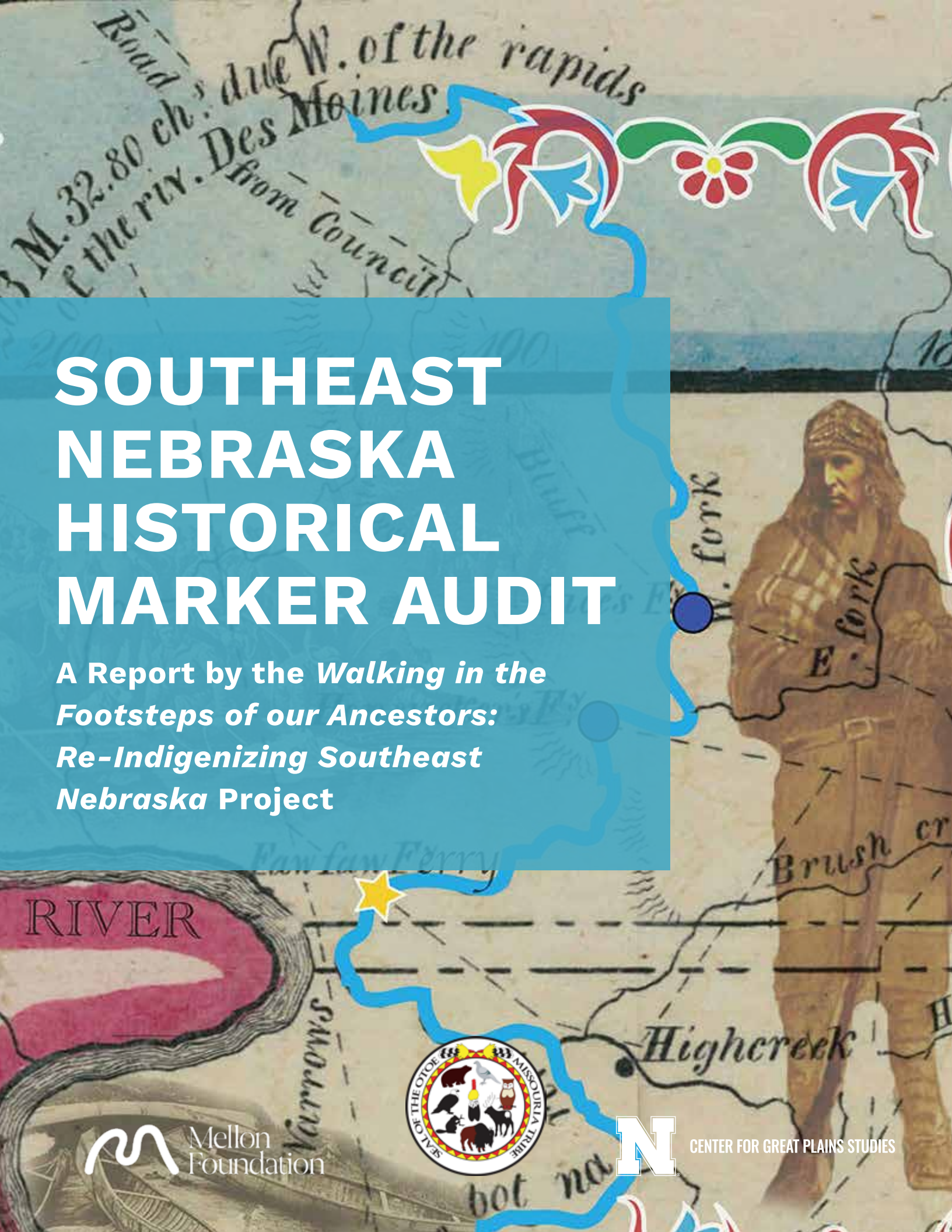


# SOUTHEAST NEBRASKA HISTORICAL MARKER AUDIT

**A Report by the *Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors: Re-Indigenizing Southeast Nebraska* Project**

Mellon Foundation

SEAL OF THE OTOE MISSOURIA TRIBE

CENTER FOR GREAT PLAINS STUDIES

# Southeast Nebraska Historical Marker Audit

A Report by the *Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors: Re-Indigenizing Southeast Nebraska* Project

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*Co-Directors*

The research for this report was commissioned by the *Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors* project, a joint project of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma and the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). It was researched by Heather Bloom, Graduate Research Assistant, Ph.D. Candidate, School of Global Integrative Studies, under the guidance of Yunwoo Nam, Professor, Community and Regional Planning at UNL. Zhenghong Tang, Professor, Community and Regional Planning, and Abigail Cochran, Assistant Professor, Community and Regional Planning, also provided support. The researchers wish to thank Professor David Wishart, School of Global Integrative Studies, for valuable background information on the Otoe-Missouria, and Autumn Langemeier, Nebraska State Historical Society Historical Marker Programs Coordinator, for providing the historical markers location information and narrative database that was analyzed for the study.

# KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

***Otoe-Missouria***

Otoe-Missouria can refer to the nation, tribe, language, culture, and people who once inhabited southeastern Nebraska in the early 1700s, confined to a shrinking reservation, and eventually removed to Indian Territory in 1881. Otoe-Missouria comes from what the Jiwére-Nút'áchi identified themselves to other tribes, Europeans, and Americans.

***Jiwére-Nút'áchi***

Jiwére-Nút'áchi is what the Otoe-Missouria call themselves (autonym) and prefer to be called today. The meanings are place-based.

***Indigenous peoples and Natives***

For this report and in the context of the United States, Indigenous and Native refer to the people who lived here when Europeans arrived on the continent, as well as their descendants.

***Indian***

This term is used when referencing U.S. Federal Indian Policy. Indian Country, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Education, and Indian Gaming Association are all used today to refer to the specific federal trust responsibility that applies to American Indian/Alaska Native Tribal Nations.

***Settler Colonialism***

Settler colonialism is a form of foreign intervention that aims to transfer vast territories from Indigenous peoples to their colonizers through eliminating Indigenous people and replacing them with settlers. Settlers accomplished the takeover of most Indigenous land in North America through violence and intimidation as well as diplomacy, policy, and assimilation. Settler colonialism also seeks to erase the cultures, histories, and important sites of Indigenous people, to write them out of existence.

***Settlers***

We use the term settlers for all non-Indigenous people from the past up to the present.

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# INTRODUCTION

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

*Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors (Ahádada Wathígre Hįnéwi Ke)* is a joint project of the Center for Great Plains Studies and the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma. Through land- and relationship-based commemoration, the project aims to promote healing and reconciliation in southeast Nebraska (Nyi Bráthge) by reconnecting the Otoe-Missouria (Jiwére-Nút'áchi) to one of their homelands and educating non-Native people about the history and ongoing presence of the Tribe and other Indigenous peoples in our region. The Mellon Foundation's Monuments Project awarded a three-year, $1.58 million grant to the *Walking in the Footsteps* project.

Launched in 2020, the Mellon Foundation's Monuments Project seeks to "transform the nation's commemorative landscape to ensure our collective histories are more completely and accurately represented." The Monuments Project is one of the Foundation's signature initiatives under Mellon President Elizabeth Alexander and "reflects both the urgency and the gravity of fostering more complete and inclusive storytelling of who we are as Americans."[1]

**Learn more about the project:**

[1] Mellon Foundation, "The Monuments Project," https://www.mellon.org/article/the-monuments-project-initiative.

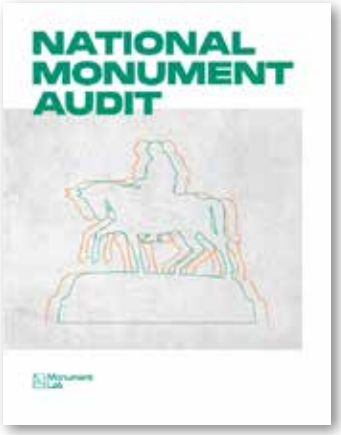
## OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL MARKER AUDIT

As one of its first steps, the *Walking in the Footsteps* project commissioned research into commemorations that already exist in southeast Nebraska. In consultation with project co-directors, the research team focused on historical markers sponsored by the Nebraska State Historical Society. This program started in the late 1950s with the first marker constructed in 1961. The historical markers are all engraved metal with the identifiable seal of Nebraska at the top. Each includes a commemorative narrative that allowed our project to gain insight into what topics and individuals garnered the most attention in the region. Most commemorative markers have been initiated and funded by community organizations in partnership with the state.

Prior to this period, communities erected other historical monuments and markers, usually in granite, in their communities, but they did not have the official backing of the state. Jeff Barnes details these in his book, *Cut in Stone, Cast in Bronze*. Other entities, including the National Park Service, Nebraska Game and Parks, and Nebraska Department of Transportation, have erected some monuments at rest areas and other locations.

The *Walking in the Footsteps* project wanted to gain a sense of whether historical monuments in southeast Nebraska included the history of the Otoe-Missouria people, the sovereign Indigenous nation that called the area home for hundreds of years, gradually ceded the land to the U.S. government through two treaties in the 1800s, and gave the state its name, Nyi Bráthge (Nebraska). We also wanted to find out how these historical markers dealt with other Indigenous histories in the region.

We were inspired to conduct this regional audit based on the *National Monument Audit* that was produced in partnership with the Mellon Foundation by the Monument Lab, a Philadelphia-based non-profit art and history studio that cultivates and facilitates critical conversations around the past, present, and future of monuments. Their national audit collected data on half a million monuments and focused on some 50,000 statues or monoliths installed or maintained in a public space with the authority of a government agency or institution as well as nonconventional monument objects like buildings, bridges, streets, historic markers, and place names. The *National Monument Audit* included 31 monuments in all of Nebraska, only eight of which were historical markers. They mentioned six markers in southeast Nebraska. Our audit is much more modest than the national effort and covers a much smaller area, but it allows for a deeper dive into the 363 modern Nebraska State Historical Society markers, the 170 earlier granite monuments, and nine additional monuments at highway rest areas and other locations.




## WHY COMMEMORATIONS MATTER

Public commemorations of historical events signal what a community deems most significant about its history and most deserving of honor and remembrance. As the co-directors of the Monument Lab write, "monuments do more than just help us remember—they make our society's values visible."[2]

Commemorations also reflect which individuals and organizations have the resources to establish commemorations. The Monument Lab co-directors point out that monuments "have been shaped by those with the time, money, and officially sanctioned power to craft and elevate the past in their own image."[3]

Our audit shows that in southeast Nebraska the collective narrative that emerges from our historical markers tells just a small part of the area's past, that of the colonization of the land and its settlement by mostly European-American migrants over 150 years. There is little in the region's commemorative landscape about the Indigenous people who possessed this land or the sordid history of their displacement, dispossession, and removal. Commemorations in southeast Nebraska not only erase the history of Indigenous people; they also valorize the explorers who paved the way for colonization, the military leaders who led assaults on Native communities, and the pioneers and homesteaders who settled on stolen Indigenous land.

Overall, the monuments in southeast Nebraska create a narrative that normalizes and legitimizes settler dominance in the region. As Rose Miron writes, "These representations are ingrained into our national identity and collective heritage, and because of the reductive nature of monuments, they often lack the nuance that telling these complicated historical narratives requires. Instead of communicating a complicated history that might narrate transformation and violence in indigenous homelands, these monuments are taken in quickly by those who pass by, and they typically position Indians as an essential, but not central part of our nation's history."[4]

Our audit reflects on a small scale what the Monument Lab found across the nation. As Elizabeth Alexander, president of the Mellon Foundation, put it, "a few figures and themes came to overshadow the many different collective experiences that make up our past" and "just a few stories have been disproportionately commemorated in a country created by multitudes." Sadly, "we may not know which voices are missing, which contributions have been elided, or how much the monuments and memorials now standing misrepresent our collective history."[5]

[2] Paul M. Farber, Sue Mobley, and Laurie Allen, Preface, *National Monument Audit*, https://monumentlab.com/audit?section=preface.

