

FROM THE LIBRARY OF
C. EDGAR MANNUM
ARDMORE, OHA.

15781
20.00

CHAPTERS IN NEBRASKA ARCHAEOLOGY

By
EARL H. BELL



VOLUME ONE
NUMBERS I-VI

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA
1936

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION, <i>Earl H. Bell</i>	5
I. ARCHAEOLOGY OF CERTAIN SITES IN CEDAR COUNTY, NEBRASKA, <i>Paul Cooper</i>	11
II. A COMPARISON OF THE CULTURAL MANIFESTATIONS OF THE BURKETT AND GRAY-WOLFE SITES, <i>Marion Lucile Dunlevy</i>	147
III. THE SWEETWATER CULTURE COMPLEX, <i>John L. Champe</i>	249
IV. THE NEHAWKA AND TABLE ROCK FOCI OF THE NEBRASKA ASPECT, <i>Earl H. Bell and G. H. Gilmore</i>	301
V. THE ROCK SHELTERS OF WESTERN NEBRASKA, <i>Earl H. Bell and Robert E. Cape</i>	357
VI. SOME CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE POSSIBLE AGE OF AN ANCIENT SITE IN WESTERN NEBRASKA, <i>Earl H. Bell and Willem Van Royen</i>	401

THE NEHAWKA AND TABLE ROCK FOCI OF THE
NEBRASKA ASPECT

EARL H. BELL AND G. H. GILMORE

IV

THE NEHAWKA AND TABLE ROCK FOCI OF THE
NEBRASKA ASPECT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	305
Geography	306
Houses	308
Artifacts	311
Pottery	312
Pipes	322
Chipped flint	323
Ground and polished stonework	324
Work in bone and antler	324
Basketry	325
Summary of traits	326
Table of comparative percentages of certain pottery traits	327
Summary and conclusions	328

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1.—Map of the Weeping Water area	307
FIGURE 2.—Behrnes site, House I	308
FIGURE 3.—Sheldon site, House I	309
FIGURE 4.—Pottery profiles	313
FIGURE 5.—Rim profiles	315
FIGURE 6.—Handle types and rim decorations	317
FIGURE 7.—Rim types from Table Rock	321

LIST OF PLATES

PLATE I An unexcavated house pit	330
PLATE II Restored pots from the Woolsey and Behrnes sites	332
PLATE III Restored pots from the Gates and Table Rock sites	334
PLATE IV Restored pots from the Sheldon and Rock Bluffs sites	336
PLATE V Restored pots from the Behrnes site	338
PLATE VI Pottery texture, basket mold, effigies, and surface finish	340
PLATE VII Rim sherds from Sheldon, Table Rock, Gates, and Rock Bluffs sites	342
PLATE VIII Table Rock sherds with modified rim	344
PLATE IX Typical clay elbow pipes	346
PLATE X Arrowpoints and end scrapers	348
PLATE XI Knives and scrapers	350
PLATE XII Pecked and polished and chipped celts	352
PLATE XIII Implements of bone and antler	354

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the characteristics of a prehistoric culture which is known to exist in eastern Nebraska along the Missouri River and its tributaries between Omaha and Falls City. (See map at front of book for location of excavated sites.) While the boundaries of the culture are unknown, it seems to extend up and down the river in slightly varied form for some distance, and westward along the tributaries of the Missouri for at least 50 miles. In Iowa many of the sherds which Dr. Charles Keyes of the Iowa State Historical Society refers to as the "Glenwood Culture" bear a close resemblance to those of Nebraska discussed below.

This distinctive complex of traits had been recognized for some time through the work of local amateurs of high standing. It was briefly described by Dr. Robert F. Gilder of Omaha in 1926, who referred to it as the "Nebraska Culture."¹ Dr. F. H. Stearns also referred to it in his unpublished doctor's thesis in 1917.

