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An
Old Kansas Indian Town
On
The Missouri



BY
GEORGE J. REMSBURG

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Old Kansas Indian Town
On
The Missouri

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CENTURIES ago mention was made by the French explorers of the large or main village of the "Quans" on the southwest bank of the Missouri river, about thirty leagues above the mouth of the "Quans" river. The Quans were the Kansa or Konza Indians from whom the state of Kansas derived its name. They were visited by De Bourgmont, in 1724, while on his famous expedition to the Padoucas. The exact location of this noted old village of Bourgmont's time, heretofore, has never been definitely determined, although the ruins of the old town on the Missouri were observed and mentioned by explorers and travelers for many years subsequent to the early French explorations.

Professor Dunbar apparently ^{was} authentically, has designated Atchison, Kansas as the site of the old village, while Kansas historians generally evade the question by vaguely referring to the old Kaw village "at" or "near the present site of Atchison, which is based merely on an approximation of the distance above the Kansas and Little Platte rivers, without taking into consideration the topographical and other features so essential in determining such matters. After carefully studying all available data bearing on the subject, including the chronicles of most of the early explorers who mention the old village, and unroughly examining the whole region along the Missouri river north of the Kansas, I have concluded that the historic old town of Doniphan, five miles north of the city of Atchison, was the prehistoric capital of the Kaws. The historical, topographical and archaeological evidence adequately sustains such an opinion. Before going into details I will succinctly give a few of the more important reasons for my belief that the old Kansas village was so located.

First—Doniphan corresponds approximately with the distances that the early explorers place the old village above the Kansas and Little Platte rivers, and other definite points on the Missouri.

Second—Lewis and Clark, and other explorers, who saw the remains of the old town explicitly state that it was a mile, or a little above Independence creek.

Third—Doniphan is the most ideal situation for an Indian village in that region, and the only desirable site for such a ~~site~~ ^{village} within a mile of Independence creek to the north.

Fourth—The fine prairies, which may be seen from points several miles below; the bend in the river, and other natural features at or near the old village site as recorded by the early explorers are identifiable with the present townsite of Doniphan and vicinity.

Fifth—The large amount of archaeological material, the prehistoric relics, the graves and other such remains found at Doniphan and vicinity indicate unmistakably that it was an important seat of aboriginal occupancy.

Sixth—Old settlers of undoubted reliability have seen on the Doniphan townsite numerous hut rings or lodge circles of an ancient Indian village, and from their descriptions of the same they were exactly similar to those of the later day villages of the Kansas Indians at Manhattan, Valencia, Council Grove and other places, denoting the hemispheric earthen huts that these Indians are known to have always constructed as their dwelling places.

In the summer of 1724 Captain Etienne Veagard de Bourgmont, military commander of the colony of Louisiana, set out on an overland expedition from Fort Orleans to the village of the Kansas Indians, on the Missouri river, and from there to the province of Padoucas, or what is now known as the Comanche tribe of Indians, in what is now Western Kansas. Bourgmont was accompanied by Ensign Bellerive, Sieur Philip Renaudiere, mining engineer and director general of mines for the colony of Louisiana, five soldiers, three Canadians, servants and 176 Missouri and Osage Indians commanded by the grand chief of the former tribe. Bourgmont had previously dispatched to the Kansas village several boatloads of merchandise under command of Lieutenant Saint-Ange and guarded by eleven soldiers. On the afternoon of July 7, 1724, Bourgmont's party arrived on the east bank of the Missouri river, opposite the village of the Kansas. The next morning they crossed in a pirogue, the horses being swam over and the Indians transported on rafts. "We debarked," says Bourgmont, "within gunshot distance of of the village where we camped." Bourgmont's arrival was made an occasion of much demonstration. From July 8 to 24 the time was spent in feasting, powwows, trading horses and peltries, making presents to the Indians and getting ready for the journey to the Padoucas. The river detachment arrived July 19. On the 24th the "grand departure was made, or to use the words of Bourgmont, "we put ourselves in battle array on the hight of the village, the drum began to beat the march and we marched away." The strange procession consisted

