

## An Indian Play Pot

O. J. Pruitt

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

---

### Recommended Citation

Pruitt, O. J. "An Indian Play Pot." *The Annals of Iowa* 31 (1952), 200-204.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.7237>

Hosted by Iowa Research Online

# An Indian Play Pot

By O. J. PRUITT

*Curator Pottawattamie County Historical Society*

I like to ideate Indian stories, when I have proto-history and archaeological evidence which concur. I am not a scientist nor a historian in the sense of a college training. My lore has been obtained by conning of books by men of science and by actual field work carried on for years, thirty-five to be exact.

I like the word hyperbole because it means I may with impunity indulge to full extent my imagination. It is not hard to so indulge with some date, though it is far fetched.

Setting forth the date of this narrative we have the work of Father DeSmet, Captain LaBarge, famous Missouri river steamboat captain, John J. Audubon, the Prince of Pied-Bismark, General Atkinson, and Bodner, the artist with Bismark.

All of the above names refer to the embankment seen a hundred years ago, some two miles north of Council Bluffs, Iowa. In history we read that Bad Heart and his tribe lived at the site of the embankment distinctive of the Old Otoe village seen by Lewis and Clark two miles below.

It was near the "Grand Battier," now the Narrows. In 1832, the Missouri river meandered and left the site one mile distant. At this time Big Lake on the Iowa side and Carter Lake on the Nebraska side came into existence. Big Lake originally was two miles long, now reduced to a mere one-fourth of a mile, and aided and abetted by man and machinery to hold its tenure. Between Big Lake and Stevens point, the bald knobs of Lewis and Clark, is a swamp grown to willows, cattails and muskrat dens.

The archaeological evidence is the outline of a moat three feet deep and four or five feet wide, as determined and exposed by road grading. This is the site of

embankment and the village of Bad Heart and his tribe, substantiated by history.

The proto-history is that all scientists agree that the Mandan Indians were the first to travel up the river and they were seen at Mandan Indian village by Lewis and Clark in North Dakota.

The abandoned Otoe village was seen by Lewis and Clark after going one mile and coming into contact with the bluffs for the first time since leaving Platte (Missouri) river. Later the name of Hart was applied to the site, presumably the name being for Bad Heart.

General Atkinson says in his writings that Bad Heart called at the fort with several packs of beaver on his way somewhere below in search of his people. This is evidence of the Indian village where "his people" lived, some eight miles down stream from the fort.

The tenure of the Bad Heart tribe ended when the river meandered and it took four years before we find Bad Heart and his tribe settled on the Missouri Platte river opposite the city of Leavenworth, Kansas. Here Bad Heart signed a treaty granting the government full possession of all the lands in southwest Iowa claimed by the Indians. The tract comprised all of seven counties and parts of others. It was made the reservation for the Pottawattamie and was so held for twelve years, when the Pottawattamie were moved to their present location in Kansas.

#### THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROOF

Now we come to the archaeology of the site and, in addition, of proof by the exposed moat. Proof is found in the artifacts garnered in great number and in close inspection of sherds. There is a distinction, some being Siouan and others Mandan. This could have been by trade, but one is justified to state that quality of ceramics of the Mandan excelled any yet to be seen made by the Sioux. They excel in more than one way, by texture, binder and kiln firing. This being so, we must consider the site as having once been occupied by the Mandan Indians.

Proto-history names Black Bird, whose skull was taken by Catalin and now is in the archives of the Bureau of Ethnology, Washington, D.C. The mighty medicine of the famous Black Bird was arsenic with which he disposed of a few enemies, including a squaw. He had obtained the poison from French traders.

In 1819, Fort Atkinson was built and lime was burned at Lime Kiln Hollow for mortar to lay the hand-made bricks. Lime Kiln Hollow is four miles north of Council Bluffs, and parts of kilns exposed by WPA workers are yet to be seen. French coins were yet in circulation at the fort and are today found on the site. The fort was destroyed by fire in 1827, and was said to have been the act of Pawnee Indians.