Since that time further work has been done by local collectors and the University of Nebraska Archaeological Survey. Dr. William Duncan Strong of the Smithsonian Institution has written at length on the work of the University under his direction.²

In the spring of 1934 the Civil Works Administration Board of Cass County appropriated funds to be used for further archaeological investigation in that county under the direction of the University of Nebraska. That work was conducted under the direction of Dr. Earl H. Bell, with the field work in charge of Dr. G. H. Gilmore of Murray, Nebraska.

Later in the spring several citizens of Table Rock in Pawnee County, Nebraska, cooperated with the University in excavating two house ruins near that town. They were much farther south than any of the previous ones excavated, and while the cultural complex proved to be very similar to that encountered farther north there were significant variations, which are described herein.

This paper will discuss the new material which has been collected, attempt to bring together the results of previous work, discuss the possible foci represented, and describe the relationship of the whole to other Middle West cultures.

Unfortunately, the burial complex of the culture is unknown. Numerous low mounds which may or may not be artificial, are found throughout the area, and are described by Strong.³ Due to the lack of funerary

¹ Robert F. Gilder, *The Nebraska Culture Man*, Omaha, 1926.

² William Duncan Strong, "An Introduction to Nebraska Archeology," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, Washington, D. C., 1935, Vol. 93, No. 10, pp. 124-168, 49, 50, 177, 180-182, 272, 288, 295.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

offerings in the mounds, and the fact that remains of another distinct prehistoric culture⁴ are found in the region which in addition was inhabited by historic groups, the mound burials cannot be ascribed to any one culture. Much more work remains to be done on the burial aspect of Nebraska archaeology.

GEOGRAPHY

The eastern part of Nebraska north to about Sioux City and west to Lincoln, in which area this culture is found, bears a closer resemblance to the Eastern Woodlands than to the adjacent plains of the West. Reference to a vegetation map shows the Eastern Woodlands extending along the rivers into the prairies and plains. Floral and faunal lists for this part of Nebraska compiled by the botany and zoology departments of the University of Nebraska show a great preponderance of Eastern Woodland plants, mammals, and birds over those typical of the plains. The annual rainfall records show Omaha, which is in this eastern Nebraska area, to have an average rainfall of 29.5 inches, while Lincoln, only 50 miles west, has 28.8 inches. Seventy-five miles farther west it drops to 26 inches and at North Platte, little more than 250 miles west of Omaha, the average annual rainfall is approximately 18 inches. Thus, the rainfall records also show eastern Nebraska to have a closer affiliation with the East than with the West.

The area is drained by a network of rivers and creeks. Springs of sparkling water are still present, and early settlers tell us that springs were formerly much more prevalent. Topographically the land is rolling to rough. It has been dissected by rivers and creeks, both permanent and intermittent, which cut their way down through the loess mantle from the High Plains to the west to the level of the Missouri Valley. Hence, as one approaches the Missouri River the hills become more and more pronounced, and ravines deeper and more frequent.

Thus, it is evident that while we are dealing with a region well within the plains area, it is actually an extension of the Eastern Woodlands. Indians who had formerly lived to the south or east were not confronted by a significantly different geographical environment, and hence were not under pressure to readjust their culture. Any changes which came about would more likely be in the nature of the acquisition of new traits in response to the additional opportunities offered by the natural resources in the adjacent plains. For this reason eastern Nebraska, located as it is, on the threshold of the Great Plains, may bring to light an important link which will eventually connect the cultures of the Plains to those of the

⁴ F. H. Stearns, "Stratification of Cultures in Eastern Nebraska," *American Anthropologist*, 1917, p. 121.

Mississippi Valley, and should prove to be of importance in the study of social change.

Along the water courses of this Nebraska extension of the Eastern Woodlands, the hill tops and sides are literally dotted with the ruins of prehistoric houses. Recently numerous house sites of the same culture have been found in the valleys and on the terraces just above the flood plains. Contrary to former opinions, it seems likely that the valleys and terraces were inhabited just as extensively as were the higher lands. Not so many house ruins have been discovered there, however, as erosion tends to bury the remains in the lower lands, while it uncovers those on the higher ground.

