

**A NINETEENTH-CENTURY NATIVE AMERICAN BURIAL FROM THE KANSAS HIGH PLAINS: THE MCKINNEY SITE (14SD301)**

By Jim D. Feagins

More than 55 years ago on the High Plains of northwestern Kansas, a high school student, Don Rowilson, discovered a historic Native American burial eroding from the side of a gully. State Archeologist Thomas A. Witty at the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) was soon notified. On April 5, 1965, he spent approximately half a day at the site, aided by Rowilson, excavating remnants of the burial. Witty found that it had been greatly disturbed by occasional flash flooding, years of rodent activities, and probably a century or more of decay. A single layer of wooden poles had covered the interment. The skeletal remains and associated artifacts were badly fragmented, decayed, and rodent scattered. Glass beads, Prosser buttons, brass and iron objects, tinned-iron pieces, cloth, feathers, and leather were recovered. The collection contained more than 3,350 items of which 3,272 were beads. Not counting beads, over half of the specimens were retrieved prior to Witty's visit. Flash flooding had taken an unknowable toll.

In 2000 during laboratory analysis, pseudomorphs (impressions) of cloth, hair, and feathers were found on some of the metal artifacts, thus permitting additional interpretations. Also at that time the author consulted with experts in a variety of fields concerning portions of the collection. The results from this burial analysis were presented in a report (Feagins 2004f) as a small part of a Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) compliance and enhancement study, funded by the Kansas legislature and administered by the KSHS. Since the original report was submitted, some further research has provided the background for additional interpretations.

**A NINETEENTH-CENTURY NATIVE AMERICAN CHILD'S BURIAL FROM MEADE COUNTY, KANSAS: MANY QUESTIONS, SOME SPECULATIONS, AND FEW ANSWERS**

By Jim D. Feagins

A metal coil, possibly a bracelet or armband, was recovered from a young child's skeleton by an unknown finder/collector, on an unknown date, at an unknown location near the town of Fowler in northeastern Meade County, Kansas. It was donated to the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka in 1967 by Mrs. Merritt Beeson of Dodge City. Years later this artifact with its very limited documentation was assigned case number UBS1991-89. In 2004 Feagins wrote a brief report about this specimen and its background, which has been expanded here.

At the time of donation the thick wire coil was thought to be made of bronze; however, as part of the Native American-Euroamerican trade, it more likely was manufactured from brass. The item is described and additional, but still limited, background concerning the donation is presented along with various interpretations of how and why it might have come to be placed on the indigenous child's arm. Its manner of use appears to have been innovative and opportunistic.

This study provides a small example of how material culture aids cultural understanding through interpretation. It also gives a brief history of the evolution of archeology from its antiquarian origins and illustrates the importance of recording and curating adequate documentation.

## **METAL HAIR PLATES FROM A NATIVE AMERICAN BURIAL IN SOUTHERN KANSAS: THE BISSITT SITE (14KW310)**

By Jim D. Feagins

During the last half of the nineteenth century, metal hair plates became quite popular among the Great Plains Indian tribes and to a lesser degree with tribes from the eastern United States and southern Canada. The popularity of metal hair plates spiked dramatically during the 1860s and 1870s after nickel/German silver became plentiful through the Plains fur/hide/annuity trade and thus was easily obtainable by Native Americans. The earliest hair plates from the 1830s were pounded thin from Spanish silver dollars acquired through Mexico. Copper and brass, cut and shaped from metal containers, also were used in their manufacture.

Hair plates are thin round metal discs, convex on the front and concave on the back, attached in various ways to a long strip of trade cloth or a leather strap, forming a trailer that in turn was connected to a braid at the back of the head. A set commonly comprised hair plates similar in size or graduated with the largest next to the scalp and the smallest at the bottom of the trailer. Trailers varied in length; some did not reach the waist, but many were much longer. Assuming only minor exaggeration, some Indigenous ledger artists illustrated mounted warriors wearing trailers that touched the ground.