[3] Paul M. Farber, Sue Mobley, and Laurie Allen, Preface, *National Monument Audit*, https://monumentlab.com/audit?section=preface.

[4] Rose Miron, "Statues, National Monuments, and Settler-Colonialism: Connections between Public History and Policy in the Wake of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante," *History @ Work*, December 18, 2017, https://ncph.org/history-at-work/statues-national-monuments-settler-colonialism/.

Commemorations and the stories they tell have real-world consequences in our contemporary world. The culture of Indigenous erasure in southeast Nebraska's commemorative landscape contributes to the persistence of discrimination, exclusion, inequity, and poverty that the Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous nations in our region face.

While our report focuses primarily on documenting the collective narrative formed by historical markers in southeast Nebraska, it also serves as a call to action for generating new commemorations that more accurately reflect our region's history. Commemoration is a key component of making redress for colonization and its ongoing legacies and of educating the non-Native population about our shared history. Two renowned international criminal court jurists, Theo van Boven and Cherif Bassiouni, have outlined the five principles that restorative justice efforts must entail to be effective. One of the five, "Satisfaction," includes apologies to those who have been wronged, memorials, and opportunities for those who have been left out of history to tell their stories.[6]

We hope that this audit will allow residents of southeast Nebraska to see the urgent need for creating a commemorative landscape that tells a more complete story of our region and contributes to healing and reconciliation. Our state has already taken some significant steps in this direction. The 2021 Nebraska State Legislature designated funds for a Historical Marker Equity Program to pay for markers that commemorate a wider range of topics.

Commemorations, as the Monument Lab co-directors put it, have the power to "shape circumstances, challenges, and possibilities for transformation. If we seek a nation that lives up to its creed, learns from and labors to repair its past, and connects to its history in ways that are more truthful, complex, and vital, then our monuments must change."[7]

[5] Elizabeth Alexander, Foreword, *National Monument Audit*, https://monumentlab.com/audit?section=foreword.

[6] M. Cherif Bassiouni and Theo van Boven drafted the principles that became the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/147, adopted December 15, 2005.

[7] Paul M. Farber, Sue Mobley, and Laurie Allen, Preface, *National Monument Audit*, https://monumentlab.com/audit?section=preface.

# HISTORY OF THE OTOE-MISSOURIA PEOPLE IN SOUTHEAST NEBRASKA

## BEFORE NYI BRATHGE

The Otoe-Missouria, along with the Ioway and the Ho-Chunk peoples, originally came from the waters of Lake Michigan near what is currently known as Green Bay, Wisconsin. Sometime before Europeans reached the area in the 1650s, a group of about 5,000 people who are the ancestors of the Otoe, Missouria, and Ioway left due to crowding of hunting grounds, intertribal violence, and other issues that arose after European colonization in the East.

From Green Bay, the group moved south and west, traveling through present-day southern Minnesota and settling in areas that would bear their names and languages in the future. The group that became the Ioway took up lands in what would become Iowa, the group that became the Missouria occupied what would become Missouri, and the group that became the Otoe made a home in what would become Nebraska.

**Nyi Brathge**
**NYEE BRAH-thgay**
**(Nebraska)**

The Otoe migrated to southeastern Nebraska in the late 1600s or early 1700s, choosing to live at various village locations along the rivers in the region. By 1714, the Otoe established a village on the Salt Creek tributary of the Platte River. In 1798, after a particularly defeating attack from the Sac and Fox massacred many Missouria warriors, elders, women, and children, the remainder of the Missouria people escaped to their Otoe relatives just over the Missouri River. The Tribes settled together in a village that would come to be known as "Yutan" until about 1820, when they split again due to disputes amongst families and settled in two separate villages. By 1830, the divisions had healed under the leadership of chiefs like Sų Manyi Kathi (Prairie Wolf aka Ietan/Yutan), Kąnðą Xąnje (Big Kaw), and the Thief.

Spanish correspondence from 1777 noted the presence of the Yutan (you-tan) village. According to the Comanche National Museum and Cultural Center, "In 1739, Pierre and Paul Mallett of New France followed the Platte River into southeast Colorado. The men with six others in their party were seeking a route from the Missouri River to Santa Fe. Eventually, they came upon a village of 'une nation sauvage nommee laitanes', Indians later called 'Hietans' or 'Ietans'. At the time of President Thomas Jefferson, 'Ietan' was thought to be the name for Kotsoteka Comanches or the Yamparika Comanches."[8]

Ietan (ee-uh-tan or eye-uh-tan) is not an Otoe word, though according to oral traditions, Ietan were a tribal group that the Otoe and Missouria encountered on the Plains. It is likely Chief Sų Manyi Kathi got this name from a Frenchman who witnessed a battle with the Ietan group, but the French pronunciation sounds closer to "Yutan."[9] The "Yutan" village was occupied until 1837. It was the first major Native settlement seen by fur traders going up the Platte to hunt bison and trap beavers in the mountain ranges of the West.

From the time the Spanish, French, and Americans arrived in southeast Nebraska, the Otoe and Missouria positioned themselves as the gatekeepers to the upper Missouri River valley. If foreigners wanted access to the Omaha, Ponca, Lakota, Mandan, Hidatsa, or Arikara, they would have to go through the Otoe and Missouria first. Other tribes generally regarded the Otoe and Missouria favorably, except for when there were

[8] "Comanche National Museum and Cultural Center," Facebook, March 31, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/ComancheMuseum/posts/

[9] Thomas McKenny et al., *History of the Indian Tribes of North America: With Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes of the Principal Chiefs. Embellished with One Hundred Portraits from the Indian Gallery in the War Department at Washington* (Philadelphia, PA: D. Rice and Company, 1872).

disputes on the Plains and in hunting territories. All tribes on the Plains at one time or another battled each other, but extended warfare between Otoe and Missouria and other tribes was limited to the Sac and Fox and occasionally the Kaw and Osage. The Otoe and Missouria generally were at peace with Europeans, except when the Otoe and Pawnee fought together against the Spanish Villasur Expedition in 1720. The arrival of American settlers brought new conflict to the area.

There were about 14,000 people living in the eastern half of Nebraska in 1800, including the Omaha, Ponca, and at least 1,000 Otoe and Missouria people.[10] Europeans introduced diseases that significantly diminished the Otoe-Missouria population. There were several outbreaks of smallpox noted in the 1800s, one of which brought the Otoe-Missouria population to below 800 by 1804.[11]

[10] David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), xiii.

[11] David J. Wishart, "Otoe-Missourias" in *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, edited by David J. Wishart (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 587-588.

## THE FIRST MEETING WITH THE BIG KNIVES: LEWIS AND CLARK

The Otoe-Missouria were the first tribal nation to meet with Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery when they traveled up the Missouri River in August 1804. That spring, Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were sent by President Thomas Jefferson to explore and map the wilderness between the Missouri River and the Pacific coast across the land recently acquired by the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson instructed them to establish friendly relations with tribes and to impress on them the power of their new "white father" in Washington, DC.

Lewis and Clark's first council with Native people was held near present-day Fort Calhoun, Nebraska. This site was referred to as the "council on the bluff" in their journals, and they recommended this location for a future military installation. The entire area became known as *council bluffs* and is often confused with Council Bluffs, Iowa. Locally, this historic meeting led to the founding of Fort Atkinson in 1820 and, eventually, the town of Fort Calhoun in 1855. Fort Atkinson today is located three blocks to the east and features a bronze sculpture commemorating this first council.


On August 3, 1804, the Otoe and Missouria held council with Lewis and Clark. The captains presented to the chiefs an agreement of peace and friendship. They gave speeches, smoked a pipe, awarded peace medals and exchanged gifts; they showed off the air gun, magnet, spyglass, compass, and watch. The meeting was meant to establish the sovereignty of the United States over the tribe and was performed before those that Lewis and Clark felt were of sufficient rank to speak for the rest.

The "first council" was the official council with the Missouria as He Pities Them, the headman for the Missouria, was there. The Otoe were represented by Sunge Tąnge (Big Horse), the younger brother of Otoe headman, Little Thief. Lewis and Clark's lack of understanding of the political structure of each tribal nation caused a problem. They gave Big Horse a large peace medal, given to the leaders of each tribal nation. Big Horse had no authority to represent the Otoe, which caused a problem among the tribe, and Big Horse was punished for receiving headman honors that he did not have the right to accept. A second meeting was scheduled with the rightful leaders, and Big

Horse was punished by having to walk naked to the site of the second meeting. The second meeting took place on August 18, where Little Thief met with the Corps. Before departing, Little Thief indicated he would go to Washington in the spring. In March 1805, a delegation including Little Thief and one Missouria chief met in Washington with President Jefferson, who promised trade goods and told them he hoped for peace. Although this was a mere number of days for the Otoe-Missouria, the meetings with Lewis and Clark have become the central story around which Otoe-Missouria history is disseminated.

## TRADE


Between 1817 and 1841, the Otoe-Missouria tribe resided in present-day Otoe County, Nebraska, with the population increasing to 1,500 by 1830.[12] In the first half of the nineteenth century, many different traders operated posts near Council Bluffs, Iowa. Manuel Lisa ran Fort Lisa from 1812 to 1823. In 1823, Joshua Pilcher moved the post to Bellevue, Nebraska, and Lucien Fontenelle managed it. Bernard Pratte and Company maintained a rival trading post under the management of John Cabanné at Council Bluffs from 1823 to 1833. They relocated the post to Bellevue in 1834, and Peter Sarpy took over its management until 1854.

[12] Wishart, "Otoe-Missourias," 587-588.

Exchange—of both goods and culture—was a central driving force during this time for all in southeastern Nebraska. A burgeoning population of mixed-descent people arose due to the intermarriage of Otoe-Missouria and Omaha women with the traders. Native wives afforded the traders essential political and social connections. While the Otoe-Missouria benefitted from good relations with the traders, their territory shrank and their ability to gather traditional materials was greatly diminished. Traders also deliberately introduced alcohol to Otoe-Missouria communities, with devastating effects and in violation of the 1802 Indian Nonintercourse Act, which authorized the president "to take such measures, from time to time, as to him may appear expedient to prevent or restrain the vending or distributing of spirituous liquors among all or any Indian tribes."

Traders also brought new illnesses and diseases to Otoe-Missouria villages. Smallpox epidemics in 1800–1801 and 1837–1838 spread via trading posts where Native people met with traders and travelers coming up the Missouri River from St. Louis. Measles, malaria, and cholera also plagued the Otoe-Missouria. In 1849, a cholera epidemic spread upriver from St. Louis via the *Amelia* steamboat. The Otoe-Missouria narrowly missed the worst effects of the outbreak because the traders knew cholera was on board and did not stop, and most of the Tribe was out on the summer buffalo hunt.

## MISSIONS

Missionaries followed the traders into the territory of the Otoe-Missouria. Historical geographer David Wishart explains that "after the war of 1812, this religious mission was fused with a nationalistic drive, and Christianization became synonymous with Americanization."[13] Moses Merrill and his wife, Eliza Wilcox, were the first missionaries to live among the Otoe-Missouria and the first to missionize in the area

[13] Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 48.

overall. The couple, who were Baptists, lived near Bellevue from 1833 until Moses' death in 1840.

A mission was constructed during the Merrills' time in Otoe-Missouria territory, located on the north side of the Platte about eight miles from Bellevue and six miles above the confluence with the Missouri.[14] In order to effectively proselytize, missionaries needed to learn the languages of the Native people they were trying to Christianize and Americanize. Moses Merrill attempted to learn the Otoe-Missouria language and translated a few hymns, which became part of the first book ever published in the state of Nebraska, *Wdtwhtl Wdwdklha Eva Wdhonetl*. He also wrote a spelling book and a reader in Baxóje (Ioway). After the Merrills, the Presbyterian missionary Edmund McKinney and his wife Theresa (neé Davis) transferred from Spencer Academy in Choctaw country to proselytize to the Otoe-Missouria and Omaha from 1846 until the early 1850s. They constructed a large boarding school at Bellevue.

[14] Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 49.

