and the first gardening in the valleys of Nebraska is of peculiar and timely interest.

BY SUSAN LA FLESCHE PICOTTE,
(Daughter of the chief chief of the Omahas.)

The life of the primitive Indian was rich in ceremonials, beginning with the fifth day of infancy, continuing through the different stages of a man's growth till the earth closed over his form. For the object of the tribal organizations was to carefully safeguard, by numerous rites and ceremonies, the life of its individual members.

These ceremonies were beautiful and symbolic. Being all founded on the recognition of a higher creative power, and of man's dependence on this power, they encompassed not only the moral and physical welfare of the people, tending to preserve their integrity and unity as a people.

So we find ceremonies attending the planting of the maize and the planting of a child, for corn was considered sacred and because it gives sustenance and nourishment in life, it was called "Mother" by the Omaha Indians.

Every household participated in the planting of the crops, for it was considered a sacred obligation on a man to support his family, and there was esprit de corps and contempt for a "gentleman of leisure."

How Corn Came.

This is the sacred legend of how corn was given to my people by Wahunda, the Creator.

In the beginning when we became a people in the big star, there dwelt seven different tribes, but when Wahunda completed this world he peopled them, to name them in this world. When the feet of the first man touched this earth, the grass began to burn and a great smoke went upwards.

A young boy went out hunting for the gray squirrel, with bow and arrows. He aims in a great hole bordered by willows. As he made his way through the dense willows, he looked on and saw a stalk of green and wonderful corn. He gazed in wonder and saw first the tassel, then the joints, the blades and last two ears of corn growing one below the other. He cut swiftly home and said, "Father, come and see a strange thing I have found." When his father saw it he pulled up the corn blind by the roots and putting it over his shoulder he carried it home. He shelled the two ears and gave the corn to the Omaha, Yellow Smoke's band, who are the keepers of the sacred tents.

The Omaha band gave four grains of the corn to each household and in the spring the husband and wife of each household prepared two mounds of earth and planted two kernels in each hill. This was the gift of Wahunda for our sustenance.

The planting and cultivation of the corn was regulated by the Omaha seasons, who were the keepers of the sacred red corn, conducted the ceremonies and chanted the rites.

Rites for the Planting.

In the spring when the grass came up represented the Omaha tribe assembled "the oak leaves had unrolled to the size of rabbit's ears," the head of the Omaha band made a feast and called the chiefs together to decide on the planting time. A chief was sent out to make the rounds of the village crying out, "they say it is time for you to plant."

A general invitation was sent then through a crier to the people to "come and thank, they are going to sing the chant of the corn, and they want you to hear." The people came in response from all directions, but it was particularly for the young men.

The men went out and selected their garden patch and put up a pole to fold their sacrifice. After the ceremony, the gens who kept the sacred red corn fed with the Iskamba gens whose duty it was to provide the red corn.

The Iskamba conducted the ceremony and chanted the chant, while the priestess of the red corn acted as servers and distributed four grains of red corn to each household. The women received the four grains and mixed it with the seed corn they had preserved from the last harvest. The red corn was supposed to give new life to the seed corn and cause it to produce a good harvest. We knew the color red to typify of life.

The providers of the red corn, the Iskamba gens, could never eat red corn—not even to this day. If they did it was said some great disaster would befall them. Should they eat it the gens would have some one suffer from inflammation of the peritoneum, therefore the gens considered it sacred, and it was their totem.

When I was a little girl my father showed me how they picked out seed corn—the rich blue, the red, or kernels striped, the size of the grains as even as possible with no discoloration of the white part of the kernel, the pitch of the cob firm and with no discoloration.

In the fall each household picked out the best of the red corn and took them to the Iskamba gens or providers of the sacred red corn seed for seed.

Ritual Song of the Corn.

The ritual song of the corn consists of many verses, and it took years to sing it.

