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The Great Bend People - A Prelude to History

Wade Parsons

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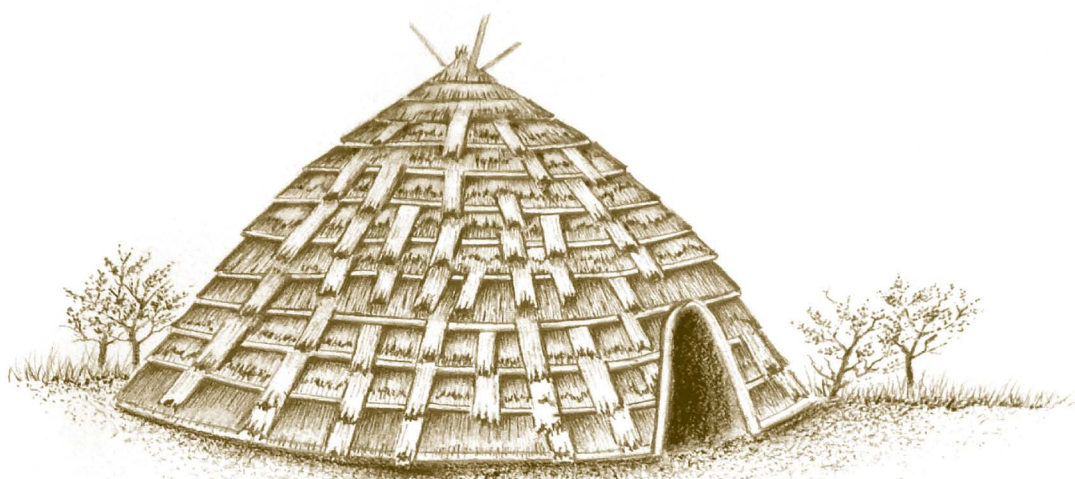
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WICHITA GRASS LODGE
Wade Parsons

The Great Bend People: A Prelude to History

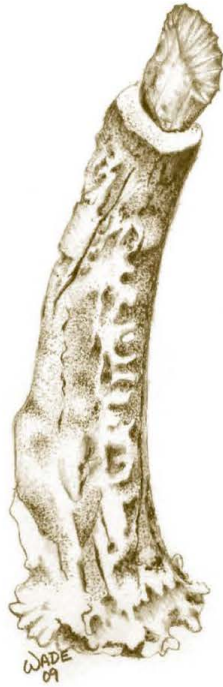
When conquistadors Coronado (1541) and Onate (1601) journeyed into Kansas, the possibilities of unimaginable wealth, lost souls, and eternal glory drove their expeditions across an uncharted wilderness. Their destination was the gold-filled land of Quivira. In Kansas these Spaniards found no gold, established no missions, and were



ultimately disgraced by their king. What they encountered were extensive settlements of semi-sedentary agriculturists who effectively utilized their local resources. These people are known today as the Wichita tribe and are referred to as the Great Bend Aspect (ca AD 1450-1700) by archeologists.

By 500 AD Caddoan speaking ancestors of the Wichita had long ago left the eastern forests of North America and inhabited wooded river

valleys across the Great Plains. During the next 1,000 years these people developed an impressive lifestyle combining agriculture and hunting. They ranged from the Smoky Hill River in the north to the Brazos River in the south. Evidence of their presence is found in Missouri woodlands and on the short grass prairies of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. In Kansas the Great Bend people established three regions filled with large village



ANTLER HANDLE SCRAPER
Wade Parsons

clusters. Coronado reported over 200 houses in some locations. One of those major village sites is found about 12 miles northwest of Cedar Point near the town of Marion where at least 62 archeological sites have been recorded. The majority of those sites represent the Taovaya branch of the Great Bend people who roamed the prairie where the Symphony is being held.

It is generally believed the Great

Bend people built seasonally inhabited settlements. During the growing season they cultivated corn, sunflowers, squash, and beans. Those who were able to travel would leave the village

The Great Bend built round or oval houses constructed on a framework of poles covered with their most abundant resource - grass.

to help with the bison hunts. This mixed economy allowed them to develop a complex culture that endured for centuries. The Great Bend built



DIGGING TOOL
Wade Parsons

round or oval houses constructed on a framework of poles covered with their most abundant resource – grass.

