

## Indian Burial Relics

By O. J. PRUITT

Twenty years and more seems a long time to spend in the collection of Indian relics. In such period the writer and friend wife have waded every creek in Potawattamie and adjoining counties.

It was not done without expense or mishap. The wife once had the misfortune to fall on a slippery bank and break an ankle. The fun and fascination went hand-in-hand. Usually it was hard work, but at other times it was easy. Often we dug continuously a whole day long in quest of specimens, and again we picked up many artifacts on newly plowed ground after a washing rain. Other times we visited Indian village sites and prospected the refuse dumps.

We accumulated over five thousand artifacts, including some nice earthen pyral pots and mortuary offerings, from the fish-hook bone of the raccoon to shell beads and pendants.

Many pathetic instances were met with in the excavating of graves. In one mound containing 24 skeletons, a mother was buried with her infant in her arms. At another, a brave was buried astride his horse in full regalia, peace pipe, tomahawk, bow and arrows, with a white man's money belt containing six dollars and thirty cents all in silver.

At still another, we found that exactly nine braves had met death in a fight with enemies. This was a wheel burial which are numerous in west Iowa, referred to in one of my previous articles in the ANNALS. A wheel burial is one where all the heads are placed together with the bodies and legs radiating like the spokes of a wheel. The heads represent the nave and the bodies and legs the spokes. We found four of this kind of burial.

On the S. B. Peters farm near Crescent, there were nine skeletons in the grave and all appeared to have

had their heads bashed in, presumably with a tomahawk and thought by all who saw them to have been the result of a battle between the Winnebagos and the Sioux in historical times.

#### A MUTILATED SKELETON

Behind Sol Smith lake in Harrison county, also previously reported in the ANNALS, we examined an Indian burial ground and found two wheel burials, and a single grave containing a skeleton minus one hand and one foot and the head. At a short distance away we unearthed the head, which had suffered pyral action, but the beads were intact. Curiously enough, the leg bones showed a compound fracture some time early in life and the setting of the fracture was perfect, so perfect that the two femurs are of exact length and in all probability the person walked without a limp. He was evidently a man of importance, perhaps a great warrior, and the separate burials of portions of the body was to deceive any enemy who might discover the loss of a great leader in warfare. This is the opinion of a lady of the Hines Foundation, who was experienced in the methods of the Winnebagos in the disposition of their chiefs and leaders in warfare.

Also in Harrison county, five miles above Missouri Valley, a grave was opened by Charles Kelsey, and here were five skeletons, one of which had a horn-like protuberance on the occipital bone, which resembled those of the Kaffiers of South Africa and were removed by English surgeons during the Boer war to allay savageness. This is stated on the authority of George S. Stienberg, an alderman at large in Council Bluffs. Mr. Kelsey lives at 110 East Bay avenue, Balboa, California, and is the man with whom I did field work in Harrison county; also a Mr. Jones, who at that time lived at Missouri Valley, and Jack Dewitt, who lives at Santa Barbara, California.

#### ASSISTED IN TRACING ANCESTRY

The legality of excavating of Indian graves covers and requires certain qualifications and length of time since

interring. In a few instances we hardly waited the one hundred year period, but not without thorough investigation of a chance of a living relative. The knowledge we gained more than offset the spectacular and gruesome task. We were able to chart most of the Indian graves in three counties, all of the village and camp sites. Thus we enabled living relatives after nearly a century to relocate where their forefathers rested. For this act alone, we had the blessings of the respective tribes, and offers of gifts.

From Kansas the Pottawattamies came and from the reservation in Nebraska came the Winnebagos, from whom we learned the names of many of the dead who lived before the birth of the writer, now approaching his 90th year. None of the Omahas could recall that they had dead buried on Iowa soil, the oldest Omaha then living being in the sixties.

#### FOR CENTURIES UNDISTURBED

The burials of the Pawnees' dead in Iowa represent periods of two to three centuries, and all were atop hills in individual mounds. The individual remains were set upright against a fixed post, sod cut and stacked like a haycock over poles, and at the time of making were fully five feet in height. When found undisturbed at the present time, they are miniature cone-shaped with a crater cave-in and usually found where the underbrush is dense.

Five were located on one farm in Mills county and, curiously enough, at the foot of a hill beneath the graves a moonshine still operated back in the days of prohibition. The fire had been put out, but things were yet hot and the odor of fresh corn liquor was very strong. Nearby was a deep well covered with brush, and further along up the side of the bluff were two wooden vats, a copper coil and a round boiler. The vats were half filled with corn meal soaking in water. The finished product was carried up the hill, the nearest route to the seldom traveled road. Upon seeing two men drive away in a truck, the investigation was begun. Unarmed, it

made one feel a bit squeamish. It is suffice to say we left without digging into the mounds so near to the outlaws.

Three years later, after tedious work, we learned that the burials were undoubtedly the oldest we had encountered. Here only brown streaks remained to show the outline of the larger bones of the body. Unio shell beads were decomposed to the extent that they were easily crushed in the hand. No artifact other than the beads were found. In time, all five of the mounds were opened with no further information available.

In one box canyon in Harrison county, forty skulls of humans were found strewn about by water in which only one male was represented, a boy with the eighteenth year molars just arising. The bones were buried through erosion where the fill-in and grading of the valley floor level had exceeded fifteen feet in the past two centuries. A ditch now had cut the fill to a depth of 10 feet and the strata of earth containing the bones was at a six-foot depth.

Here in the excavating, Hugh Kelsey almost lost his life by a cave-in. Hugh's father and a companion, a Mr. Jones, worked frantically and were able to extricate him before suffocation. In this short canyon many carved shells, effigies of animals, crude combs and pendants were found.

#### MUSEUM RECEIVES COLLECTION

The collection of relics we made has been placed in the museum of the Pottawattamie County Historical society. It has been a lot of pleasure and a great deal of hard labor. During all this time we have had the tutoring of such well-known archaeologists as R. F. Gilder, Dr. Over, Dr. Strong and Professor Kelsey, with the constructive advice of a great paleontologist, Harold J. Cook, of Agate Springs, Nebraska. We have had for almost constant companions Mr. and Mrs. A. V. Jensen, and on certain occasions free lance writers, news reporters and geologists of national repute.

Harrison county has a noted collector, Fred Yocum of

Logan, while Mills county has Paul Rowe, who majored in geology and is living near Glenwood.

The labor was greatly expedited in recent years by the work done by the W. P. A. in road building and the paving of highways. Much was learned by the work of excavating at the site of the old lime kilns, where lime was burned for the erection of Fort Atkinson in 1818-19.

Deep cuts through the bluffs gave additional information relative to the formations. More recently, the St. Bernard hospital had a vast grading job done, wherein the bluff was leveled some eighty feet. The area graded covers about two acres and barely missed the Indian burial on the saddle of the bluff. These are graves of the Pottawattamie. The making of new roads in the bluffs after rains revealed many stone and flint articles of Indian make.

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### Honor in Strict Accounting

Public money ought to be touched with the most scrupulous conscientiousness of honor. It is not the produce of riches only, but of the hard earnings of labor and poverty. It is drawn even from the bitterness of want and misery. Not a beggar passes, or perishes in the streets, whose mite is not in that mass.—Thomas Paine.

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### The Duty of Today

Our forefathers gave us a system of government which has produced greater liberties and higher living standards than ever before experienced in the history of the world. As citizens it is our duty and our responsibility to do our utmost to protect that system.—George E. Stringfellow.

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