of Bourgmont's force, 300 Indian warriors with two grand chiefs and fourteen war chiefs, 300 Indian women, 500 Indian children and 500 dogs carrying and draging provisions, etc. The object of the expedition was to induce the Padoucas, who were friendly to the Spanish, to enter into a treaty of peace and an alliance with the Missouri. Kansas, Osage, Otoe and Iowa tribes, allies of the French, with whom they (the Paducas) were at war. Bourgmont reached the main village of the Padoucas October 18, 1724. A peace treaty and alliance was effected and the party returned to Fort Orleans, arriving November 5, 1724.

Bourgmont is very indefinite as to the location of the Kaws, but Renouidiere, in his memorandum of the expedition, says that thirty leagues above the "Quans" river "a small river flowing from the north is found; here is the great village of the Quans, consisting of 150 lodges adjoining the Missouri. There are fine prairies to the south and many mountains to the west." It is evident that this chronicler of the Bourgmont expedition mistook Rock creek for the main continuation of Independence creek. The general course of the Independence is from a westerly direction, but about a mile and a half above its mouth it takes a sharp turn to the south, flowing straight in this direction for nearly a mile when it makes another acute turn to the east for about one-half of a mile to its mouth. That part of the channel extending north and south is almost on a straight line with that of Rock creek, the merging of the Independence basin with that of Rock creek making a clearly defined valley much more prominent than the main valley of Independence from Rock creek westward. Coming as it does from the prairie the Independence valley at this point is not so noticeable as that of Rock creek which is bordered by high hills, or "many mountains," as Renouidiere saw fit to term the prominent elevations lying west of the Kansas village. Any person not acquainted with the country, looking north from near the mouth of the Independence would readily take the valley of Rock creek for the main trend or continuation of Independence valley. The "fine prairies," mentioned by Renouidiere are readily noticeable off south and southwest of Doniphan. In fact the country south and west of Doniphan tallies almost exactly with the descriptions given in the journals of the expedition; for instance Bourgmont mentions that a half league southwest of the Kansas village a small river was passed. Independence creek is just about that distance southwest of Doniphan. In another account we find that shortly after leaving the village they "marched about a league and a half along a river coming from the southwest." Deer creek comes into the Independence near its mouth from a southwesterly

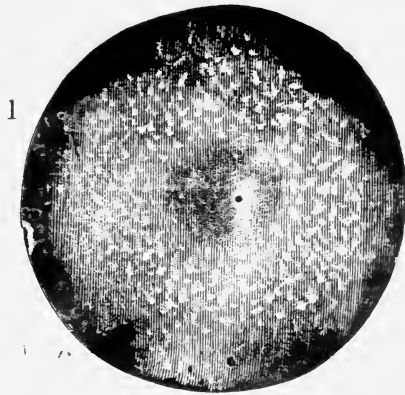
direction.

Those who passed up the Missouri river after the old Indian town was deserted, noticed its ruins on the river bank and mention it in their journals. Although Bourgmont mentions only one village of the Kansas, it will be noticed that the later explorers refer to two old village sites of this tribe. The Kansas no doubt had several villages on the Missouri at different periods, though the "second" village site mentioned by Lewis and Clark and others was the main, and perhaps the only, village of the tribe at the time of Bourgmont's visit. It is hardly likely that the "first" or lower village was contemporaneous with the upper, for in such wise Bourgmont would have mentioned it. On the contrary, it is more probable that the lower village either belonged to an earlier period or occupancy, or had not been such an extensive and long existent populace as the upper, for Lewis and Clark state that there were no traces of the former left, while the remains of the latter were still visible to the extent that it appeared to have once been a large town. Traces of an Indian village may still be seen at the lower site (Salt creek valley), but it requires the scrutiny of an antiquarian to identify its location, the indica being scarcely visible to the casual eye.