In it the corn calls to man, calling him to native and behold the different stages of his growth into life—first, with firm roots I stand; with one foot I stand, two up to seven; with nine feet I stand, up to seven; with clothing I stand—the corn calls attention to first its glossy hair, its yellowish hair, its dark hair, its glossy silver, its pale tassel, its yellow tassel; with fruit I stand prominent, fruit ripe, sweet by a few my fruit, the fruit the cob, and in the fulfillment of its mission says, "eat me." The words of the song may be found in the new book by Miss Fletcher and Frank La Flesche, "The Omaha Tribe," issued by the bureau of ethnology.

The man sings:

O other the land, I put to the corn, the corn sweet on the blades, the corn appears, I address the corn to test the milk; I is ripe, I pull off the husks, I pull off the husks, I pull off the ear, I shall it, I eat it."

These songs were considered sacred and the people were forbidden to sing them, because they commemorate life and sacrifice of the people.

A man would select his garden patch and hoed it so long as he cultivated it, and on and dressed of husbanding him, and his harvest was sacred, for it sometimes before it was fully ripe.

These patches varied, from half to three acres. I have seen many gardens in the sheltered places near the creeks.

Before planting, the corn was soaked all night with three of four buffalo apples or ground pumas. Whether these were to preserve the corn or to keep crows from eating the corn, I do not know, but they served some such purpose. They were thrown away in the morning.

There were also different kinds of corn planted; two kinds of white, soft and hard, blue, soft and hard, yellow, speckled, red and reddish-blue; there were as if painted in stripes; three kinds of sweet corn, a fragrant white, a yellow and a blue, which was soft, all ripening in August, and an early snow corn that matured in July.

Unique Planting.

The earth was pulverized and heaped into mounds a foot and a half in two feet long, the northern end being sixteen inches high and sloping down till the south end was level with the ground; the peculiarity of the ground may have caused them to be built in this peculiar manner; for drainage or to make allowances for our gentle Nebraska zephyrs, I do not know. Later on a semi-circular trench was dug around one-half of the mound to hold the water for irrigating the corn and the earth heaped up in a hill; three hills were two or three feet apart. From five to seven kernels of corn were planted in each hill. Sometimes beans were planted with the corn as they would climb up the stalks of the corn, then fewer kernels were planted.

The seeds were carefully selected by hand and the soil kept loose. After the corn was up the hoeing was done with the shoulder blade of an ox, a pole for a handle being fastened to the blade by sinew. Later on with the advent of the white man, iron hoes were used. It was hard, a second time when it was a foot high and then half, for about the time the tiles went on the buffalo hunt.

In the fall when the corn was picked the seed corn was carefully selected, and the beans were stripped downward and these being braided together made long strings of corn that were hung up to dry in a safe, dry place.

Woman's Garden.

They planted four kinds of beans—red, brown black, yellow and speckled. All were climbers and pole were used for the vines to climb on; there was always a heavy yield of these beans. In the fall the beans were picked and placed in mounds and shelled by being beaten with willow poles, and winnowed by being poured from baskets, some held over the head and poured out. It was done on windy days so the chaff could be carried away. The beans were put in silo lined for winter use.

There was no need for suffragettes in those days, for the produce of these gardens always belonged to the women.

Four kinds of squash were planted—yellow squash, as they called it, which was green, round and slightly flattened on the edges; a spotted variety, white immature is white and dark blue, striped and scalloped, and one that had knobs and lumps on it. Later on, the white man brought the Hubbard and pumpkin, the latter never used by the Indians of that time.

Watermelons were planted when the plum blossoms were in bloom, and were green with a stripe and black seeds, and chiefly always harvested this corn, sometimes before it was fully ripe.