During the early days of the mission school, the Native children rather than their parents became the center of the missionaries' attention. By 1849, Minister McKinney reported that 24 Otoe-Missouria students were in classes at the Bellevue mission school. Many Otoe-Missouria families may have sent their children to the school because they hoped they would have a better chance of being fed than starving in the village due to reduced game and the failure of the government to provide annuities as promised. Nevertheless, some children did not wish to stay at the school. When the Otoe chief Warinase brought his son to stay with Reverend Merrill, for example, the boy fell ill, left, and never returned to the mission.

## GOVERNMENT AGENTS & TREATIES

Traders and missionaries brought dramatic changes to the Otoe-Missouria, but the U.S. government's Indian Agents and Superintendents introduced even more profound change. The superintendents were responsible for large regions with several tribal groups. The superintendents oversaw the agents, who were in turn assigned to either a single tribe or a group of closely related communities. Under the agents were blacksmiths, teachers, farmers, interpreters, and other employees. Between 1822 and 1851, the Otoe-Missouria people were under the jurisdiction of the St. Louis superintendent, William Clark, until his death in 1838, and then Joshua Pilcher took over until 1841. David D. Mitchell (another fur trader) then served as superintendent off and on from 1841 until 1853, with a stint by Thomas Harvey from 1843 to 1849.[15]

Government agents were supposed to regulate trade, arrange for the sale of lands, dispense annuities, and promote a civilization program. They oversaw, too, the many agreements and treaties made with tribes between 1819 and 1871. Prior to 1830, the government had not asked the Native people of eastern Nebraska to cede any land. However, the Fourth Treaty of Prairie du Chien, in 1830, pressured tribes to relinquish their land. The treaty negotiations included the Otoe-Missouria; Omaha, Ho-Chunk; Menominee; Ioway; Sisseton, Wahpeton, and Mdewakanton Dakota; and Sac and Fox. In return for tribes maintaining the right to hunt on the territory between the Missouri and Des Moines rivers in Iowa, Superintendent Clark convinced the tribes to relinquish other territorial claims (or so he thought).

As part of this treaty, the Otoe-Missouria ceded title and claim to lands east of the Missouri River but maintained hunting rights there. They were also to receive an annuity of $2,500 for ten years, to be rendered in cash, merchandise, or domestic

[15] The Otoe-Missouria were assigned to the Upper Missouri Agency from 1819–1836, headquartered at various points along the Missouri River. Benjamin O'Fallon was the first agent assigned in 1819 and John Dougherty in 1827. The Upper Missouri Agency was established in 1819 and assigned responsibility for all the Native people living along the Missouri River. The Upper Missouri Agency had several headquarters: Council Bluffs (1819–1827), Bellevue (1827–1835), and Fort Leavenworth acted as a satellite headquarters as well. In 1837, the Upper Missouri Agency became the Council Bluffs Agency and so the Otoe-Missouria were transferred. John Dougherty was appointed April 13, 1837; Joseph V. Hamilton on June 27, 1839; Daniel Miller on October 22, 1841; Jonathan Bean on July 25, 1845; John Miller on July 22, 1846; John E. Barrow (subagent) on April 13, 1849; John E. Barrow (agent) on June 30, 1851; James M. Gatewood on April 18, 1853; and George Hepner on May 19, 1854. It was discontinued in 1856 when the Otoe-Missouria were again passed on to the new Otoe Agency, and this agency lasted until 1881, when the Tribe was removed to Indian Territory. John A. Alston was appointed as agent in 1856, William W. Dennison in 1857, John Baker in 1861, William Daily in 1864, John L. Smith in 1866, Albert L. Green in 1869, Jesse W. Griest on April 1, 1873, Robert S. Gardner on June 16, 1880, and lastly, Lewellyn E. Woodin on July 21, 1880. See bibliography for list of sources.

animals. The services of a blacksmith, $500 worth of farming equipment, and an annual education fund of $3,000 were also to be supplied for each treaty signatory. Clark had assured the tribes that this land would not be used to settle white people. However, the tribes lost their hunting rights nevertheless when, less than five years later, the hunting rights lapsed, and the government removed Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Ottawa bands to the common hunting grounds in western Iowa. Later, Agent John Dougherty worked out the Platte Purchase with the Omaha and Otoe-Missouria, which ceded their formal title to the northwestern corner of Missouri.

## DISPOSSESSION AND RESERVATIONS

During the 1830 Treaty of Prairie du Chien negotiations, the Otoe-Missouria, Ioway, Omaha, Yankton, and Santee requested that their descendants of European/Tribal ancestry be given a territory in southeastern Nebraska, to be named the Nemaha (Nyi Mąhą, *Muddy River*) Half-Breed Reservation. In 1836, Chief Sų Manyi Kathi wrote a letter to Clark reiterating the need for this reservation matter to be settled because "many of those persons who are now growing up and anxious to settle upon those lands; but are at the same time unwilling to attempt any improvement without some guarantee that they will permitted to hold them.[16] Berlin Basil Chapman writes, "It was evident that the reservation might become a white man's region because allottees could secure patents and sell their lands. Their reservation adjoined lands subject to white settlement, and some of the claimants were suspected to be more of white blood than of Indian."[17] For 30 years, officials in the United States government surveyed and resurveyed both boundaries and "half-breeds," debated on allotment methodology and strategy, and generally prolonged the purgatory for eligible Nemaha allottees. Finally, 389 allottees were issued fee simple patents on Sept. 10, 1860. These were the first allotments assigned to Native people in the United States; the U.S. government would attempt to allot nearly all communally held Native land to individual tribal members in the 1880s and beyond.

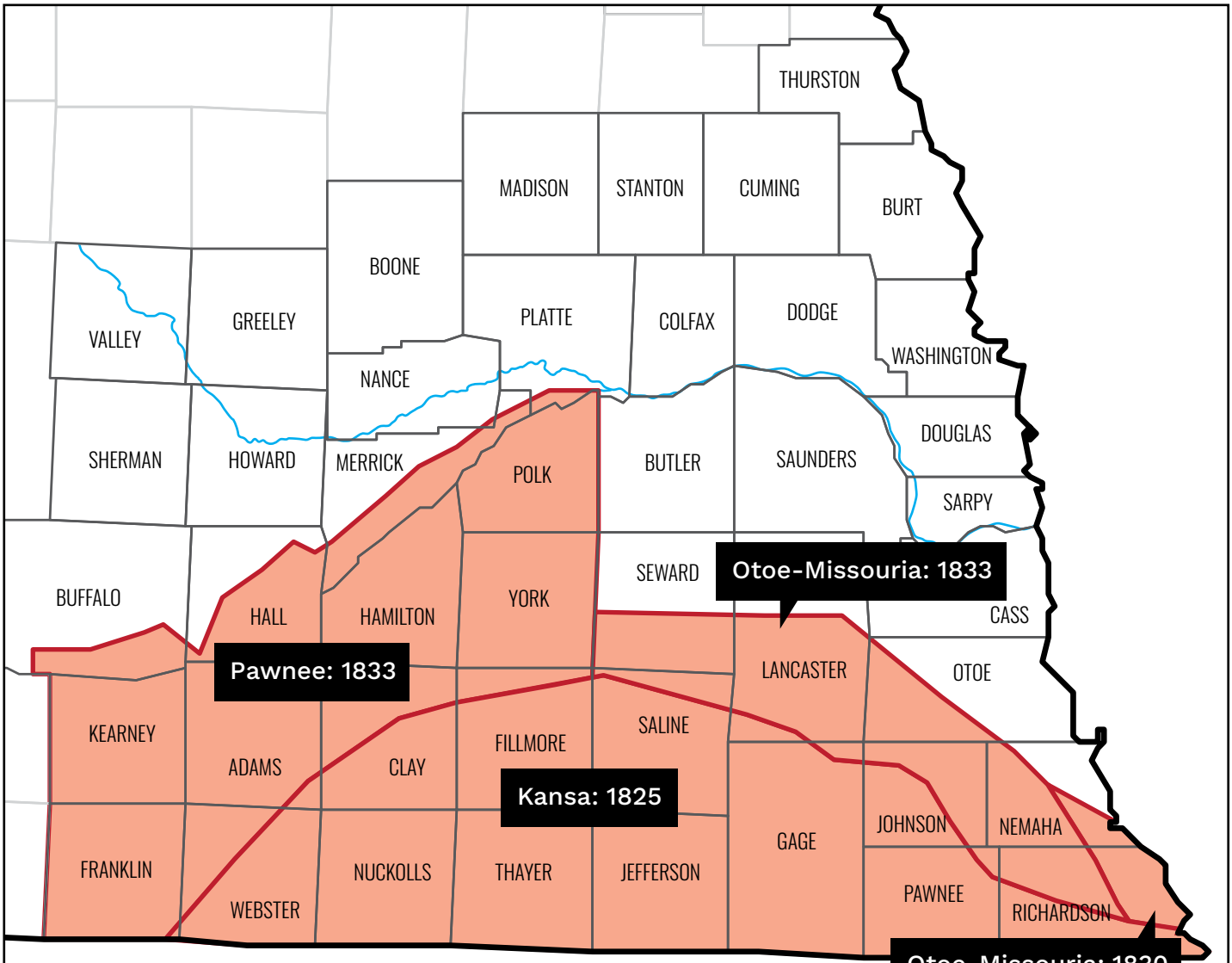
In 1832, the government removed the Kickapoo to the land that the Otoe-Missouria claimed for hunting, the Otoe-Missouria having previously driven out the Kaw in the 1820s. In 1833, Henry Ellsworth sought to negotiate a treaty with the Otoe-Missouria, attempting to convince them to relinquish their claims to the land in question. During this council, Ellsworth told the Otoe-Missouria that they must take up the agrarian lifestyle or starve. Chief Sų Manyi Kathi relayed this message to the other Otoe-Missouria and urged them to accept the terms so that they might receive their share of the annuities.

This council set the pattern for other treaty councils in Nebraska for the remainder of the treaty period. In the Treaty of 1833, the Otoe-Missouria ceded the land between the Great and Little Nemaha rivers in present-day Nebraska and as far west from the headwaters of the Little Nemaha as they had any claim, which had been regarded as hunting territory and did not necessarily have specific boundary lines. For this swath of land, the Otoe-Missouria were to receive an annuity of $2,500 for 10 years, to begin after the Prairie du Chien payment period ended in 1840. Additionally, the government was to provide $500 worth of agricultural equipment annually for at least five years, or longer at the discretion of the president; $500/year for education purposes; $1,000 worth of cattle and other livestock; and the service of two farmers for at least five years. The treaty stipulated that to receive the agricultural and educational provisions, the Otoe-Missouria must stay at the village(s) year-round and not leave to go on any hunt or "unauthorized trips."

[16] Ietan et al. to Clark, Oct. 15, 1836, National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, Treaty file.

[17] Berlin Basil Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias: A Study of Indian Removal and the Legal Aftermath* (Oklahoma City, OK: Times Journal Publishing Company, 1965), 51-52.