Perrin du Lac, in 1802, says that thirty-five miles above the mouth of the Kansas, on the Missouri river, his party found one of the old villages of the Kansas, and twenty-two miles beyond this the other. Hon. J. V. Brower, in his "Missouri River" published in 1897 gives the distance by river channel from the Kansas river to the Fort Leavenworth bridge as thirty-two miles, which would make it just about thirty-five miles to Salt creek where there are evidences of an Indian village site on the farm of Mr. Thomas Daniels. From Salt creek to Doniphan, the distance by river channel is, approximately, somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty-two miles.

"Three miles before we arrived at the last village," says Du Lac, "we perceived some iron ore." Along the bluffs, three miles below Doniphan, the rocks are impregnated to a considerable extent with iron. Lewis and Clark, in 1804, mention the remains of both of the old villages, the first twenty-eight miles above Little River Platte, the second twenty-eight miles above the first. It might be incidentally stated that the slight variations in distances as given by the different explorers is accounted for by the fact that the channel mileage of the Missouri river does not remain the same for any long period, the stream shifting its course at frequent intervals.

On July 4, 1804, Lewis and Clark discovered a stream about thirty yards wide, which they named Independence, in honor of the



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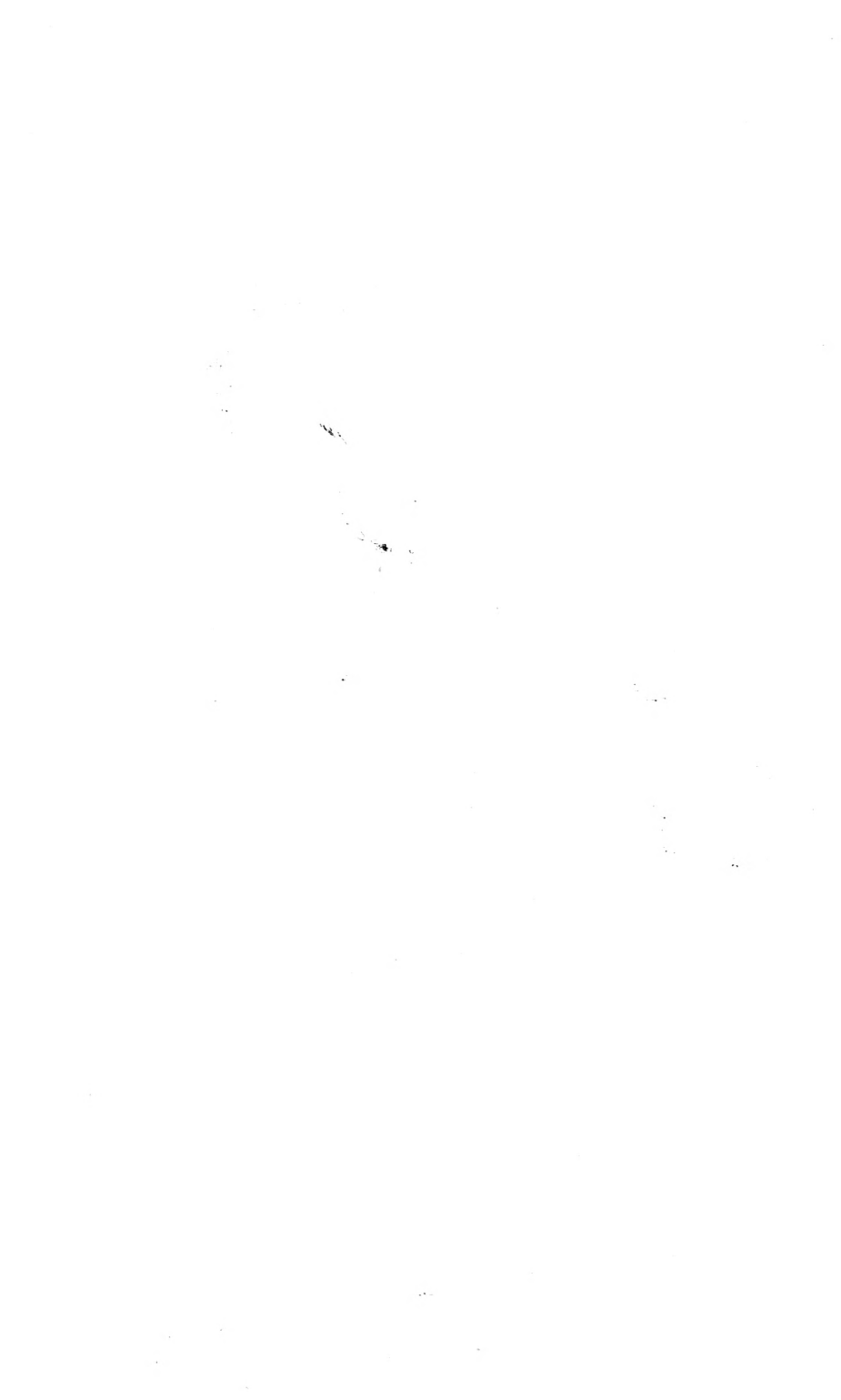
Typical Kansas Artifacts