Tobacco was raised, but it was not a general crop. My great-aunt, who died in 1904 at the age of 98, remembered her grandfather, the old Chief Blackbird, and was an eye-witness to the orgeoy when the old man stabbed to death his favorite and beautiful young wife. He went in and took all his ornaments, tobacco and found there an earring he had given her. The young lover came, and handing a new gun to the old chief, begged to be shot, for a suicide is against all tribal laws and is held in special abhorrence. The wise, old chief took his revenge in telling the young man live in suffering. Sacrificed, with earth on his head, he mourned alone for years, never mingling with the people, traveling alone until his sufferings were ended by the hand of the enemy in battle. The tobacco leaves were as large as a man's hand, somewhat bluish, and when pipe were rolled and dried.

Cache of Stores.

Beside each dwelling was a hole in the ground or cache for storing food, corn, beans, squash, buffalo meat, etc. It was dug straight down eight feet, the entrance large enough to admit a person, with round bottom and sides. Bulb grass were used to cover bottom and sides, with bunches of dried grass covering them; in shape it resembled a gourd, the mouth being covered with grass and soil. These caches were also built at intervals to be used by the tribe in their frequent journeys on the buffalo hunt, to save carrying provisions, for horses cost $200 or $300 apiece and many of the people traveled on foot.

Corn was prepared in different ways for food. In the summer evenings when the family circle gathered around the campfire, fine corn was roasted on the ear beside the coals and turned over and over. While still in the milk the grains would take and grate the corn, baking over the coals, making most delicious corn bread, or the grated corn was folded in the green husks and baked in the ashes. Dry corn was shelled and parched over a fire. Dry corn was often cooked in pig bags by boiling; it was easy to carry and with powdered meat or pemmican was concentrated nourishment. A mortar which a foot high was made by hollowing out one end of a tree, the closed end was rounded off and sharpened down to a sharp point which was stuck firmly into the earth; the rounded bottom was even with the ground. In this the corn was pounded by a wooden pestle. The parched ground corn was eaten mixed with wild honey and buffalo marrow, with with cherries that had been pounded, seeds and all.

Some Favorite Dishes.

The raw ground corn was made into a delicate gruel that was far more strengthening than most of the lavished you eat for breakfast foods. The dried corn boiled with ashes that boiled it, made a hominy. Sometimes the dried corn, without being hulled, was cooked all day, with meat and fat.

Sometimes gruel was cooked with beans, harvested over night and while on the march, if we children were hungry, which was a simple condition, we got a piece of this, which was considered a delicacy. We never had to eat it twice lazy, we were healthily hungry. Hominy was unknown until the white man brought it his eastern home.

Succotash was a summer dish, corn and beans in a green state cooked together with bits of fat meat.

Squash was prepared for winter use, by peeling, cutting the flesh round and round into long strips, which were then braided into a wide strip, hung out in the sun and air while dried in all the dews and where eaten in winter was full of flavor and sweetness.

While the summer corn was in milk it was scraped still green; a long trench was dug, wood was held in the corn in the green husks was laid on the wood and the smothered fire generated steam that cooked the corn with all the juices in. When nearly done it was taken out, shelled and laid out to dry. It was cooked with fat and meat in the winter and tasted almost like fresh corn.

A Politician's Job.

Later on in the '70s, when a politician ended a job and the government didn't know what to do with him, they sent him out to teach these people how to farm and be self-supporting. I remember the disgust of the Indian who had to show him how to fix the reaper when it broke down. The Indians came to call on him for help when they found "they had to show him how." At this time they planted wheat, yellow corn and potatoes.

On the census roll of 1906 there were 1,324 Omahas; 613 of these were minors. There were 242 men between the ages of 18 and 21 years. Thirty-six of these were over 21. Sixty-eight were in other lines of business, storekeepers, farmers and state stock, drug stores, etc. Five were too fat to work. Seventeen were sick and crippled, seven away at school, and what are found not infrequently in the white race, eleven "gentlemen of leisure," living in Omaha, who were all farming—a pretty good record. It is a little galling to have the Omaha Indians not and say how the government is making a man of the Omaha Indian by teaching him how to farm and be self-supporting, when we have such a record as this for proof.

