

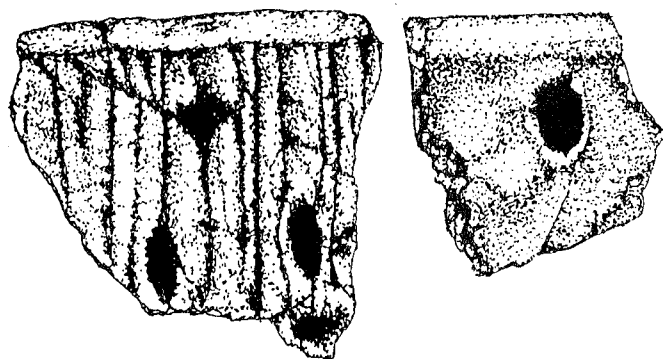
# WOODLAND VILLAGERS

The climate of the Great Plains was becoming more stable about 2000 years ago and weather patterns much more like modern patterns developed. The Archaic foragers had developed an extraordinary system of life which allowed their culture to flourish at a hunting and gathering level for generations. Their lifeway, living in relatively small, nomadic family bands, was soon to undergo dramatic change.

The cause of this change was ultimately from the rapidly developing cultures in Central America, but came to the Plains cultures through the groups in the Woodland areas of the eastern United States. The Archaic peoples of the East practiced a subsistence pattern very much like that of the Plains peoples, that is, a generalized hunting and gathering existence. The environment of the eastern Woodlands, however, was much more productive and had a huge variety of resources from which to select. These people were able to practice what has been called "Primary Forest Efficiency." Consequently, they were able to live much more sedentary lives than were the Plains peoples; eastern Woodlands people lived in fairly large villages and developed large populations.

As these Woodland villagers began to feel the influences of the cultures in Central America, their culture changed. One of the first important developments was the invention of pottery. The Archaic peoples along the southeast coast of the United States had used hide containers, baskets, and bowls carved from stone to store their food and to cook it by the process of stone boiling. The first pottery was made in imitation of these vessels. The clay was mixed with Spanish Moss, or similar substances, molded as a lump into the desired shape, and "fired" or heated. The sides of these first vessels were thick and the pottery was crude. As people became more expert in working the clay and used grit or sand for temper, the shapes of pots became more regular and resembled a cone. Frequently, these vessels were made by a paddle and anvil technique; a hand or another object was placed on the inside of the roughly modeled pot and a

paddle of wood wrapped with cord was beaten on the outside of the vessel. This beating both thinned the walls and gave a rough texture which is called cord-roughening. Decorations were sometimes made on the rims of the pots by incising lines with a reed, bone, or other pointed object. Sometime single strands of cord were pressed into the pots, making triangles or horizontal line decorations, and sometimes a "boss," or bump, was raised by pressing a pointed object into the rim from the inside. Much of the Woodland pottery from South Dakota combined many of these elements of decoration.



*Examples of Woodland pottery sherds from the Sonota complex.*

The other major trait that appeared during the Woodland was the construction of specialized mounds for the burial of the dead. The mounds in the eastern states varied widely from being small and conical to large linear forms. Some from the late Woodland period were even shaped like animals such as bears and birds. The burial mounds often contained fantastic grave goods including effigy pipes, sheets of copper and mica formed into shapes of people or animals, exquisite pottery made especially for the burials, and many other items. The earliest of these mounds were made by the Adena and, slightly later, by the Hopewell of the Ohio, Illinois and Mississippi drainages. These peoples began to spread their influences westward by 1 A.D., probably as a result of their widespread trade network called the "Hopewell Interaction Sphere" which had links as far west as the Rocky Mountains, as well as being all over the eastern and southern regions of the United States.

When these cultural characteristics were transmitted to the northern Great Plains states, they became "watered down," that is, the Woodland culture that was developed on the Plains was not so "pure" as it was in the east and was really eastern Woodland culture imposed on a well established Plains Archaic culture. Over the years archaeologists have learned a great deal about Woodland life in South Dakota from 1-800 A.D., but knowledge is still quite limited.

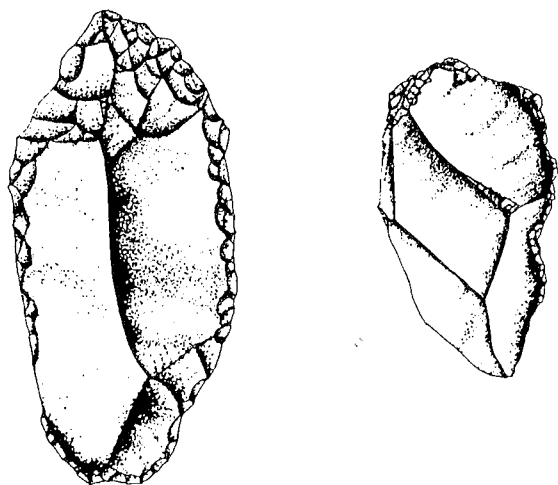


*Paddle and anvil method of thinning pottery vessel walls.*

At least four complexes or varieties of Woodland culture are represented in South Dakota. The best known complexes have been identified along the Missouri River, probably due to the fact that most archaeological work has been done in those areas. The first complex to be defined is focused in the area on the section of the Missouri River that forms the border between South Dakota and Nebraska and extends as far north as the mouth of the White River. This complex has been called Loseke Creek after a very similar complex in Nebraska. The major known sites for South Dakota are the Scalp and Ellis Creek sites in Gregory County which were excavated in the 1940's and the 1950's.