6



1. Discoidal Stone. 2. Flint Hoe. 3. Stone Pipe. 4. Flint Drill.
5. Flint Knife. 6. Flint Tomahawk.



day. To quote their journal, they "came along the bank of an extensive and beautiful prairie, interspersed with copses of timber and watered by Independence creek. On this bank formerly stood the second village of the Kansas. From the remains it must have been a large town." "On this bank stood the village" signifies on the bank of the prairie, and not on the bank of Independence creek, for in another place in their journal (p. 1258 Coue's Lewis and Clark) they designate "a mile above Independence creek" as the situation of the old village. If the village was anywhere within a mile of the Independence to the north, it must have been where Doniphan now stands, for that is the only desirable situation for an Indian village, within that distance from the creek. Shortly after leaving the old village site Lewis and Clark passed a small stream which they called Yellow Ochre creek, from a bank of that mineral a little above it. About three miles above Doniphan, at Geary, there empties into the Missouri a small stream called Brush creek, which was doubtless the "Yellow Ochre" of Lewis and Clark's day, for the "bank" of that mineral from which they so named the stream is visible "a little above" the creek, as they stated. C. B. Roundy, of Geary, once sent some of that mineral substance to be examined by experts and they pronounced it "ochre of poor quality."

Sergeant Floyd, of the Lewis and Clark expedition, in an individual diary, speaks of Independence creek coming out of an "extensive prairie, open and high, which may be seen six or seven miles below." Brackenridge, in 1811, also mentions the fine view of the prairies and the old village site, which could be obtained below. The country about Doniphan may be seen very plainly from the Atchison bridge, and even as far down as the bend of the river below Atchison. John Bradbury, in his "Travels in the Interior of America," 1309-10-11, mentions going ashore at the old Kansas village and noting the great fertility of the soil and the abundance of hops, but is indefinite as to its location. However taking into consideration the natural features of the country as depicted in that portion of his journal leading up to the old village site, they correspond pretty closely to existing topographical conditions, and point consentaneously with the narratives of Lewis and Clark and others to Doniphan, as the seat of Kaw occupancy in Bourgmont's time. H. M. Brackenridge, in the journal of his voyage up the Missouri in 1811, mentions the old village as follows; "High prairies southwest side—continued under sail through another long stretch (of prairie) and had a fine view of the old Kansas village at the upper end of it. It is high prairie, smooth waving hills, perfectly green, with a few clumps of trees in the hollows. It was formerly a vil-