# Indigenous land cessions in the 1830s and 40s

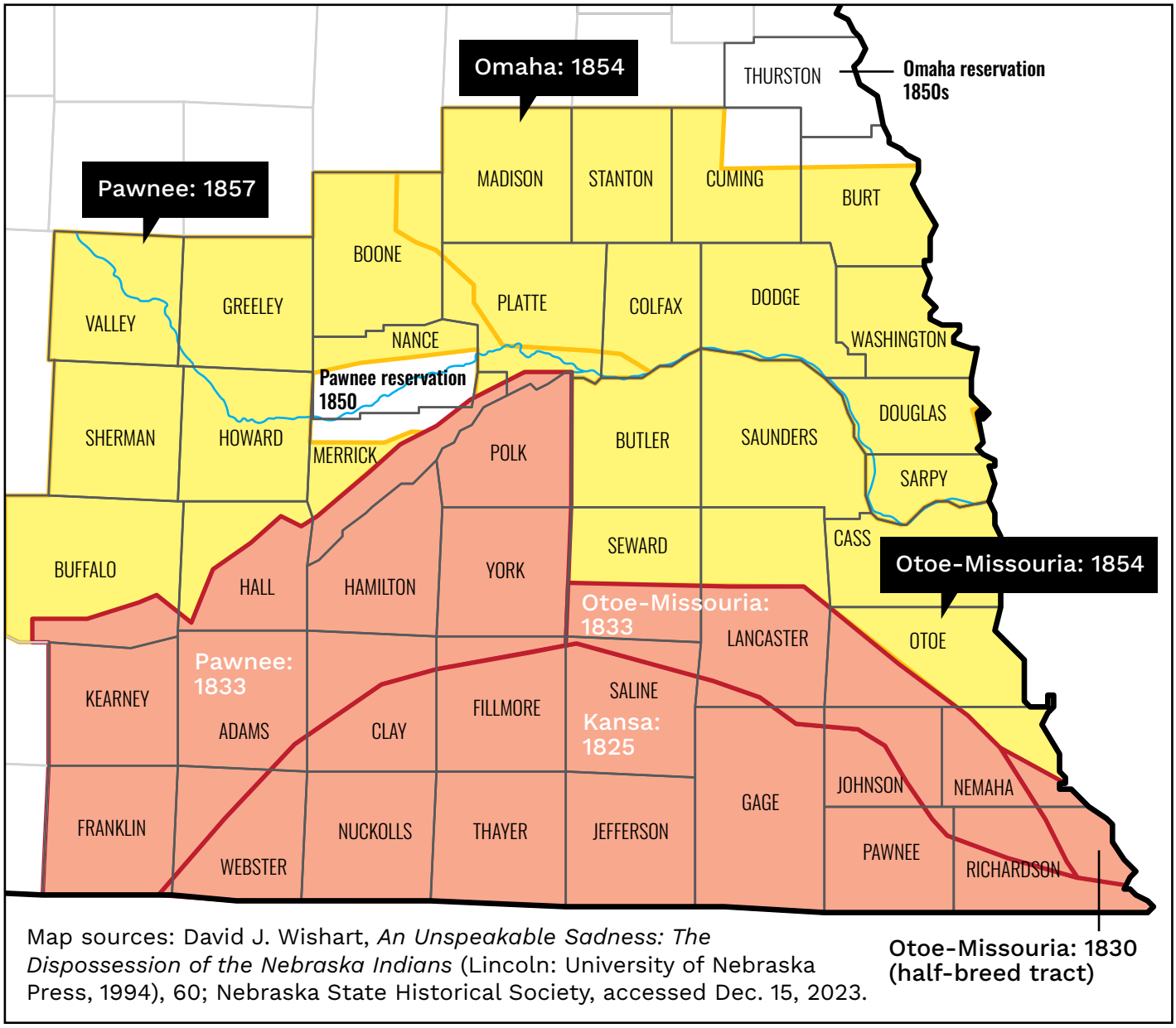



Map sources: David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 60; Nebraska State Historical Society, accessed Dec. 15, 2023.

The government failed to deliver annuities to the Otoe-Missouria (as well as other tribes) on time or at all. When supplies did finally arrive, they were often unusable. The government never delivered the agricultural equipment and failed to establish the promised corn mill. These developments led to starvation among the Otoe-Missouria and stoked divisions among them. Furthermore, the introduction of alcohol and loss of life from disease imperiled Otoe-Missouria society.

These developments intensified rifts among the Otoe-Missouria that had initially appeared in the 1820s. By the time winter descended upon the Platte River in 1839, the Missouria population was maintaining a separate village on the south side of the Platte near its junction with the Missouri. Fractures in Otoe society also reappeared. Divisions between families and clans led to the Otoe splitting apart into four groups each with their own village by 1841, further to the west of the Missouria village.

# Indigenous land cessions in the 1850s




Map sources: David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 60; Nebraska State Historical Society, accessed Dec. 15, 2023.

In the 1840s, more and more migrants and travelers further encroached on Otoe-Missouria territory as they journeyed along the Platte River flood plain on their way to the West Coast. At the same time, the Dakota, based to the north and west, were attacking the Otoe-Missouria. The United States did not provide weapons to the Nebraska tribes to defend themselves, but the Indian Office was supplying the Dakota with weapons as a means of appeasement. Trespass on Otoe-Missouria land and attacks on Otoe-Missouria people made traditional modes of subsistence even more difficult.

The U.S. government pursued a policy during this period to blend tribal nations even if that was not agreeable to the nations in question. Paradoxically, in the case of the Otoe and Missouria, who had lived together amicably since at least 1798, the government undermined their cooperation. The two tribes had conducted councils with each nation's chiefs being recognized, but agent Benjamin O'Fallon wanted to, in the words of military expedition leader Stephen H. Long, "extinguish as much as possible the national prejudices between the two nations or tribes" by not recognizing the Missouria chiefs in council.[18] This effort further isolated and subordinated the

Missouria leaders in the community. Later in 1845 and 1847, Superintendent Harvey advocated the merging of the Omaha with the Otoe-Missouria or Kaw due to their proximity and somewhat favorable relationships with each other. Again in 1851, Superintendent Mitchell suggested merging the Otoe-Missouria with the Ho-Chunk in Nebraska due to their shared ancestry and friendly relations.

In the 1850s, as crises mounted for Nebraska tribes, the governments sought to extinguish more Native land claims and determined that "the Indians would be placed on small areas with well-defined boundaries where the civilization program would be applied with intensified effort."[19] The government conducted a new round of treaty negotiations with the tribes in the Nebraska territory. Otoe and Missouria people were forced to sell everything, their personal possessions, guns, and horses for food. On March 15, 1854, left with no other choice except to starve, the Otoe-Missouria ceded by treaty more than a million acres of land near the Platte River to the United States government, receiving a meager 42 cents per acre.[20] The treaty with the Otoe-Missouria stipulated that the president, at his discretion, could order the survey of the reservation into lots that would be assigned to Indians who were interested in establishing "permanent homes." Furthermore, "the size of the allotments would be proportionate to the size of the family: one-eighth of a section (eighty acres) for a single person over 21; one-quarter of a section for each family of two, and so on, up to and beyond a full section for each family of six to ten."[21] The annuities for the 1,087,893 acre land cession were to be $20,000 for the first three years (1854–1856), $13,000 for the next 10 years (1857–1866), $9,000 for 15 years after that (1867–1881), and $5,000 for the subsequent 12 years (1882–1893). In addition, the government promised $20,000 for resettling on the reservation, a payment for a saw and grist mill and a blacksmith's shop, and the services of a miller, blacksmith, and farmer for 10 years. In exchange, the Otoe-Missouria acknowledged their dependence on the United States and gave the United States the right to build roads and forts on the reservation.

Just two months later, on May 30, 1854, the federal government passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which divided the Louisiana Purchase land west of the Missouri into the two territories of Kansas and Nebraska, repealed the Missouria Compromise of 1820, and introduced the doctrine of "popular sovereignty," whereby the citizens of each territory would decide for themselves whether they would be a "free" or "slave" state.

The Act's primary sponsor, Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois, designed it primarily to pave the way for the transcontinental railroad. In 1851, Congress had appropriated $150,000 to "ascertain the most practicable and economical route from the Mississippi river to the Pacific Ocean." The appropriation was "proposed by a Northern senator and championed by a Southern sympathizer," and the resulting report "tried to break the political logjam over the location of the transcontinental railroad."[22] Furthermore, in 1850, President Millard Fillmore signed the first railroad land-grant act. From then on, railroad transportation was the most important factor in the colonization of the western part of the United States.

Of course, Northerners wanted the transcontinental railroad to follow a northern route. The Platte Valley offered a usable and proven roadbed for those purposes as it had carried many a traveler west, but none were particularly interested in building a railroad through Indigenous territory. The territory would have to be organized if the railroad was to become reality. As such, settlers and land speculators flooded Nebraska in the 1850s. The Otoe-Missouria and other tribal nations were but an obstacle to American development. A year after the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act's passage, the government forced 600 Otoe-Missouria to move to a reservation along the Big Blue River in Gage County, Nebraska, which straddled the Kansas-Nebraska state line.[23]

The Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the way for further colonization of Otoe-Missouria lands. Now the U.S. government and settlement boosters touted the land that Stephen H. Long's 1820 expedition had once deemed the Great American Desert as cheap,

[18] Edwin James, *An Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains, Performed in the Years 1819, 1820* (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey and I. Lea, 1822-23), 239.

[19] Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 69.

**"The federal government passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act on May 30, 1854...there were still thousands of Indigenous people, settled in their own communities, all around Nebraska."**

[20] Daniel W. Overton, "Spending the Indians' Money: A Quantitative Case Study of Otoe-Missouria Trust Fund Disbursements, 1855-1881," Nebraska History 74, no. 2 (1993): 72-81.

[21] Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 104.

[22] David Bernstein, *How the West Was Drawn: Mapping, Indians, and the Construction of the Trans-Mississippi West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 199.

fertile, well-timbered land with minerals to be found. And even though thousands of Indigenous people, settled in their own communities, still lived in Nebraska, many settlers and land speculators claimed there were virtually no Indians left in the new territory.

Still in the 1850s, incoming migrants were more interested in getting rich quick than on long-term settlement. Wishart writes, "The rush to create 'paper towns,' the rapid turnover of rural and city populations (including a massive exodus to the Colorado gold fields in 1859), the small amount of land that was improved by 1860, and the chiseling of land laws at every opportunity, point to the conclusion that most early Nebraskans were attached not to a place, but to the process of making money, especially on real estate."[24]

GAGE COUNTY

During the Civil War the flow of settlers to Nebraska had dried up for the most part. At least three Otoe-Missouria men served in the conflict: Buffalo Black, Richard Roubedeaux (Mą́nto Nayį́ [Man-ta-no-yea] – Standing Bear) and James Whitewater. Roubedeaux and Whitewater served in the Union's 13th Regiment, Kansas Infantry, B Company. Roubedeaux entered and left with a corporal ranking. Whitewater started as a private and achieved corporal ranking.

During the Civil War, Congress passed the Homestead Act of 1862 into law, granting adult men and widowed women 160 acres of land, as long as they lived on and improved the land for a nominal fee for five years.[25] The U.S. government advertised this newly ceded land as "free land." Thousands of settlers from the eastern United States, as well as European immigrants, traveled to Nebraska to take up homesteads, occupying land that was still home to the Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous nations, even if it wasn't theirs in title. Many of these homesteaders began to plow up the Native prairie and to make other irrevocable changes to the land. Even so, by 1870, Nebraska tribes were still living communally on their reservations, and all were still going on bison hunts, remaining rather resolutely traditional in the face of heightened efforts to disrupt their language transmission, cultural ceremonies, and belief systems.

[23] Wishart, "Otoe-Missourias," 587-88.

[24] Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 109.

[25] Homestead Act (1862). (2022, June 7). National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/homestead-act, accessed May 22, 2025.

## DEEPENING FRACTURES

The 1870s deepened the pre-existing fractures that existed in the Otoe and Missouria communities. Two main factions emerged: the Quaker Band and the Traditional Band. The Quaker Band centered around the Barnes family and Agent Albert Green. At the eastern end of the Big Blue Reservation several Otoe-Missouria families, most of mixed descendancy, settled down and established small farms. Prominent among the mixed-blood community was the family of Francis Marion Barnes, a white settler married to Mary Jane Drips Benoist, an Otoe woman who formerly had received an allotment on the Half-Breed Reservation between the Nemaha Rivers. Although most Otoe-Missourias of mixed-descendancy who had owned allotments were no longer considered to be members of the tribe (by the rules of the federal government, not necessarily the Otoe and Missourias themselves), the Barnes family was still well-received by Otoe-Missouria chiefs, and in 1871 a delegation of tribal leaders including Medicine Horse, Buffalo Chief, Missouria Chief, and Pipestem wrote to the government acknowledging that they considered Mrs. Barnes to be an Otoe-Missouria because her mother, Mąnką Pími (Good Medicine Woman), was an Otoe.