#### SHERDS FROM VILLAGE SITES

Now we come to the deep site of villages of pre-historic times. In Snyder's Gulch, one-half mile north of Missouri Valley, Iowa, is an eroded gully exposing an ash strata some nine inches thick and diminishing to a mere trace westward toward the river. From this strata the writer has one small celt, a nearly whole pot and some bone instruments.

Another deep site is on the Nebraska side below Platts-mouth; both have an overburden of nearly fourteen feet. Both yield Mandan sherds.

Sherds from both sites are similar to those from the embankment site. From this fact alone the writer concludes that the Mandans occupied the type site at Stevens Point before Bad Heart. So little is known about Bad Heart that the writer has concentrated on what he could learn of the Mandan occupancy and length of tenure. To do so he has spent many days digging, over a period of years, to familiarize artifacts and to be able to classify those of various Indian tribes. It is a difficult thing to do because of the multiple tenures of tribes going back to when man entered the valley first. The first people lived in underground caverns, the second built earth lodges and lastly we had the nomads with tepee and travois.

All had knowledge of fire and possessed the stone ax and dog. Some were mighty hunters and others, artisans at making ceramics, arrow and spearheads of flint, and others were farmers for self-support. All were more or less superstitious. All had ideas of the Creator, and some prayer sticks concealed in niches in their lodges, leads one to believe some early basket makers of the great southwest wandered into the Missouri river valley two thousand years ago. However, a few sticks and one tiponi stone are not sufficient evidence.

For the sake of ideating, let us assume that Imoskeet and his faithful wife, Itusco, were Mandans and lived at the Stevens Point village site long ago. Their grandchild, Bright eyes, (Wastigo Instha), played on the sands of the "Grand Battier." She had many play things, the handicraft of her grandparents, including one real buckskin leather doll with buffalo hair, one or more play pots, a very small bow, and arrows with flint points. As a tiny girl in summer, she wore only a G-string, but when older, a dress of deerskin was all she ever wore through life.

When the Sioux made war on the Mandans, Imoskeet moved to what is now Washington county, Nebraska. There he built an earth lodge much larger than the Pawnee type of the plains. It was provided with earth ledges for beds upon which were spread Buffalo robes for comfort and warmth. It also had two caches, holes below the floor level. It had a large fire pit exactly in the center of the oval-shaped lodge.

Behind the sleeping place of Imoskeet, the Dr. R. F. Gilder and the writer found the play pot upside down. Whose hands last handled the pot is your guess.

#### BRIGHT EYES GREW TO WOMANHOOD

Eventually Imoskeet and his faithful squaw passed, and we find Bright Eyes at the Mandan village, a grown woman, when Lewis and Clark wintered in 1804 near the village. Bright Eyes lived not far from the home of Sacajawea, the Shoshone Indian girl captured by the Sioux and sold to Chabineau, a French Indian trader.

Sacajawea and her husband showed Lewis and Clark the way to and over the mountains. Sacajawea was but fourteen when her child, which she carried all the way to the Pacific ocean in a pack on her back, was born.

Bright Eyes was present when the child was born, and it was she who concocted the supposed sedative to allay pains of childbirth. And what a concoction! It was made of pounded and pulverized rattle snake rattles, buffalo tallow and buffalo berry juice. Luckily enough Captain Clark was also present and saw that the proper medical attention was given.

The play pot in question is the property of the writer and may be seen at his home by any one interested.

---

### Hail Storms Then—Even As Now

On Tuesday, June 30, 1863, a terrific hail and wind storm visited portions of Black Hawk and Jones counties, according to *Anamosa Eureka*, which reported that "it entirely destroyed the wheat, corn, oats, garden vegetables, and even the prairie grass, for a space varying in width from two to four miles. Pigs and hens were killed by the hail stones, which were nearly as large as hen's eggs, and cattle were so badly bruised that blood was seen running from their wounds. Windows were entirely demolished, outhouses and fences blown down, barns uprooted, trees barked from top to bottom and stripped of their branches, presenting a scene of desolation which can only hope to be appreciated by being seen."

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.