lage of the old Kansas nation. But for the scarcity of wood this would be a delightful situation for a town. At this place the bend of the river rendered the wind unfavorable." He also mentions the old Indian pathways along the sides of the hills and down to the river. Luther Dickerson and other early settlers recall that these old Indian paths or trails were plainly visible, leading out in almost every direction from Doniphan in the early days, and some of them where not too much disturbed by cultivation, may yet be observed. Major Stephen H. Long, while on his celebrated expedition to the Rocky mountains in 1819-20, says that after leaving Isle au Vache, "we proceeded in the course of the day about twenty-three miles and encamped at night near the entrance of a small stream called Independence creek. A little above, (Independence creek), and on the south side of the river, is the site of an old Konza town, called formerly the village of the twenty-four." Major Long, in his journal and on his map, places the old village "a little above Independence creek," or at about the present townsite of Doniphan. Major Long is the only one of the early explorers who alludes to the old Indian town as the "village of the twenty-four." I have somewhere seen it alluded to as the "village of the Big Four." The reasons for these appellations seem to be obscure, or at least I can find no explanation of them. Isle au Vache, or Cow island, is in the Missouri river, near the southern line of Atchison county. Councils were held with the Kaw Indians on this island in 1819, and later when the tribe lived on the Kansas river.

The late Hon. Luther Dickerson, who was generally known as the "oldest inhabitant" of this region, says there can be no doubt about the site of Doniphan having been occupied by an Indian village in prehistoric times. Mr. Dickerson came here in June, 1854, and often visited the present site of Doniphan before the pioneer settlers selected it as a townsite. He says that the old Indian lodge circles, with fire pits in the center, were plainly visible in many places in Doniphan in the early days. These were especially noticeable where the public school building now stands. The earth in many places was intermingled with charcoal, ashes, and other debris of the Indian village. Mr. Dickerson says that as near as he can remember the rings or circles where the Indian wigwams stood and which were quite numerous, were about twenty feet in diameter and in the center of each was a cavity filled with ashes and charcoal. Professor Say, who visited the Kansas Indians in their village near the present town of Manhattan in 1819, says that the ground area of each lodge was circular, and that the fireplace was a simple cavity in the center of the apartment. On the Kansas river, wher-

ever the Kaws had their later day villages, these circles in the earth are still to be seen.

Judge W. H. H. Curtis, of Troy, who was one of the early settlers of Doniphan, in response to inquires, writes that from his own observations, as well as from the statements of the late James F. and John W. Forman, the Doniphan pioneers, he is convinced that Doniphan was the site of an important Indian village. "I have heard James F. Forman and his Brother, John W. Forman, talk about the ancient village," says Mr. Curtis, and further adds that they were firm in the belief that the ancient Indian village existed there. The Forman brothers came to that vicinity as Indian traders long before Kansas was open for settlement. They surveyed and platted the townsite of Doniphan. Mr. Curtis' own observations lead him to believe that the ancient village "circled around the spot where Doniphan now stands; or more correctly speaking, the village must have been in the form of a crescent, extending from east to west, at the north outskirts of what is now the townsite proper When a boy I saw many Indian relics near Doniphan," continues Mr. Curtis, "and I know of many others who have found axes, arrow and spear heads, human bones, and what appear to have been old burying grounds both east and west of Doniphan."

Isaac F. Weyer, the "village blacksmith" of Doniphan, who lived there nearly fifty years, also recalls having heard the Forman brothers speak about the remains of an ancient village at Doniphan and says he has always heard a tradition that there was once a large Indian town at or near that place. W. H. Nesbit, one of the founders of Doniphan, says that at an early day large masses of charcoal, pottery and other burnt substances were exposed by the caving or washing away of the banks of the small creek which flows through Doniphan. He also says that the rock shelters or small caverns in the sides of the high bluffs about Doniphan contained the bones of Indians; with pottery vessels, arrowheads, etc. The late T. J. Ingals, of Atchison, who was as well acquainted around Doniphan as any other man, and who was a close observer along natural history and archaeological lines, wrote me May 27, 1904; "I should think from the number of graves and stone relics found in and about Doniphan that it was vastly populated at some time in the past. Not only on the George Brenner land, but through out the old townsite the loose stones scattered about over the surface and even under the surface, show marks of fire." Mr. Ingals has done much prospecting for water and drilled many wells in that vicinity and had excellent opportunity for observation. The writer once found a lot of burned stones, together with burned earth and