Meanwhile Mr. Barnes erected a house, barn, and other outbuildings upon reservation land, while Mrs. Barnes operated a trading post in what would become Barneston.[26] During this time, the Indian Agent assigned to the Otoe-Missouria was Albert M. Green, a Quaker. Mr. Green did not want the Otoe-Missouria to sell their reservation and move to Indian Territory because he did not want them to be outside of the influence of Americanizing institutions and settler communities.

[26] Mary Jane Drips Barnes and her family's story are featured prominently in Anne F. Hyde's *Born of Lakes and Plains: Mixed-Descent Peoples and the Making of the American West* (New York: Norton, 2022).

Meanwhile, the Coyote or Traditionalist faction, headed by Arkeketa, Medicine Horse, Buffalo Chief, Missouria Chief, and Pipestem, wanted to sell the reservation and move to Indian Territory, where they hoped to retain traditional lifestyles. The Quaker Band protested the sale of the reservation because they wanted the eastern portion of the reservation allotted to those who had begun to adopt the American way of life. Green accused the Coyote Band of being manipulated by land speculators and others hellbent on capitalizing on the precarious situation in Nebraska. It is true that the Coyote Band's plans would benefit white settlers who hoped that the entire reservation would then be sold to the public, but this potential boon to settlers certainly wasn't a motivating factor for the band.

In 1872, facing pressure from American settlers, including land speculators, Congress voted to survey and appraise the western half of Otoe-Missouria land and offer the tract for sale to nearby whites. However, both the Quaker and Coyote bands vehemently opposed the measure because 1) it did not guarantee the allotment of lands east of the reservation for the Quakers and 2) it did not provide for the sale of the entire reservation or the ability to choose land in Indian Territory for the Coyote band.

The government was curious as to why the Otoe-Missouria opposed the legislation, so they invited a delegation of chiefs to Washington, DC in 1873. The chiefs met with federal officials who told them that their annuities would no longer be paid out to the tribe but to the Indian agents. On top of that, officials proposed that the agent would only distribute annuities to Otoe-Missourias who were working jobs approved by those agents. The chiefs vehemently rejected this action, arguing that it was essentially forcing Otoe-Missourias to work for money that was already guaranteed to them by the treaties the United States had approved.

However, the federal government's decision was final. When the Coyote band received this news, they threatened to seize the money from the agents and do as they pleased. The following summer in 1874, about 90 members of the Coyote Band, led by Medicine Horse and Little Pipe, left the reservation to hunt buffalo to the southwest. The group

was intercepted by federal troops from Fort Hays and subsequently returned to the reservation, while Medicine Horse, Little Pipe, and four other men were temporarily imprisoned. Although the Otoe-Missouria men were eventually released, the government deducted $1,000 from tribal annuities to pay the Army for their arrest and incarceration.

In 1876, officials made plans to survey and sell the western part of the reservation once again. Although they still preferred to sell all their lands, this time the Coyote band agreed to the government plans, envisioning the sale as the first step toward escaping the influence of American settlers. The Quaker band also supported the measure, being afraid that if the legislation failed, white Nebraskans might pressure Congress into abolishing all Otoe-Missouria lands in Kansas and Nebraska.

The actual sale of the reservation lands reflected the growing influence of western politicians in Washington. After a group of three commissioners appraised the region, the government offered lands for sale only to white farmers who already had settled upon them. This occupancy regulation literally encouraged whites to trespass upon Indian lands because only illegal white squatters could purchase them. To make matters worse, proceeds from the land sales were to be distributed to the Indians, but many of the whites who settled on the reservation refused to make the payments because, under the terms of the legislation, the lands could not be sold to anyone else. Government officials offered the tracts of lands for sale through the Beatrice, Nebraska, land office during 1877, but one year later, in his annual report, Indian Agent Jesse Griest admitted that the land sales had been disastrous. Although the western half of the Big Blue Reservation was now overrun with whites, the Otoe-Missouria people still had received almost no money from the squatters. With conditions deteriorating, by 1878 even most members of the Quaker Band agreed that the Otoe-Missouria people could no longer remain in Kansas and Nebraska. Emboldened by the recent land sales, white settlers now crossed over into the eastern portion of the reservation, trespassing on tribal lands farmed by mixed-bloods and other supporters of the Quaker Band. The constant harassment by whites kept Quaker Band farmers from their fields and convinced them that the Coyote People had been right in wanting to move to Indian Territory.

In 1878, a party of Coyote Band leaders traveled to the Indian Territory where they selected an area just west of the Sac and Fox Agency, on the Cimarron River in central Oklahoma along with some of their Ioway relatives. The region was rich in game but under the influence of the Indian agents who did not want tribes similar in language to be too close to one another. The Quaker Band wanted to settle in farming country in the northern part of the territory, near the Pawnees, Poncas, and Osages. In January 1880, four families from the Coyote Band left Nebraska and erected new lodges along the Cimarron River. That summer, about 180 other members of the Coyote Band joined them. While the Coyote Band was establishing a new village in central Oklahoma, several spokesmen for the Quaker Band traveled to Washington where government officials agreed to a reservation near the Poncas and Pawnees. In March 1881, after the delegation returned to Nebraska, Congress provided for the sale of the remaining Otoe-Missouria lands on the Big Blue and the total removal of the tribe into Indian Territory. During the following two months, members of the Quaker Band journeyed into modern Oklahoma where they chose lands along Red Rock Creek, south of the Ponca reservation.

Although the Otoes and Missourias who had already settled on the Cimarron protested the choice, the government achieved its desired outcome and established the reservation anyway. When the news hit white settlements in Kansas and Nebraska, more squatters arrived to replace the Otoe-Missouria population. On October 5, 1881, over 230 Otoes and Missourias left Nebraska for the reservation along Red Rock Creek.

They carried their household goods and other possessions in 70 wagons, and their horse herds followed behind. After over two weeks on the trail, the remainder of the Otoes and Missourias arrived at the reservation on October 23, 1881.

The dispossession of the Otoe-Missouria in Nebraska was complete, but not the grift. As the Otoe-Missouria got their bearings in Indian Territory, federal officials made plans to sell the remaining Otoe-Missouria land on the eastern portion of the Big Blue Reservation. The tribe held serious doubts that they would be paid, because they had not yet received adequate payment for the western portion of the reservation supposedly purchased by whites between 1876 and 1877. Reacting to the influence of frontier politicians, land office bureaucrats had allowed settlers purchasing tracts of land within the western part of the Big Blue Reservation to defer their payments for an indefinite period. Although Indian agents assured the Otoe-Missourias that they would receive interest on the overdue funds, the Tribe did not want to sell the remainder of the reservation under such circumstances.

The Barnes family was particularly concerned about the sale of the eastern portion of the reservation, since throughout the 1870s, Mary Barnes had previously petitioned various officials asking that her family and other "acculturated" tribal members be given allotments of land in that area. In 1881, when Congress provided the sale of the remaining lands in Kansas and Nebraska, federal agents agreed to withhold nine 160-acre tracts upon which the Barnes family and other Otoe-Missouria erected buildings or other "improvements on the land." Although the government held the nine tracts in trust, the Otoe-Missouria were allowed to remain on the land. If they continued to reside on the farms through 1894, then the lands would be theirs.

Meanwhile, the sale of other reservation lands proceeded according to the government's plan. Once again federal officials offered the tracts of reservation lands at auction and once more the Otoe-Missouria were caught in an elaborate grift. The tribe was supposed to receive the proceeds from the sale, but many of the settlers bidding on the land formed an organization to keep the bids low. Other settlers defaulted on their original payments, knowing that the government would be forced to offer the repossessed lands for sale a second time at a fraction of their official price per acre.[27]

To add to the confusion, federal officials again allowed the settlers to defer part of their payments. In some instances, those who had purchased lands on the eastern portion of the Big Blue Reservation had still failed to pay for the tracts 17 years after the land had been sold. Finally in 1899, under pressure from officials, most of the Otoe-Missouria people agreed to accept the reduced payment for their lands in Kansas and Nebraska: $120,000. The total figure still owed to them including interest was more than $270,000. Charges of fraud and collusion resulting from the actual land sales brought a federal investigation, and to his discredit, Francis M. Barnes was implicated. Attempting to purchase other tracts to add to his family allotment in 1885, Barnes was convicted of conspiring with certain settlers in an illegal price fixing scheme designed to lower the cost of reservation lands bought at auction. For his illegal actions, Barnes received a slap on the wrist; he paid a fine of just $365.

[27] Daniel Overton, "Withholding Payment on Otoe-Missouria Reservation Lands," *Great Plains Research* 2, no. 2 (August 1992): 263-280.

## EPILOGUE: TO INDIAN TERRITORY AND BEYOND

The ensuing years in Indian Territory and eventually the state of Oklahoma were not what Otoe-Missouria leaders envisioned when they decided to leave their home in Nebraska. If the goal was to get away from the influence of white society, the opposite became reality. The tribe came under even more government control. They engaged in battles over the question of allotment. After the Dawes Act passed in 1887, the government divided up reservations into small allotments assigned to individual tribal members and their families. The allotments were to be farmed and improved by the residents, and the government would hold the land in trust for a period of 25 years. After the completion of that period, tribal members could become United States citizens. In the meantime, the government opened so-called surplus lands to purchase by settlers and railroads. Tribal members also lost individually allotted lands. As the Tribe explains, "It was not long before one-half of the allotted lands were lost from Indian possession due to arbitrary and exploitive practices of so-called guardians."[28] As with other tribal nations, allotment was a disaster that led to further dispossession for the Otoe-Missouria.

In the 1940s, the Tribe set out to gain compensation for the lands that had been taken from them unfairly. Admitting that the United States had acquired much of Indian land under questionable circumstances, in 1946 the federal government finally established the Indian Claims Commission after many decades of pressure from tribal leaders and advocates. The commission was authorized to investigate tribal claims against the government and to provide financial compensation to those tribes who had not received a fair price when their lands had been purchased by the government. Being one of the many tribes that had pressed the federal government to do something about the grift the Otoe-Missouria experienced during their removal to Indian Territory, in 1947, the tribal council hired several attorneys, including Luther Bohanon, Bert Barefoot, Jr., and Baptiste Shunatona, who was the first "full-blood" Native American graduate of the University of Oklahoma College of Law.

The team presented nine claims against the government asking for compensation for Otoe-Missouria lands in Kansas and Nebraska, arguing that the government owed the Tribe upwards of $10 million dollars. On March 31, 1953, the Commission upheld the sale of the Big Blue Reservation and ruled that a compromise made in 1899 was valid. However, the Commission also ruled that in the matter of the 1833 treaty, the amount paid to the tribe was "unconscionable." In the matter of the 1854 treaty, the Commission also ruled that the federal government owed the Tribe compensation for lands. The total for both cases came out to $1,156,034.35, with $23,024.05 in found additional fees paid offset how much the government would pay to the tribe. The decisions became landmark cases, as they were the first in which the Commission awarded additional compensation for Indian lands occupied for generations with no documents such as treaties or deeds. Eventually, the settlement was distributed among members of the Tribe as a one-time per capita payment.

The Commission initially ruled that the Otoe-Missouria were not entitled to further payments for the 1830 cession of lands in western Iowa, but as the Sac and Fox pressed their claim, new evidence emerged that backed up what Otoe-Missouria people knew: they hunted extensively over northwestern Missouri and southwestern Iowa, especially in the region between the Nodaway (Nat'ą́we – jump over river) and Boyer Rivers. The Otoe-Missouria team pressed the claim again, and the Commission reversed its former ruling and declared that they had indeed shared the region with three other tribes: the Omaha, Ioway, and Sac and Fox. Each of the tribes was entitled to one-fourth of the

compensation to be awarded for the entire area. After consulting with their attorneys and sending a delegation of tribal leaders to Washington, the Otoe-Missouria people agreed to accept a compromise settlement of $175,000. In its amended decision of 1964, the Commission awarded the Otoe-Missouria an additional $1,750,000 for a grand total of $2,929,076 in compensation for the unfair payments made to their ancestors. This sparked a debate among tribal members about how the funds should be used: another per capita payment or to invest in tribal programs, which was favored by leaders such as Richard Kihega and Kenneth Black. However, it was decided in a close vote that another payment to tribal members would be initiated.[29]

Over the years there have been efforts to remember and return to Nebraska by the Tribe and its members to record history, reconnect to the land, rematriate items, and continue relationships with the state of Nebraska and its current stewards. During the centennial anniversary of 100 years in Indian Territory/Oklahoma, tribal member Jim Cleghorn reported on stories from tribal elders about Nebraska and the removal to Indian Territory. For example, in 2004, during the bicentennial commemoration of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, members of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe collaborated with the National Park Service and other partners on educational programming. More recently, grassroots efforts to reconnect Otoe-Missouria people to the land in southeastern Nebraska by tribal members Cory DeRoin and Billie Tohee have led to the creation of projects like *Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors*.