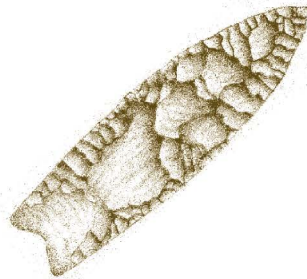


EFFIGY
Wade Parsons

These dwellings varied from 10-30 feet in diameter and height. Arbors, drying racks, hearths, interior benches, unspecified structures, and large quantities of artifacts are generally associated with the dwellings. Another common feature is the cylinder to bell shaped pits (up to 10 feet deep) used for storage. Council circle complexes that may represent religious or astronomical

associations were also constructed.

At the Marion Great Bend sites a variety of stone was used in making tools. Flaked tools were primarily made from Flint Hills cherts. Stone from the Ozark region, jasper from western Kansas, and Alibates chert from Texas are also present. Obtaining those materials would require either long distance travel or a trade network. Flaked stone tools at Marion included notched and unnotched arrow points, hide scrapers, a variety of drills, knives (beveled and bifaced), and choppers. The Great Bend people applied the technology of heat treating chert to improve its workability. Blocks of local



ARROW HEAD
Wade Parsons

limestone were shaped into metates and manos for grinding seeds. Sandstone from Rice County smoothed arrowshafts and sharpened awls. The Great Bend people also used Sioux quartzite and red pipestone pushed down from Minnesota by Ice Age glaciers and deposited in N.E. Kansas.

Some of the Great Bend people conducted trade with pueblo dwellers at Pecos, New Mexico. Bison products and Osage Orange bow wood were exchanged for turquoise, obsidian,

and various crops. Trade ceramics from the Southwest appear in some Great Bend villages, helping archeologists determine when the sites were occupied. Spanish chain mail, a metal axhead, glassbeads, seashells, Caddoan pottery, and Great Lakes copper have been found in Great Bend sites. The Marion sites

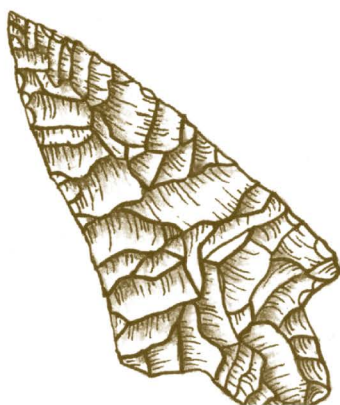
produced no known artifacts confirming contact with Spaniards or pueblo dwellers, but further investigation may prove otherwise.

The Great Bend people are responsible for the first known martyr within the continental United States.

Franciscan Friar Juan de Padilla first met the ancestral Wichita while travelling with Coronado. Upon his return to Santa Fe, he asked to go back to Quivira as a missionary.

According to

one version, Padilla along with a few servants and six Wichita guides journeyed to Quivira and were welcomed. Later the friar proposed taking his message to tribal enemies of the Wichita. While Padilla was travelling toward their enemy, the Wichitas killed him but allowed his

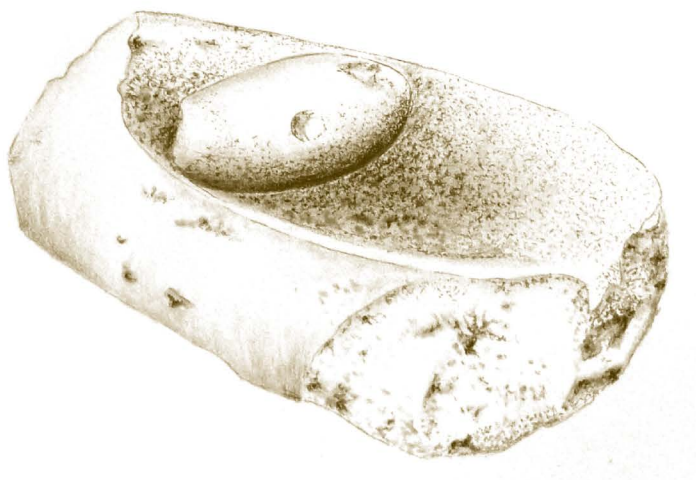


PROJECTILE
Wade Parsons

servants to return to Mexico. The towns of Herington, Lyons, and Council Grove claim a connection to the story of Father Padilla. If any accurate account of this fascinating story ever existed, it was lost long ago.

The story of the ancestral Wichita is only a small part of the Flint Hills mosaic. Human societies lived along

the Cottonwood River more than 7,000 years before the Great Bend Aspect. One small drainage near Cedar Point has over 50 documented sites representing the Early Archaic (7000 BC) through the Historic period. The region surrounding the Symphony is filled with the evidence of their presence.



METATE
Wade Parsons