Since 1906, when temperance became the rule and not the exception, the Omahas have been farming on a larger scale, and today are raising by their own exertions, wheat, barley, oats and from 3,000 to 1,000 bushels of corn, besides numerous garden vegetables.

At the county fair in Wattitt, 1908, Jesse Old Man, almost or more than 80 years old, received a ribbon for best corn and squash... Henrick Blackbird [illegible] three prizes, two on the best [illegible]

Conforming closely to the code of [illegible] and "reasonable hold down for the tribal organization, the Omaha [illegible] a man of fine physical development, clean in morals, of good [illegible] a properly balanced amount of work and rest, lived at peace with his neighbors, with plenty for his family, contented with his share of what he needed and more of the gifts of God, and more [illegible] taining that goal which is the [illegible] pursuit of all mankind," happiness.

Our Little Troubles

BY GRAHAM HOOD.

We may enjoy life, or we may make ourselves miserable—as we choose. Joy and misery are terms that are not clearly understood by everybody. We are apt to look at them as fixed conditions. We feel that we have the right to be happy because certain agreeable things have happened, or that we may feel happy because circumstances are favorable to us, or when, as a matter of fact, happiness and unhappiness are not external conditions, determined by external causes. The ability to be happy comes from within, and happiness is governed by our mental attitude to a far greater degree than by outside conditions.

The character of the life we live is largely determined by the way in which we view it. If you study nature through a blue glass window pane you get a very false impression of its aspects. Everything is blue—varying somewhat in shade, but not in color. The sunshine, though common sense tells you that it is white—seems blue, the grass looks blue, even the sun will appear walking about under the trees are the same color as the foliage—all blue.

The same is true of everyone when we look at the world without through the eyes of the mind, only, in this case, it is the mental attitude that tinges everything in harmonious hues with the dominant tones of thought. Are we disposed to look at the dark side of things—then it is the dark side that will always present itself to us. Are we inclined to view things cheerfully and hopefully—then it is the bright side that will invariably catch the eye.

Such being the case, it is easy to see why those who take things to heart most seriously should find it so difficult to discover anything but trouble in the world. They are forever anticipating trouble—forever looking for it. Instead of washing the windows of the soul that the view of life may not be momentarily obstructed, they don dark-colored glasses and then wonder why the sun seems so sorry.

Father Vaughan once called attention to the fact that "a penny piece held close to the eye, will suffice to shut out all creation." Knowing this, to be true, are we not foolish to not applying this knowledge to life's everyday experience? Where is the sense in deliberately blinding ourselves and then feeling ourselves into the belief that there is nothing for us to see?

In producing the result: a critical trouble will [illegible] as well as a [illegible] penny piece. All we have to do is [illegible] the little trouble to bear roughly as to shut out every [illegible] If we do this, we can easily convince ourselves that the universe is [illegible] troubles that there is nothing else [illegible] we can hold upon.

Of course, we know that life is not always a flood of golden sunlight; there are dark mornings in every life—days which our burdens seem more than [illegible] diurnally hard to bear—but, if the lessons we have learned in the school of [illegible] persons have been of any real value to us, the most, have taught us that the weight of a burden depends to a great [illegible] upon the way in which we attempt to bear it—the proportions depend largely a question of the respective frame which we look at them.

Helpless.

Chop enough cold boiled mutton to make a pint. Put two tablespoonfuls of fat in a small saucepan, add one onion and cook until the onion is [illegible] brown. Then add a cupful water and four tablespoonfuls bread crumbs. Push back on the stove, add a dozen minute-hanged and chopped [illegible] a generous sprinkle pepper and salt. Add three cups broken light [illegible] to the mixture, then cure the [illegible] into a buttered casserole, sprinkle with little lemon juice, bake in a quick oven twenty minutes, then serve with [illegible]