In general the houses are not grouped closely together in large villages as is the case with certain other Nebraska cultures. Rather they are widely spaced all along the water courses, much as are the modern farmsteads in the same region. The whole gives the impression of a peaceful, industrious, agricultural people. (See Figure 1, which shows the approximate location of house ruins situated in the Weeping Water drainage.)

This portion of Nebraska is very fertile, the annual rainfall being normally about 30 inches, which is sufficient to insure good crops of

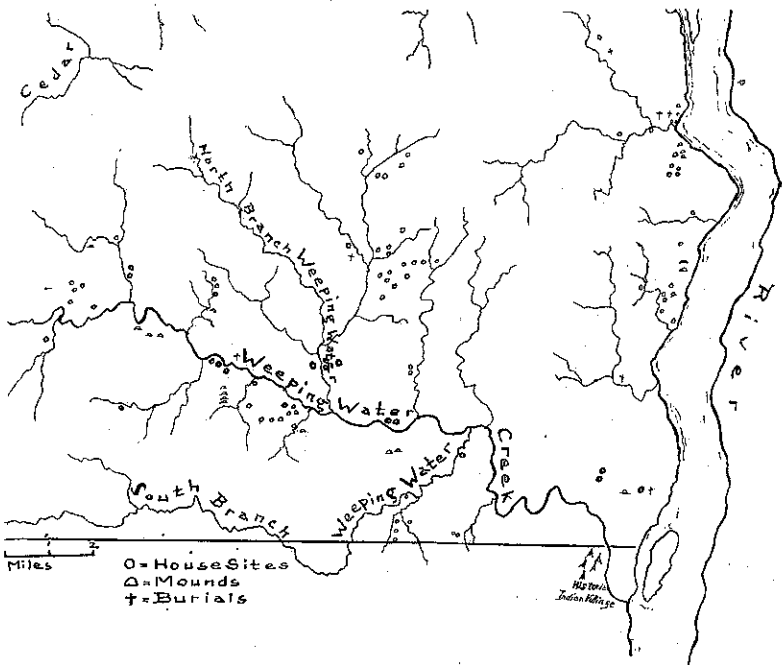


FIG. 1.—Map of the Weeping Water area, showing distribution of houses.

maize and other plants cultivated by prehistoric horticulturists. Game was likewise plentiful. Underlying the entire region is the Nehawka limestone, a part of the Pennsylvanian formation, in which are contained nodules of flint. Primitive quarries, worked for the flint, are numerous throughout the region. Frequently house remains are only a few yards distant from one of the ancient quarries, and in the houses the abundance of rough, unworked blanks and cores as well as finished artifacts of that distinctive flint bear mute evidence that some of the quarries at least were worked by the people of this culture.

HOUSES

Some of the houses of this culture have been described so excellently and in such detail by Strong that we shall present only a general description plus some detail not commented on by him. In contrast to the round houses of the historic Pawnee and Omaha, they are generally rectangular in shape, although the corners may be slightly curved (see Figures 2 and 3). Those excavated range from 23 feet by 26 feet to 51 feet by 51 feet,

