

ARCHEOLOGICAL STUDIES

CIRCULAR NO. 11

Report Of The

# **Archeological Salvage Investigations In The Gavin's Point Reservoir Area,**

**Lewis and Clark Lake  
Nebraska and South Dakota  
1963 and 1964**

BY

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As excavation proceeded in Section 1 several shell pendants in the form of bear's claws, (Plate 27) drilled canine teeth, (Plate 28, Fig. A) and tubular shell beads (Plate 28, Fig. B) began to appear, together with flecks of red ochre. Disarticulated human bones surrounded by an irregular pattern of post-molds were also noted, beginning at a depth of one foot from the surface. A typical Plains-Woodland body sherd was found in association with these remains. It appeared at this point that the site was a typical Plains-Woodland ossuary. Further work, however, revealed that in addition to the Plains-Woodland remains other, later, burials were present.

Completion of the excavation unit revealed three separate, complete, burials accompanied by glass trade beads, a gunflint, scraps of iron, and other 19th century artifacts. Immediately south of these was the Plains-Woodland "ossuary" which contained skull and long bone fragments representing at least five more individuals. The burials were numbered as follows: Burial I was that of a female, one of the three historic burials. The body was flexed, lying on its left side. The bones were stained with red ochre. In clear association with this burial was a bone fleshing tool made of the right hind leg (pes) of an elk. The naviculo-cuboid, cuneiforms, astragalus, and calcaneum were still in articulation, probably to provide a handle for the tool. (Plate 24) Gristle, lost through decay, served to hold these various bones together when the tool was in use. Other items associated with this burial were an iron knife blade, (Plate 21, fig. a) 50 per cent of a mussel shell filled with paint, five metal "jingles" of a type still used by Indians to ornament clothing, (Plate 23, figs. g, h, i) and 19 shell wampum beads. Fifteen of the beads were of the "white" variety and four of the "purple" type. (Plate 28, Fig. B, Top Row)

The skeleton appeared to represent a woman of 25-35 years of age. The skull was brachycephalic with some cradle board flattening present. Evidence of bone disease, probably the cause of death, appears in the left parietal.

Burial II, Section 1, was to the north of this, at the extreme north edge of the pit. It too represents a historic burial, apparently that of a male. The body had apparently been laid to rest in an extended position but had been somewhat disturbed subsequent to burial. This burial was not completely removed due to lack of time. The skull belonged to a man, judged to be between 25-30 years of age, and was brachycephalic.

Associated with this burial was a brass finger ring, (Plate 21, Fig. i) a copper "hawk" (Plate 21, Fig. h) bell, a skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) skull (possibly all that remains of a skunk skin medicine bag), four drilled cowrie shells, (Plate 26, Fig. A, Top Row) and several beads. The beads include shell wampum beads, pony beads, and a fragment of what appears to be a loom beaded garter or belt. This piece, which was near the right wrist of the individual, was clearly geometric in design, dark beads forming the pattern on a white bead background. (Plate 14) Another interesting item was a drilled bone object, somewhat resembling the long bone "hair pipes" traded to Plains Indians but clearly of native workmanship and rectangular in cross section. (Plate 25, Fig. a) Between

Burials I and II in Sec. I were two copper button backs labeled "treble gilt" (Plate 21, Fig. g) and a black stone gunflint (probably of English derivation), (Plate 23, Fig. f) also an unfinished flesher of the type described for Burial I. (Plate 24, Fig. a)

Burial III represented an infant and was near Burial I. The bones were exceedingly thin and had been scattered, making identification difficult.

Burial IV was the designation given the Plains-Woodland "ossuary." This was immediately to the south of the three complete historic burials just described. As noted earlier the remains in this area were disarticulated. They consisted of five separate skulls or fragments thereof, and various associated long bones, ribs, etc. The remains represent two adult males, one quite elderly, two mature females, and one child. All of the adult skulls are dolicocephalic and show the Woodland "bun" at the occiput. The child's skull is too fragmentary for comparative purposes. With these remains were found 3 crescent shaped shell gorgets, 17 shell pendants in the form of bear's claws, 14 drilled canines (probably a necklace), 2 fragments of dentalium shell, 1 disk bead of shell, and four typical Plains-Woodland potsherds. A small pecked, polished, and ground full-grooved axe found near the excavations was probably associated with this ossuary as well. (Plate 19, Fig. b) In view of the association of the Woodland sherds, shell gorgets and pendants, drilled canines, and shell disk bead with these remains, likewise the general similarity of the burial as a whole to other Woodland ossuaries in Nebraska and Kansas (i.e. the Marshall site 25HN1, the Holdrege 5 site 25FR9, and the Woodruff Ossuary 14BH4, it is suggested that this portion of Section I represents a Plains-Woodland burial pit. This pit was later dug into for burial purposes by historic Indians.

In Section II, at a depth of one foot, disarticulated human bones, including a skull fragment, appeared. In association was a triangular, unnotched point and a shell disk bead. No complete burial was recovered in this unit, however, and it became evident that the area had been badly disturbed by previous digging, perhaps by Mr. Over's 1919 work.

In Section III, located on the summit of the smaller of the two bluffs, a glass bead appeared just below the surface. At a depth of 2.5 feet three cedar boards were found, all oriented east and west. Two of these measured 4.5 feet in length, while the third was 2 feet 11 inches long. Diameters of the boards were 4 inches, 7 inches, and 2.5 inches in the order listed above. Beneath these boards, which appear to have formed the grave cover, the soil was very soft.

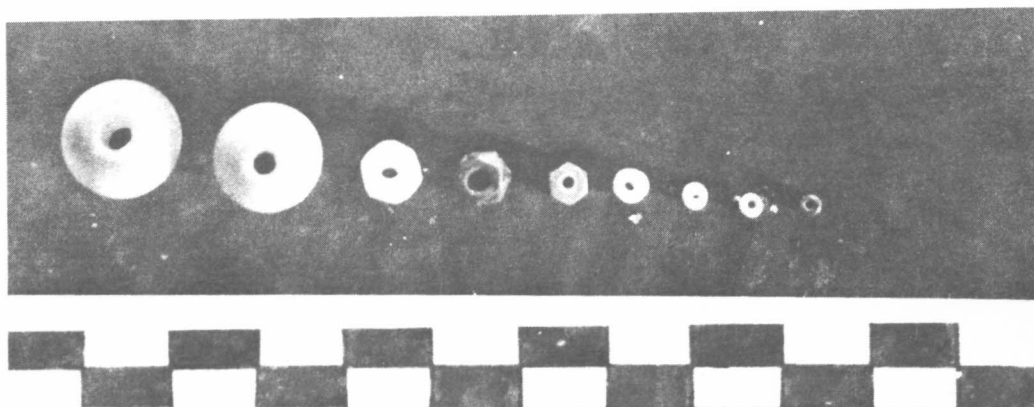
A partially articulated, extended burial of a female Indian was found in this loose soil, together with various items of 19th century provenience. The woman appeared to have been about 25 years old at the time of death, and was brachycephalic. Grave goods consisted of many white and coral seed beads, larger "barrel" beads which were an iridescent copper in color and faceted, and a few large white "neck" beads. (Plate 26, Fig. b) Four metal "jingles" probably clothing ornaments, were also scattered at random.

Fig. A



Top row, drilled cowrie (*Cyprea moneta*) shells found in association with historic Ponca burials, 25KX207; Bottom row, shell beads 25KX207.

Fig. B



Glass beads found in association with historic Ponca burials, 25KX207.