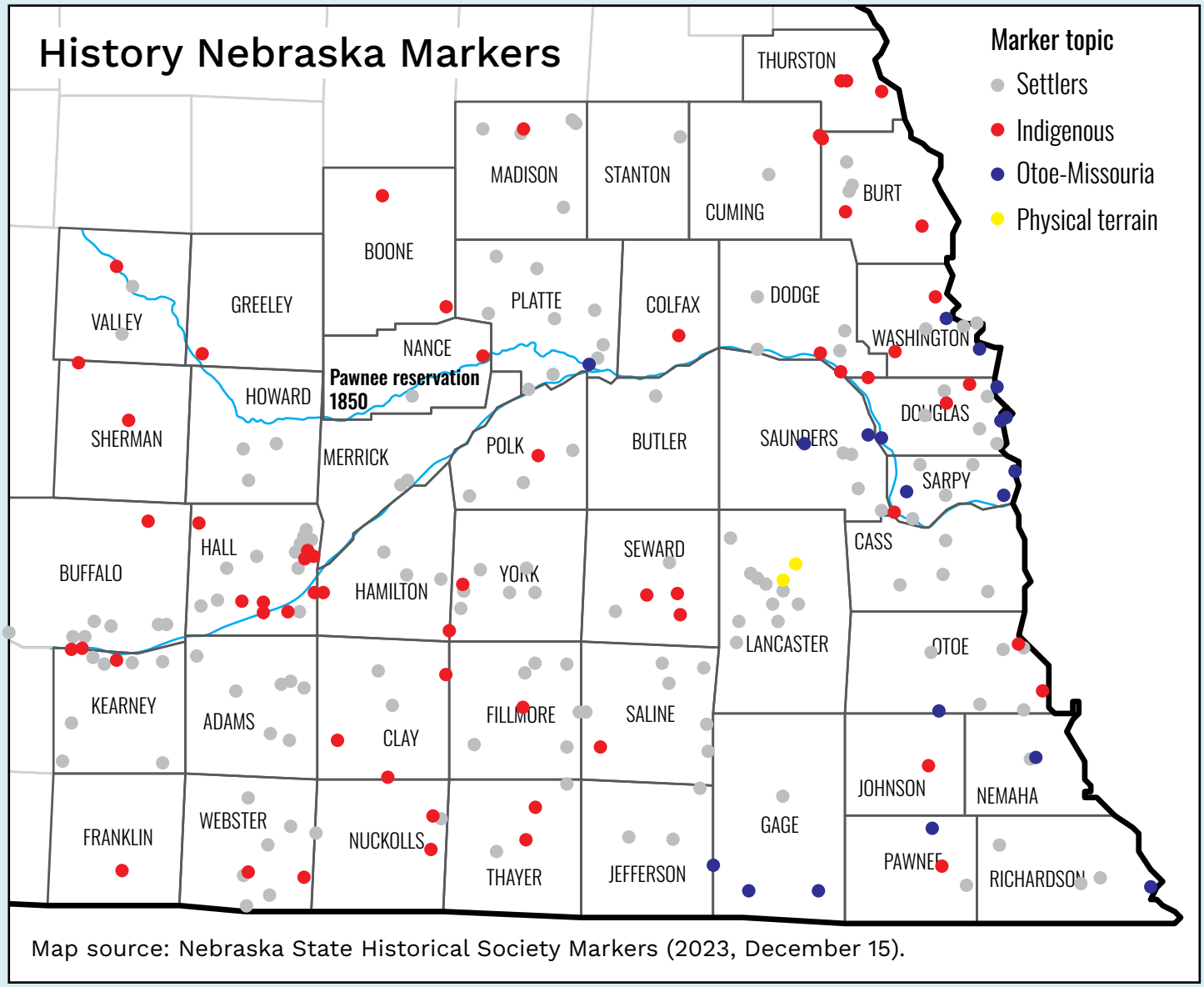
[29] R. David Edmunds, *The Otoe-Missouria People* (Phoenix, AZ: Indian Tribal Series, 1976), 85-86; Daniel W. Overton, "Withholding Payment": 265.

# KEY FINDINGS

1. The overwhelming majority of historical markers in southeast Nebraska focus on settlers and their achievements and celebrate the colonization of the area.

2. When markers do mention Indigenous people, it is nearly always in relation to settlers and/or from the perspective of settlers.

3. The Otoe-Missouria Tribe, which occupied the area for hundreds of years, are mentioned on just 5% of historical markers, and often only in reference to Lewis and Clark.




Map source: Nebraska State Historical Society Markers (2023, December 15).

# ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS

**KEY FINDING 1. The overwhelming majority of historical markers in southeast Nebraska focus on settlers and their achievements and celebrate the colonization of the area.**

As of 2024, the Nebraska State Historical Society (which went by the name History Nebraska between 2018 and 2024) had erected 363 markers in southeast Nebraska, an area of 44 counties that encompassed Otoe-Missouria lands. 170 additional older markers and monuments dot the landscape as well. Other entities, including the National Park Service, Nebraska Game and Parks, and Nebraska Department of Transportation have also erected some monuments in the region.

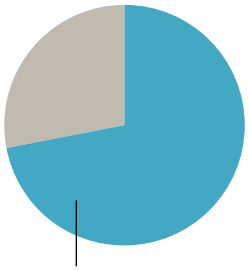
Of the 363 modern historical markers, 259 (72% percent) focus only on settlers, people of non-Indigenous descent who migrated to southeast Nebraska. 100 markers (27.5%) mention Indigenous people. Only one marker, in Lancaster County, does not commemorate people. Instead, it mentions glacial activity. Three markers offer no narrative.

All but two of the 170 older markers focus on settlers and their achievements. Occasionally they mention Indigenous people but only in reference to them as threats as generic "Indians." In only three cases do these older markers mention a specific tribe, the Pawnee (The Pawnee Memorial in Fullerton at the Nance County Courthouse; the Pawnee Council marker in Saunders County, and the Zebulon Pike and the Pawnee Village marker in Webster County).

Interestingly, the markers privilege certain settler histories, and not others. Collectively, the markers minimize the early history of the Spanish and French in the area. French traders who intermarried with Native peoples and assimilated into tribes had a long and lasting history in the area that is not sufficiently represented on the markers.

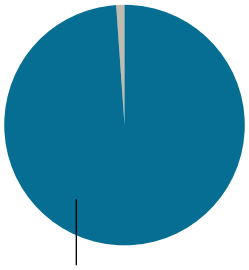
Dr. Kurt Borchard writes, "It makes sense that settlers and their descendants want to celebrate their history, endowing museums and public parks with statues depicting legendary stories and heroes. The problem comes when those statues are prominently displayed at state-sponsored institutions at the expense of other accounts and contextualized histories that would allow visitors also to consider settler colonialism."[30]

**363**
Modern historical markers



Markers that focus only on settlers

**170**
Old historical markers



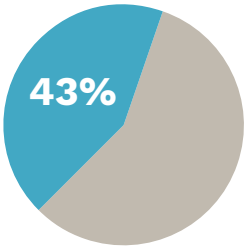
Markers that focus only on settlers

[30] Kurt Borchard, "Normalizing Settler Colonialism through Monuments," Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, February 17, 2020, https://thesocietypages.org/holocaust-genocide/normalizing-settler-colonialism-through-monuments/.

# PROMINENT TOPICS ON MARKERS

## PIONEERS, PIONEER TRAILS, & HOMESTEADERS

52 (14%) modern historical markers in southeast Nebraska commemorate the overland trails that migrants took across Nebraska on their way further west. An additional 67 (18%) mention pioneers and 41 (11%) honor homesteaders. Taken together, these memorials (43%) comprise the largest group of monument types. 60 (35%) of the earlier granite monuments commemorated the trails. 13 honor pioneers and three commemorate homesteaders separately.




Modern markers that commemorate migrant trails, pioneers, or homesteaders

Jeff Barnes writes in his book *Cut in Stone, Cast in Bronze*, "Likely no other state along the Oregon Trail marked it so thoroughly as the state of Nebraska." From 1912 to 1967, settlers erected more than 100 monuments and markers to commemorate the trail. Barnes explains that Ezra Meeker, who had emigrated to Oregon Territory on the trail in 1852, "was convinced the Oregon Trail was being forgotten," and he led a movement to memorialize the trail. He found a willing ally in the Daughters of the American Revolution in Nebraska. In 1908, the DAR advocated for a state legislative appropriation to erect markers along the trail's 425-mile route through Nebraska, which passed in 1911.[31]

Here is a typical example about the Oregon Trail from Adams County (U.S. 6/34, 9 miles west of Hastings):

> The most traveled of the overland routes passed this point on its way to the great Platte Valley, highway to the west. . . . In the 1830's trappers and missionaries recognized the Platte Valley as a natural roadway. The first wagon train followed the 2,000-mile trail to Oregon in 1841. An estimated quarter of a million travelers used this route in the twenty-five years after those first wagons. Moving slowly, only 10 to 20 miles a day on the three-month trip, thousands of hooves, shoes, and wheels pounded a wide trail into the prairie sod. Oregon was an early goal. The '49'ers went this way to California. Settlers, stage coaches, freighting wagons, Pony Express riders, and military expeditions all used this prairie highway. With completion of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1869, this route fell into disuse, but the Oregon Trail had earned a permanent place in our history.

**"Likely no other state along the Oregon Trail marked it so thoroughly as the state of Nebraska"**

**This passage erases the presence of the Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous peoples in the Platte Valley, how they created trails along the Platte as well, and how the Oregon Trail dramatically degraded the environment while undermining Indigenous peoples' societies.**

As with the related topic of "pioneering," the southeast Nebraska commemorative landscape also features homesteading prominently. According to Jeff Barnes, in 1925, the Elizabeth Montague Chapter of the DAR used stone from the old state capitol in Omaha to create a marker to commemorate the first registered homestead in the

[31] Jeff Barnes, *Cut in Stone, Cast in Bronze: Nebraska's Historical Markers ad Monuments, 1854-1967* (Brookfield, MO: Donning Company, 2020), 27.

United States, to Daniel Freeman, in Brownville at midnight on January 1, 1863. It now is part of the Homestead National Historical Park, originally a National Monument of America that was established in 1936.

A historical marker in Buffalo County (located at the Gibbon Heritage Center, 2nd and Court St., Gibbon), reads:

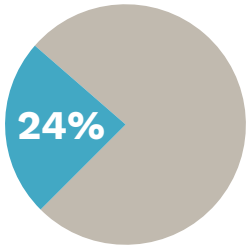
> Gibbon, near here, was the site of a unique experiment in homestead colonization. The Soldiers' Free Homestead Temperance Colony was responsible for bringing the earliest settlers, mostly Union veterans, to this locality. Traveling via the Union Pacific Railroad, the first group arrived April 7, 1871, when the only building was a small section house. They lived in railroad boxcars until sod or frame homes could be built. Their first view of the area was not encouraging, since a prairie fire had recently swept the region, and two days after their arrival a blizzard struck. Still, of 129 families only one failed to file a homestead claim.