pottery fragments, exposed by the caving of the creek bank just south of the public school building in Doniphan. On another occasion I found a hammer stone projecting from the bank nearly two feet below the surface. While strolling along the main street of Doniphan on October 19, 1903, I picked up three flint arrow points, and observed numerous chips or spalls of flint that had washed from a small gully at one side of the thoroughfare. The late Richard Dempsey, an old resident, and for many years road supervisor in that vicinity, informed the writer that in making grades on the roads he had occasionally turned up baked clay, charcoal, potshards and fragments of stone implements. When the roadbed of the old A. & N. railroad was made through Doniphan in 1869 the workmen unearthed similar material and at the present time there is frequently picked up, from the dirt which was thrown out along this grade, arrow points, hatchets, etc.

The late Frank Kitzmiller, of Highland, under date of April 20, 1894, wrote me: "I have been informed by several parties that many Indian relics have been found at Doniphan, and from what I can learn it must have been once occupied by an Indian village. I understand that the rubbish of the old tepees is occasionally met with in digging trenches and making other excavations. One man there has promised to bring me a lot of stone relics which he plowed up in the town of Doniphan." Mr. Kitzmiller had an interesting collection of Indian relics gathered in Doniphan county. Mrs. Jane Spencer says that in making excavations on her farm just north of town pottery has been unearthed. Mrs. Spencer came to Doniphan with her late husband in 1855. At that time there was evidence of an Indian graveyard on the land which they pre-empted and on which she still lives. Many wagonloads of loose limestones were hauled from a field on their farm. She has observed numerous Indian relics and has several in her possession now. Thomas Logan reports numerous evidences of Indian occupancy on his farm near Doniphan. James A. Dunning, of St. Joseph, Mo., formerly of Doniphan, writes that Indian relics were so very common there in the early days that but little attention was paid to them. "I have gathered my hat full of arrowheads on the creek bank; also stone axes and war clubs by the dozens. Years after, in plowing over my father's farm, we have picked up beads and pottery, the latter being similar to that I have seen from the cliff dwellings." Joseph Geisendorf says he has found many stone relics on the same farm. Charles Kuch, the postmaster at Doniphan, says that the boys have gathered innumerable arrowpoints on the land occupied by the Brenner vineyards, and N. G. Brenner corroborates this statement

and says he has found hundreds of them himself on the same ground

Indian burial mounds and graves are numerous on the hills surrounding Doniphan. External evidences of many of these sepulchers have been obliterated, but here and there may still be seen limestone slabs set in the ground in regular order, or piled up irregularly, to mark the last resting place of some aboriginal denizen of Doniphan. In some instances these graves may belong to the Sac and Foxes, or other modern Indians, but it is believed that the majority of them belonged to the ancient Kaws. Rev. Isaac McCoy, a missionary among the Western Indians at an early day, speaking of the Kaw methods of burial, says: "They frequently deposited the dead on or near the surface and raised over the corpse a heap of stones." Hon. George P. Moorehouse, of Council Grove, who has seen and studied the Kaws, when they lived at that place, says that he has often noticed their graves, usually on top of some near bluff or high ground, and that they were often covered with slabs of limestone. Mrs. Mary J. Forman, widow of the Doniphan pioneer, John W. Forman, writes from Canton, Mo.: "On the hill west of the John Forman residence (since owned by George Brenner) there were indications of an Indian graveyard, piles of rock seeming to have been used as monuments or to mark some place of note." Mrs. Jane Spencer mentions similar graves on her farm at an early day. L. Clem, who has lived in that vicinity about thirty years and who has hunted throughout that region, observed many such piles of stone when he first located there. Luther Dickerson says there are several small mounds on land belonging to J. P. Brown, of Atchison on the river bluffs south of Independence creek. H. J. Adams, of Leroy, Kas., a son of the late Secretary Adams, of the Kansas Historical Society, who formerly lived near Doniphan, while digging a cellar on the crest of a river bluff south of Independence creek, in 1868, exhumed the skeleton of an Indian. It was about two feet below the surface and covered with stones. James Eylar reports several graves just north of Doniphan, and in the same neighborhood "firepits on top of the river bluff, in which the charred bones resembling those of human beings." He also mentions a grave on Independence creek west of Doniphan in which was found a human skeleton, together with a small headless image and some beads. There were also traces of fire in this grave. Further west, on the Auld farm, are other graves, near which have been found many stone axes.