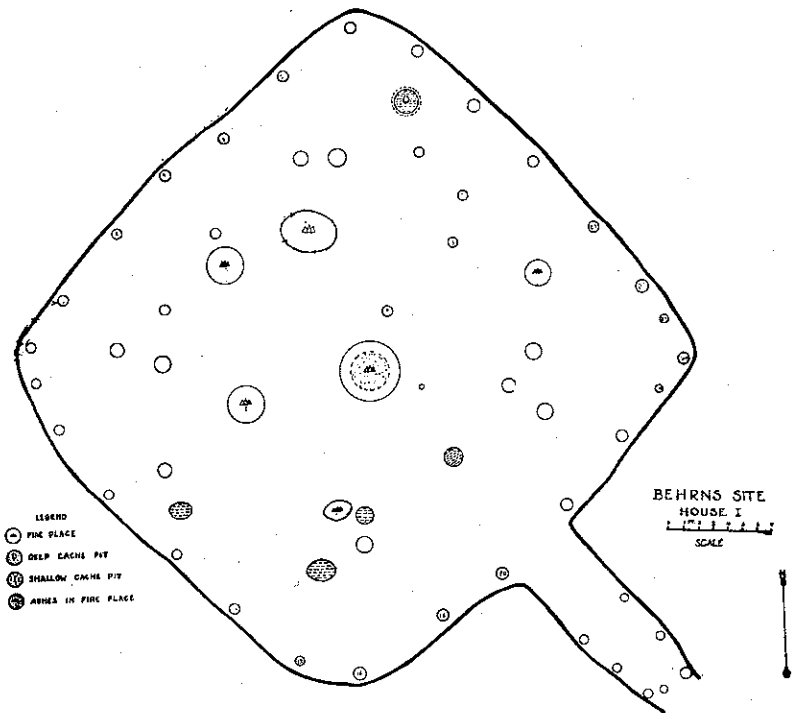


FIG. 2.

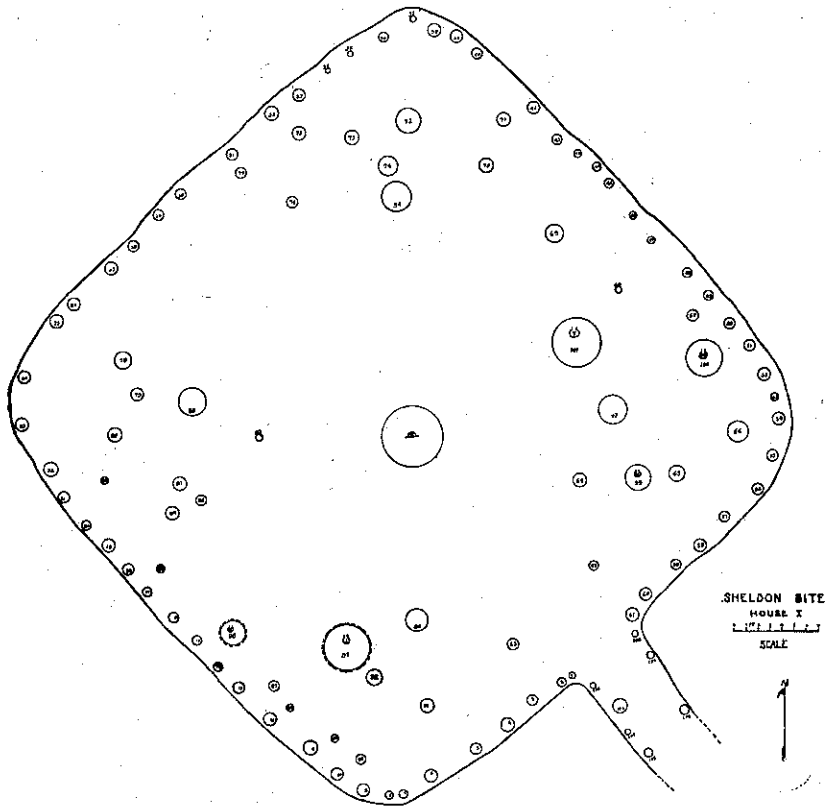


FIG. 3.

with an entrance from 8 feet to 16 feet in length. The depth of the pits in houses excavated by Strong and the writers range from 2 feet 8 inches to 3 feet 6 inches. Dr. Gilder reports houses "a dozen feet deep,"⁵ but later speaks of them as being 4 to 6 feet in depth.⁶ Some remains which the writers have seen recently are at least 8 feet in depth.

They were constructed by digging a pit the desired size and depth. The entrance way was also excavated, but with the floor sloping gently upward to form a sort of ramp. There seems to have been no set rule for the orientation of the entrance. Posts were then erected around the edges of the pit to form the framework of the walls. It is significant that the posts were closely spaced, being only 6 to 14 inches apart. Their

⁵ Robert F. Gilder, *The Nebraska Culture Man*, p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.