The Scalp Creek site is located on a small promontory of a stream terrace about 25 feet above Scalp Creek. The Ellis Creek site is located about two miles south of Scalp Creek along the narrow valley of Ellis Creek. Both sites were located in places where people could take advantage of the grassland plant and animal species of the uplands and the plants and animals of the Missouri River floodplain, as well as the aquatic resources of the creeks and river. The creek valleys would also have provided shelter from winter winds.

Little evidence of permanent houses was found at either the Scalp or Ellis Creek sites. The Woodland complex at the sites was a recurring series of occupations over a long period of time. The remains of storage pits and fire places were discovered and, in one instance, a very dark soil layer with a concave base was found. This layer may have represented the floor pit of a temporary shelter. Artifacts found at the site included a variety of side-notched, triangular arrow points. Sandstone abraders, to smooth and straighten the shafts of arrows, were also common at the site. There was also an abundance of stone scrapers and knives which indicates that hides were processed for clothing and other uses. Much of the stone for these tools came from the nearby prehistoric stone quarries of the Bijou Hills.



*Woodland knife (left) and Woodland scraper (right).*

About 300 feet northwest of the Scalp Creek site is a burial mound which had six burials in it. The skeletons were apparently in the flexed position with knees drawn up to the chest. The burial offerings that were found included five fragments of knives or scrapers, two bone awls or perforators, four end scrapers and a hammerstone covered with red ochre.



*A flexed burial, common in Woodland mounds.*

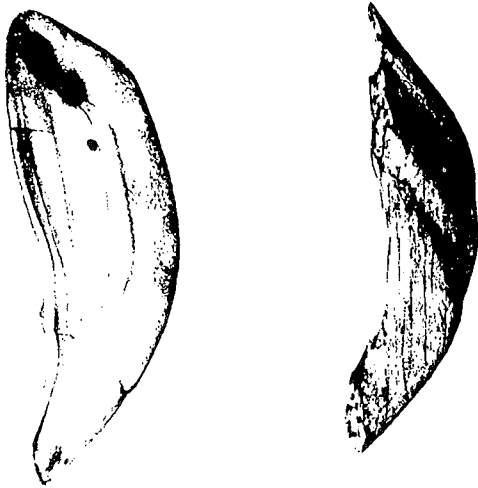
Pottery was one of the main handicrafts at the two sites. All the pottery was fairly thick and had been tempered with grit. Some of the pottery was conical in shape, as is most Woodland pottery, but one style, called Scalp Creek ware, had a more rounded shape. Designs were relatively simple. Some pots just had the characteristic Woodland cord-roughening while others had bosses or single cord-impressed lines worked into triangle patterns.

The economic base of the Loseke Creek complex at Scalp and Ellis Creek villages rested on hunting combined with the collection of wild vegetable products. Fishing and shellfish gathering appear to have been practiced at the site but probably did not provide much food material for the group. The animals hunted by the Woodland villagers were very much the same as the animals that were hunted by the Archaic foragers. The primary species taken was the bison, but also hunted were other animals like deer and elk, along with many smaller varieties. Vegetable products were also probably much the same as those used during the Archaic, and were probably processed on milling stones much as those used during the Archaic.

The remaining question about the Woodland complexes in South Dakota, especially those along the Missouri River, is focused on whether or not the groups practiced agriculture. There is evidence that similar groups in Nebraska did grow corn but there is no direct evidence for this among the groups in South Dakota.

While knowledge of Loseke Creek materials from South Dakota is limited, more sites than those at Scalp and Ellis Creek are known. One level of the Tramp Deep site, on the Nebraska side of the Gavins Point Reservoir, has Loseke Creek materials, as does the Arp site in Brule County. Archaeologists suspect that several mounds or mound groups like Spawn mound in Lake County and Hofer mound in Hutchinson County, and the Split Rock Creek mounds in Minnehaha County also belong to the the Loseke Creek complex. Most of these sites, including Scalp and Ellis Creek, date from the time period between 200 A.D. and 800 A.D.