Several years ago the writer, accompanied by T. J. Ingels, of Atchison, and C. A. Bruner, of Oak Mills, opened a stone mound on the high hill west of Doniphan, but it had either been despoiled of

its contents by relic hunters or else the descendents of the dead warrior had removed his remains to another place, for not even a human bone remained in it. Early settlers recall having seen the Indians come to this place at an early day, and after weird ceremonies, exhume the remains of dead Indians and carry them away. Where they came from and whither they went was never learned.

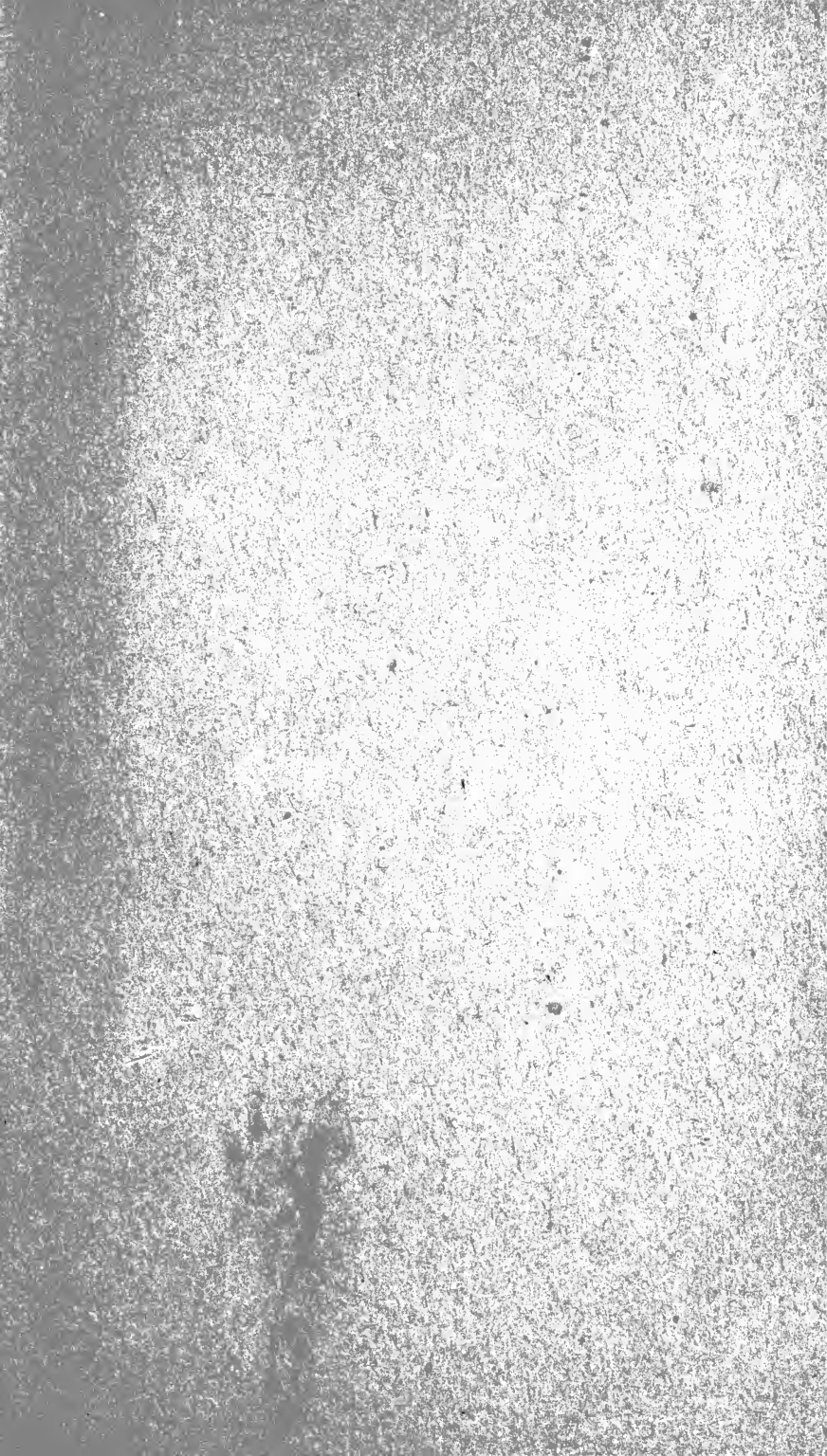
On another hill on the farm of John Myers, near the junction of Independence and Rock creeks, the writer, assisted by J. B. Loftin, an intelligent citizen of that vicinity, explored an Indian mound. This mound was originally covered with stones, but most of them had been removed by Mr. Meyers in cultivating the land. The contents of the mound consisted of human remains, badly charred by fire, pieces of burned wood and charcoal, numerous glass and porcelain and bone beads, two silver (?) finger rings, a silver breast-plate, fragments of silver ear bobs, fragments of a copper bracelet, fragments of an iron kettle, fragments of an old-fashioned decorated porcelain plate, fragments of bone instruments, a piece of steel evidently used as a fire striker, many flint spalls and some particles of vermilion, all in a confused mass. Everything indicated that this was the remains of a "scaffold" or "tree burial" which after tumbling down, had been swept by prairie fires and later gathered up and deposited, without regularity, in a stone sepulchre.