**Collectively the historical markers legitimate settler presence and communicate that settlers are the rightful occupants of the land while negating or minimizing Indigenous presence.**

Here, as with Oregon Trail and pioneering historical markers, the narrative leaves out all mention of how the rise of homesteading led to the loss of Native land, often through unscrupulous means, the displacement of the Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous peoples from their lands, and ensuing hardship for Native communities.

## RAILROADS

A large number — 87 (or 24%) — of historical markers commemorate railroads, a key engine and potent symbol of settler colonialism. Railroads acquired huge swaths of land from which Indian people had been dispossessed, and the building of the transcontinental and branch railroads enabled widespread settlement.




Modern markers that commemorate railroads

One marker, for example, touts the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad (located at Nebr. 10, 1.5 miles south of Platte River bridge; Kearney County):

> The Burlington & Missouri River Railroad entered Nebraska at Plattsmouth in 1870 and built west to join the Union Pacific at Kearney Junction (now Kearney city) on September 3, 1872. The railroad bridge into Kearney was used for 104 years. It linked southern Nebraska traffic with the transcontinental Union Pacific. In 1872-73, thousands of trailed-in Texas Longhorns were shipped from Lowell, 5 1/2 miles east of here. Sugar beets and prairie hay were once primary freight items. During World War II as many as 200 carloads of cement, steel, and Weeping Water limestone were carried here for highway construction.

Left out of this marker's analysis is any mention of who the land came from, whose labor built it, and who benefitted from its construction. To make way for the railroads, settlers systematically hunted and removed bison, a relative and major resource for Indigenous peoples on the Great Plains, from the landscape in a short span of time. As settlers decimated the bison population, government agents then forbade Natives from hunting out "on the frontier" and confined them to reservations, thus removing the Indigenous population from the landscape, too. Further, as allotments and assimilation programs arose, so did a path emerge for settlers and railroad companies to acquire large swaths of "formerly" Indian land. All the while, settlers used the

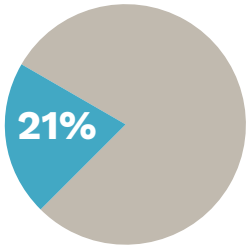
railroad itself to import invasive new species, including Texas longhorns, that took over the prime grazing land once occupied by bison. As Dr. Manu Karuka, author of *Empire's Tracks*, explains, "Indigenous people are often present in railroad histories, but they form a kind of colorful backdrop that establishes the scene. Rarely, if ever, do we get an understanding of the interests that drove Indigenous peoples' actions in relation to the railroad. Rather than analyzing Indigenous peoples' commitments to their communities and their homelands, railroad histories have emphasized market competition and westward expansion. Focusing on Indigenous histories reveals how Indigenous nations have survived colonialism."[32]

[32] Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Julia H. Lee, *The Racial Railroad* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2022); Sam Vong, "The Impact of the Transcontinental Railroad on Native Americans," National Museum of American History, June 3, 2019, https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/TRR.

## FORTS AND MILITARY ACTION AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

78 modern historical markers (21%) in southeast Nebraska commemorate forts and the military conquest of the West. (Interestingly, only four of the 170 earlier markers commemorate forts.) For example, the historical marker for Fort Kearny (located at Fort Kearny State Historical Park, Kearney County) reads:

> The growth of overland emigration to Oregon after 1842 resulted in the establishment of military posts across the West to protect travelers...Despite its lack of fortifications, Fort Kearny served as way station, sentinel post, supply depot, and message center for 49'ers bound for California and homeseekers traveling to Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. By the 1860s the fort had become a significant stage and freighting station and home station of the Pony Express. During the Indian Wars of 1864-1865 a small stockade was apparently built upon the earth embankment still visible. Although never under attack, the post did serve as an outfitting depot for several Indian campaigns. One of the fort's final duties was the protection of workers building the Union Pacific. In 1871, two years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the fort was discontinued as a military post.




Modern markers that commemorate forts and military conquests

The Fort Atkinson historical marker (located 5 miles east of 96th St. and Nebr. 36, north of Omaha), notes:

> A few miles north is Ft. Atkinson (1819-27), the first U.S. military post west of the Missouri River. The fort's location at the "Council Bluff" was recommended by Lewis and Clark in 1804. It was established to assert U.S. influence over the Indian tribes and to protect the fur trade from the British. Many famous men of western history passed through the fort, including fur trader William H. Ashley; mountain men and trailblazers Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger, and Hiram Scott; Gen. Henry Atkinson, Maj. Stephen Long, and three officers who later became generals and for whom forts were named--Col. Henry Leavenworth, Maj. Stephen Watts Kearny, and Lt. Bennett Riley.
>
> Long's famous exploring party wintered near Ft. Atkinson in 1819-20. Long camped just west of here near the banks of Big Papillion Creek. He referred to

**"This focus on military activity in southeast Nebraska is consistent with the National Monument Audit's finding that 33% of national monuments represent war and conquest. "**

> the region to the west as the "Great American Desert," a name that appears on maps as late as the mid-1800s.

In both cases, note the primary focus on settlers, whether explorers, traders, military leaders, "travelers" on the Overland Trail, goldseekers, or Pony Express riders. The forts served to protect settlers from a homogenous group of "Indians," to "establish influence" over them, and to launch attacks against them. This focus on military activity in southeast Nebraska is consistent with the National Monument Audit's finding that 33% of national monuments represent war and conquest.

## MISSIONS

Modern historical markers also celebrate missions and missionaries (37 of 363 markers, or 10%). In the nineteenth century, missionary activity on the Great Plains increased and was spiritually motivated by the Second Great Awakening of the 1820s and 1830s. Many of the missionaries that arrived in Nebraska were well-educated but had no training in intercultural relations.[33] When used as tools of a colonial system, missions and missionaries provided an important service by "educating" Indigenous people about Christianity and American society. For example, the historical marker for missionary Narcissa Whitman (near Lisco), reads:

[33] Robert W Galler, "Indian Missionaries," *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, 2011, http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.rel.027.

> Narcissa Whitman, trailblazer and martyred missionary, is one of the great heroines of the frontier West. In 1836 she and Eliza Spalding, following the north side of the Platte on horseback, became the first white women to cross the American continent. The Protestant 'Oregon Mission' was composed of Dr. Marcus Whitman, Rev. Henry Spalding, their new brides, and William Gray. They traveled from New York to Otoe Indian Agency (Bellevue, Nebraska), then joined an American Fur Company caravan led by Thomas Fitzpatrick. From the Green River rendezvous, they journeyed westward with traders of the Hudson's Bay Company. In November 1847, Narcissa, her husband, and eleven others, were massacred by Cayuse Indians at their Walla Walla mission, now a National Historic Site. The missionaries passed this point in June 1836.
>
> In May 1847 the Mormon Pioneers passed here en route from Winter Quarters (present North Omaha) to Salt Lake Valley, calling these formations "Ancient Bluff Ruins." Beginning with the California Gold Rush in 1849 this "Mormon Pioneer Trail" became "the Council Bluffs Road" to emigrants bound for the West Coast.

It is notable that a missionary who was merely passing through Nebraska on her way to Oregon Territory warrants a commemoration over the Otoe-Missouria people or any number of their leaders. The only reason the Otoe-Missouria are mentioned is because of the Agency's proximity to the American Fur Company's post in Bellevue, which made it a perfect stopping point for the Whitman party. The stop itself is hardly worth commemorating considering the much deeper local history of Bellevue with Reverends Moses Merrill and Edmund McKinney and their work with the Otoe-Missouria.

## OTHER POPULAR TOPICS

Modern historical markers also prominently feature pioneer cemeteries (35 of 363 markers). This contrasts with a lack of any commemoration of Native burial grounds. While pioneer cemeteries are deemed worthy of historical markers, many former Otoe and Missouria village sites were plowed, bulldozed, or built over long before that point. It took over 100 years for Congress to pass the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990 to stop the desecration of Native grave sites and require public institutions to repatriate ancestral remains and grave artifacts to Native nations.

The more recent historical markers also commemorate the founding of small towns and schools. Their earlier counterparts gave much attention to Pony Express stations, post offices, and churches, all important signifiers of settler society.

## MONUMENT MESSAGES: SETTLERS

Historical markers in southeast Nebraska do not just overwhelmingly commemorate settler subjects; they also convey additional messages about history through the common phrases they use.

**"Permanent" settlers vs. "prehistoric" Indigenous people**

Commemorative markers frequently honor an incoming migrant individual as "the first permanent settler" or mark a new community migrants established as "the first permanent settlement." This use of the term "permanent" contrasts settler presence from the supposedly "temporary" residency of Indigenous people who lived in the area before settlement. Ironically, settlers have been in Nebraska for only about 175 years as compared to the many hundreds of years that the Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous groups lived here.

The Spring Ranche marker (located at Nebr. 74, 6 miles west of Fairfield in Clay County), for example, reads, *"The original Spring Ranche, located two miles south of here on the north side of the Little Blue River, was founded about 1863. James Bainter,* ***the first permanent settler****, operated a store and inn for travelers along the Oregon-California Trail."*

Settlers often claimed that Indigenous people were not permanent occupants of the land because they periodically moved their villages or moved seasonally. Settlers failed to see that maintaining a lot of different village sites wasn't evidence that Indigenous people were unattached to the land or only temporary dwellers on it, but that they maximized the space. That's why there's not a huge and visible footprint on the land. The beauty of communal land stewardship for the Otoe and Missouria was that villages, or families, clans, or nations could move within the territory but not necessarily break away from the tribe(s) as a whole. This flexibility was needed as the pressures of incoming trader and settler populations put increasing stress on fractures in the social fabric of the Otoe and Missouria.

Collectively, the historical markers legitimate settler presence and communicate that settlers are the rightful occupants of the land while negating or minimizing Indigenous presence, relegating them to prehistory. Prehistory typically refers to the time before written history, but the term "prehistoric" generally conjures an image of "cavemen" and even dinosaurs. However, of the markers found in Nebraska, prehistoric almost always refers to the period beginning in 1040 A.D. until as late as the 1600s. Referring to

Indigenous populations with well-developed societies and rich histories as "prehistoric" centers the Western perspective that written language is a marker of a civilized, evolved society. Privileging written histories ignores the plethora of oral histories that have been passed between neighboring tribes since time immemorial. Tribal people know where they have been and generally know where or who their neighbors were during different periods of time. The dismissal of Indigenous history as "prehistory" also ignores historical power dynamics where written records are controlled by those in power, leading to narratives that do not fully represent the experiences of all groups.

This marker at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park is typical of other markers that describe Native people as "prehistoric":

> From 1050 – 1400 the lower Platte and Missouri River valleys were home to prehistoric Indian farmers. These people lived in small villages and isolated farmsteads, cultivated corn and beans, and hunted game. The Indians built square-shaped houses made of logs and covered with earth, with long, earth-covered entryways. They were substantial structures containing a fireplace, beds, storage areas, and trash pits. Remains of these earthlodges are found in the park.
>
> Here is the site of a prehistoric cemetery used by these early Indians. Archeological evidence indicates that the bodies were exposed to the elements until only bones remained. The bones were buried later in a communal graveyard. The practice of cemetery burial by these prehistoric people indicate their deep regard for the afterlife.
>
> Because few such cemeteries are known, this site is an irreplaceable resource for the study of Nebraska's early inhabitants. It has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places and preserved by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Note that the use of the adjective "prehistoric" is unnecessary, and the marker could be more educational and informative if it explained what happened to these small villagers and farmers after 1400.

**"Courageous" pioneers vs "hostile" Indians**

Another common rhetorical move is to portray settlers as heroic in their efforts to overcome hardship. As an example, the marker for Pioneer Park (located in Grand Island, Hall County) **"honors the courageous settlers who peacefully inhabited this area in 1857 when only Pawnee lived here."** When repeated frequently, this trope builds the notion that settlers earned the right to the land through facing and overcoming hardships.

This is conveyed openly in another plaque in Hall County near the graves of the Campbell family in Doniphan. It reads, *"Erected in memory of these who are but a few of the many that bore the brunt of hardships in pioneer days so that not so much who lie here but what was done here will never be forgotten. They with hearts so valiant and true carved a home from the wilderness that we might live in peace and prosperity forever."*

As these examples also show, historical markers portrayed settlers as "peaceful" in contrast to "hostile" Indians, as examined below.