Using hand tools, a number of Plains tribes became proficient metal workers. They usually fabricated hair plates from metal obtained from Euro-American traders. A few examples suggest that ready-to-wear sets occasionally were bartered. However, the 13 metal hair plates that are the focus of the current study clearly were made by Indigenous peoples. They, along with many other artifacts and limited skeletal remains, were discovered in 1940 by local Kiowa County residents. The Bissitt site (14KW310) was located in a wind-scoured blowout within a low sand hill near Greenwood, Kansas.

A general account of the burial site and its contents was published in 1992 by William B. Lees. This paper presents a more detailed description of a few artifacts, primarily focusing on the hair plates, and corrects a few minor errors in Lees' report. Also described are the metal buttons used to secure almost half of the hair plates. Of special interest are the incised decorations that Native Americans frequently engraved on these ornaments. Their metrics, attachment method, decoration or lack thereof, and use-wear suggest that this set probably was compiled from portions of other hair plate sets. Clearly these objects routinely were subjected to hard usage. The Bissitt hair plates serve as a case study and are compared briefly with hair plates from two other Central Plains sites that this author examined previously.

A preliminary scheme to classify metal hair plates, based on differences in the attachment openings, is proposed. Information from the Bissitt hair plates should enable more complete and easier comparisons with hair plates from other sites by researchers interested in fur/hide/annuity trade items and the changing styles of warrior ornamentation on the Great Plains and eastward during the 1800s.

## **INVESTIGATIONS AT THE KAW MISSION IN COUNCIL GROVE**

By Tricia Waggoner

Kaw Mission was established for the Kansa (also known as the Kanza or Kaw) in 1850 north of their new reservation near present-day Council Grove. The structure was built of native limestone and designed to accommodate 50 students. A smoke house, a workshop, and a well also were constructed. The school opened in May 1851 under the direction of Thomas Huffaker. The property was run by the Methodist Episcopal Church South until 1854 when the government closed it due to excessive cost. During its three years of operation, the school reportedly averaged about 30 students—all boys, who were orphans or dependents of the tribe. The building has served several functions: mission, schoolhouse for area white children, council house, courthouse, meeting house, informal hotel, private residence, and museum. In 1971 it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Archeological investigations began in 2016, with more intensive excavations taking place in 2018. All investigations were part of the Kansas Archeology Training Program. The work recovered artifacts and features from the mission period, including a blacksmith shop; from the Civil War era, when it was a private residence; and from its time as a museum.

## **KEEP THE WHISKEY IN THE CELLAR AND THE AMMUNITION ON THE WINDOWSILLS: ARCHEOLOGY OF THE BAKER STORE (14MO701)**

By Christine D. Garst

In 1972 and 1973 Kansas State Teachers College, now Emporia State University, held archeological field schools at the Baker house and store (14MO701). Both structures, along with any outbuildings, burned in 1862. Through a series of unfortunate events, the archeological fieldwork and recovered collections were never reported fully. This article summarizes the archeology of the 1973 field season at the Baker store, discusses the artifacts acquired that year, and, where possible, compares the collection with that from another store of the same time period, the Last Chance Store (14MO367), located 8 miles away in Council Grove.

## **“IT WAS DOUBTLESS AN ACT OF RASHNESS . . .” A COMMEMORATIVE ARTIFACT FROM FORT HAYS**

By Christine D. Garst

While processing artifacts from the historic Fort Hays (14EL301) collection, several sherds of a single pitcher were discovered to have molded figures on the body of the pitcher. Researching the representational figures of Colonel Elmer Ellsworth and J. W. Jackson and their story led to a link from the opening days of the Civil War in Washington, D.C., and Virginia to Fort Hays in western Kansas seven or more years later.

## **Book Reviews**

*Art of Native America: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection.* By Gaylord Torrence, with contributions by Ned Blackhawk and Sylvia Yount. Reviewed by Jim D. Feagins.

*Plains Indian Buffalo Cultures: Art from the Paul Dyck Collection* by Emma I. Hansen, with forward by Arthur Amiotte. Reviewed by Jim D. Feagins.