Dr. R. S. Dinsmore, of Troy, Kansas, has gathered many fine Indian artifacts from the vicinity of Doniphan, and opened a small burial mound near the place that evidently had been opened before and despoiled of its contents. Dr. Dinsmore and M. E. Zimmerman and Edward Park, of White Cloud, have fine collections, mostly gathered in Doniphan County.

The writer has examined many Indian village sites in Kansas, but there has never come under his observation a more ideal location for a permanent seat of aboriginal habitation than at the old townsite of Doniphan. Situated about midway of the great western bend of the Missouri, or the grande detour of the Missouri, as the French voyageurs called it; encircled by a chain of high hills, with a gap on the east which afforded the villagers a splendid view of and easy access to the river, and through which they could readily perceive the approach of an enemy on the water; while the overtowering hills at almost every point of the compass provided natural watch towers where they could guard against the enroachments of a foe from the broad prairie that stretches off in every direction; a small stream flowing through this natural basin, fed by several fine springs, afforded a constant supply of fresh water to the occupants of the village, while just over the divide to the west and

southwest three larger streams, one of them navigable for canoes, unite before mingling their limpid waters with the murky Missouri. Surrounded by every natural advantage and resource, Doniphan is an ideal dwelling place for either savage or civilized man. The old Kansas Herd Book thus describes it: "Doniphan stands where the corkscrew Missouri makes a sharp turn to the west and is hurled back upon itself by a high wooded bluff. To north and south rise heavily timbered bluffs, dipping to form the level bottom upon which the town lies nestled from the prevailing storm currents of winter." Hon. Sol Miller's famous historical edition of the Kansas Chief says that Doniphan is one of the finest natural townsites on the Missouri river. Brackenridge, one of the old explorers, speaks of it as "a delightful situation for a town."





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