The Sonota complex has recently been defined, and is a Woodland complex much further north along the Missouri River near the North Dakota-South Dakota border. This complex was defined from five sites in both states. These sites are: Stelzer, Swift Bird, Grover Hand, Arpan and Boundary Mound. Additional information has been provided from five other sites. The people of the Sonota complex had a subsistence pattern oriented toward buffalo hunting, small animal hunting and trapping, and gathering. No evidence of horticulture has been discovered. Burial goods in mounds were relatively numerous and indicate trade with other regions. Ceramic artifacts were not abundant and were defined into only two gross classes based on surface decoration. The technology used to make the



*A bear canine pendant (left) from the Grover Hand site. On the right is an imitation of a canine pendant made from bone, found in Boundary mound.*

pottery may have diffused from the Hopewellian centers in Illinois and may also be related to Woodland occupation in Montana, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Recent excavations at the Oakwood Lakes site in Brookings County seem to suggest that these people had some affiliation to the Sonota complex in both lithic and ceramic materials. Domesticated plant remains present in the site suggest that at least some very late Sonota-related peoples may have practiced horticulture. A limited survey of sites in Hamlin and Deuel Counties suggest that several other sites with Woodland components on the Coteau des Prairies share ceramic traits with Oakwood Lakes. The relationships between the Sonota complex and other Woodland complexes in South Dakota and other states are not yet clear.

The Besant, Avonlea, and Pelican Lake complexes have been defined for western South Dakota but are somewhat puzzling. They are generally defined as being the Southern Canadian equivalent of Plains Woodland. Similarities between Besant cord-roughened pottery and pottery styles in the Central Plains have been suggested. Avonlea sites are seen by some archaeologists as representing the earliest of the planned, ritualized bison drives that appear commonly on the Plains at a later date. They also suggest that Besant may well represent the intrusion of Canadian groups into the area. While no sites have been identified in South Dakota as either Besant, Avonlea, or Pelican Lake, points from these complexes are not uncommon in the state.

Finally, the so-called Dakota Mound complex has been suggested for the northeastern Coteau area with Sisseton mound as one of the few excavated examples. The mounds of this complex vary widely in size and shape and date from 500 B.C. to 1000 A.D. The frequent appearance of bison remains in the mounds tends to indicate the extreme importance of the bison to the subsistence pattern of the people. The Dakota Mound complex may actually be nothing more than part of the Sonota complex.

The Woodland peoples of South Dakota were in few ways like the extremely complex eastern Woodland peoples of Adena and Hopewell. The basic life style of the Archaic foraging peoples continued throughout most of the Woodland period in the Plains. The subsistence methods of the Plains Woodland peoples were essentially the same as those of their predecessors, although by the time the Woodland period ended, archaeologists do begin to see the use of domesticated plants like corn and probably also beans and squash. Because the subsistence practices were continued from the Archaic, the social structure was also probably very similar to that of the Archaic period. Woodland groups in the Great Plains area lived during most of the year in small family bands and only during certain abundant seasons did they move into the larger macrobands to carry out religious rituals like building burial mounds for their dead. This construction of burial mounds required a certain amount of organization, though perhaps not much more than the planned bison drives that were practiced by some of the Woodland groups. Though the more eastern Woodland groups buried only special people, like shamans, in the mounds, it is more likely that Plains Woodland peoples of South Dakota placed the remains of most of their dead into the mounds and not just certain individuals. Pottery, the new addition to the material inventory of the peoples, was at first crude, but later during the Woodland period, became much more elaborate and much more skillfully made. Pottery was to become important for the Woodland peoples and the groups that followed them because pottery became the major method for both storing and cooking the domesticated plants that were beginning to be grown.

Because little research has been done on the Woodland period in South Dakota, many questions still remain to be answered about the groups. First of all, little is known about how the different Woodland complexes are related to each other. The distinctions that have been made may not be very accurate and these definitions of the complexes may have to be revised. Archaeologists are also not certain about the importance of domesticated plants in the diet of the Woodland peoples. These items were perhaps really not very important because few remains from the practice of horticulture are found. Even though many questions remain unanswered about the Woodland peoples, the Woodland populations of South Dakota were groups that were undergoing a considerable amount of change. The changes came primarily from the fact that influences from outside the area were beginning to impose themselves on these Plains inhabitants. While the use of burial mounds signals the coming changes in the social order of South Dakota Native Americans, even more important was the new invention of pottery and the use of corn, beans and squash

as the mainstay of the diet. These plants would soon become more important than hunting the bison. The bison would not be the most significant segment of the diet again until the coming of Plains nomadic groups like the Sioux. Growing domesticated plants imposed many burdens on the people and changed their lives dramatically. Domesticated plants had to be tended during the growing season, and that meant that individuals had to remain, at least for a part of the year, in one place. This led to a much more sedentary village life. The surpluses allowed by growing vegetable products also meant that population levels began to increase during the late Woodland occupation and these increases would be very important for the development of full scale, fully sedentary village life along the Missouri River during the coming Initial Middle Missouri tradition.

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