**Erasure of Indigenous presence**

Some historical markers erase the presence of Indigenous people altogether, even when documenting a key piece of Indigenous heritage. For example, the "De Roin and Oregon Trails" sign in Beatrice, Nebraska, reads:

> Byway 136 was designated the Heritage Highway in part because of the many historic trails that are now part of it. You are standing on the historic De Roin Trail. The De Roin Trail began at the Missouri River port town of Brownville on the eastern edge of Heritage Highway and passed through Beatrice to Alexandria where it connected with the Oregon Trail. The Oregon Trail and Pony Express route intersect near Fairbury and both are commemorated at Rock Creek Station State Historical Park just south of Jansen.

Without knowing Otoe-Missouria history, viewers of this sign would have no idea that the DeRoin Trail is named for a prominent Otoe-Missouria family, with many hundreds of current descendants.

# ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS CONTINUED

**KEY FINDING 2. When Indigenous people are mentioned, it is only in relation to settlers and/or from the perspective of settlers.**

None of the 100 modern historical markers that mention Indigenous people tell their story without also mentioning settlers. Historical markers thus tell a partial history of Indigenous people that focuses entirely on their interactions with settlers. The earlier granite markers, erected by organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, focused even more on settlers. They rarely mention specific Native nations, and when they do feature Indigenous people, it is usually as threats to settlers.

In only one case of our sample did we find a commemoration that centered Indigenous people's history, as described below in the Otoe-Missouria section. However, even in this case, the narrative is told from the third person, rather than from the Otoe-Missouria first person plural.

None of the markers that mention Indigenous people were submitted by Tribes themselves or written by tribal historians. The markers, therefore, do not reflect the priorities of Indigenous nations or bring out how they would like to tell their own stories.

The historical markers that mention Indigenous people still center settlers and their actions. For example, 76 of the 100 Nebraska State Historical Society markers narrate the actions of the United States government and/or military toward the Indigenous population. 40 markers related the story of Indigenous-government conflicts. 21 focused on methods the United States used to "assert influence over Indigenous tribes."

Some of the markers mention the historical reality but offer no analysis. This straightforward approach is an advancement over markers that leave out mention of historical developments, but further analysis would strengthen these narratives. Additional explanation of what led to removal and its impact on the tribe would be beneficial.

15 markers include a sentence about the Indigenous former residents and then focus on settler achievements, such as town incorporation, or white settler "newcomers."

Five of the markers relayed information about famous Nebraskans and their relationship to Indigenous people. Four markers mention that a town, county, or physical feature was named for an Indigenous word or after an Indigenous leader. Of the 100 historical markers that mention Indigenous people, only 61 markers identified specific tribal nations, as shown on the pie chart on the next page.

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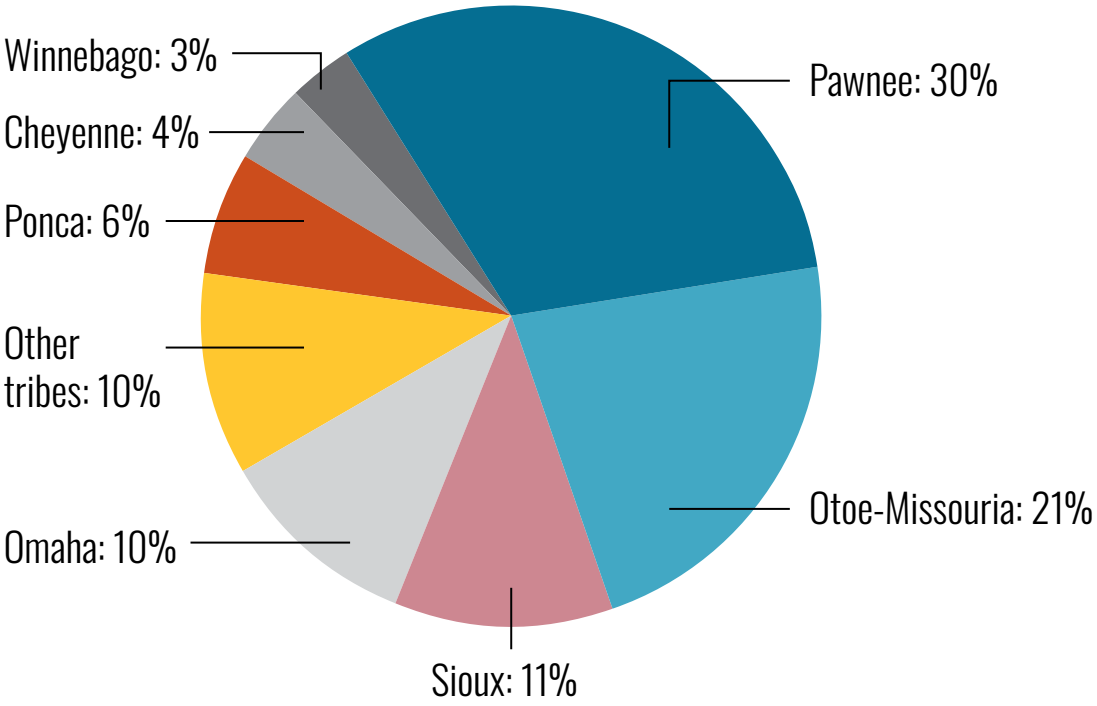
## MARKERS MENTIONING SPECIFIC INDIGENOUS NATIONS

### Markers Mentioning Specific Indigenous Nations




## MONUMENT MESSAGES: INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

**Backwards, Uncivilized Heathens**

Markers portray a backwards area and backwards people waiting for civilization to arrive and history to begin. The marker for "Bellevue" (located at 210 West Mission Ave, Bellevue (inside Bellevue City Hall), Sarpy County), for example, declares,

> Bellevue, gateway to the upper Missouri and the fur trade empire, is the oldest continuous settlement in Nebraska. This town was born, became important, almost died, and now in the 20th century, has been revitalized. Fur traders dealing with the Omaha, Ponca, Oto, and Pawnee, first gave it life. Manuel Lisa probably named it for the beautiful view at the junction of the Platte and Missouri Valleys.

Note, too, that this example refers to Bellevue as the "oldest continuous settlement" in Nebraska, although the Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous nations maintained villages in the same general locations for many hundreds of years.

This example from the "Fort Atkinson" marker (located at Corner of Adams and U.S. 75 (N 13th St., Washington County Museum, Fort Calhoun, Washington County) further conveys this attitude:

> Civilization came to the west bank of the Missouri with the establishment of Fort Atkinson in 1820 about a half mile southeast of here. Named after its founder, General Henry Atkinson, this western-most Fort protected the frontier's developing commerce. Established as a temporary camp in 1819, Fort Atkinson was the largest and strongest outpost above St. Louis. The permanent post went up a year later on the site of Lewis and Clark's Council with the Oto and Missouri Indians. From Fort Atkinson troops under the command of Col. Henry Leavenworth moved up the Missouri River in 1823 to punish the Arikara Indians after an attack on William H. Ashley's fur trading party. Members of the garrison ascended the river in 1825 on a mission of peace, participating in a series of treaties with the Indians. This spearhead of white civilization was abandoned in 1827. But in seven years Fort Atkinson had brought the first school, the first white family life, a library, a sawmill, a brickyard, a grist mill, and large-scale agriculture of the west bank of the Missouri.

**Minimizing Indigenous Presence**

Markers often minimize the presence of Indigenous people in the area before white settlement. Indigenous people hardly count as human in many of the monument narratives. For example, the "Big Blue River" marker (located at the I-80 rest area, eastbound, Milford, Seward County) notes,

> Except for the occasional Indian or white hunting parties, the scenic valley of the Big Blue River was seldom visited prior to 1860. The establishment of the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Cutoff in 1861 brought through the region thousands of overland freighting outfits, which crossed the river several miles south of here. Road Ranches were soon established along the trail, and scattered settlement began shortly thereafter. The Big Blue River played an important role in the history of the area and provided the necessary power for numerous water mills used in grinding grain for pioneer farmers.

In another example, the "Pawnee City" marker (located at Mini park, 7th and G streets, Pawnee City, Pawnee County) reads, *"Pawnee City, the county seat of Pawnee County, was platted and the first lots were sold in the spring of 1857. The county, named for the Pawnee Indians* **who lived in Nebraska for generations**, *was defined by the territorial legislature on March 3, 1855."* This phrase, "for generations," is like one many settler Nebraskans use today to describe themselves and their families. But the Pawnees lived here for hundreds of years. The "generations" term equates settler presence with that of Indigenous people, thus minimizing Indigenous claims to the land.

**Violent Aggressors**

Markers often present Native people as violent and aggressive, often in contrast to peaceful settlers. Markers commonly refer to Indigenous people as "hostile" to the U.S government and settlers and thereby justify military action against them. The "Franklin County Marker" (located at the County Courthouse, Franklin) notes,

> Present Franklin County was formerly a part of the buffalo hunting range of the Pawnee Indians, whose villages were at one time located further down the valley of the Republican River. Cheyenne and Sioux hunting parties also frequented the area prior to 1869, when General Carr's Republican

**Markers often present Native people as violent and aggressive, often in contrast to peaceful settlers. Markers commonly refer to Indigenous people as "hostile" to the U.S government and settlers and thereby justify military action against them.**

River Expedition cleared the valley of hostiles, opening the region to white settlement.

Markers also frequently label Native people as "brutal." The "Indian Captives" marker (located at Oregon Trail Park, Oak, Nuckolls County), for example, asserts,

> Sixteen-year-old Laura Roper, Mrs. Lucinda Eubanks, and children, Isabelle 3, and William 6 months, were captured by Indians at "The Narrows," Little Blue River, on Aug. 7, 1864. Laura and Isabelle were released to the Army at Hackberry Creek, KS, in Sept. 1864. Lucinda and baby, **brutally treated by the Indians**, were finally released near Fort Laramie, WY in May 1865. This marker is dedicated to the memory of Laura Roper, the Eubanks, and pioneers of the Little Blue Valley.

Earlier monuments frequently commemorated people who were "killed by Indians" (but did not mention the numerous Native people who were killed by settlers). The historical markers often veered far from actual historical fact as well. The Susan O. Haile gravestone in Kenesaw in Adams County, declares, "legend says this pioneer died after drinking water poisoned by Indians." In 1933, a local community organization created a new marble monument to preserve the original gravestone.

The overwhelming message from such markers is that the Indigenous people whose land settlers are appropriating are nuisances and barriers to settlement, not the rightful owners of the land.

**Vanishing Indians**

Markers convey that Indigenous people have disappeared. Of the 100 markers mentioning Indigenous people, 91 covered dates prior to 1890, suggesting that Indigenous people are no longer here; they have vanished. The earlier granite markers, with the near invisibility of Indigenous people, similarly convey an extinction of Nebraska's Indians. Despite removals of the Otoe-Missouria and other tribes from the state, four tribes still maintain a presence in the state: the Winnebago, the Omaha, the Santee Sioux, and the northern Ponca. About 16,000 Native Americans live in the state.

**Of the 100 markers mentioning Indigenous people, 91 covered dates prior to 1890, suggesting that Indigenous people are no longer here; they have disappeared or vanished.**

**KEY FINDING 3. The Otoe-Missouria Tribe, which occupied the area for hundreds of years, are mentioned on just 5% of the modern historical markers in the area.**

Of the 100 modern historical markers that mentioned Indigenous people, only 21 cover some aspect of Otoe-Missouria history. If there were not so many markers celebrating Lewis and Clark (8 or 38%), there would only be 13 markers that mention the Otoe-Missouria tribe. None of the earlier granite monuments mentioned the Otoe-Missouria. Markers nearly always spell Otoe as Oto and Missouria as Missouri, which shows lack of consultation with the tribe about how it represents itself in contemporary times.

Beyond the historical markers, entities such as the Nebraska Department of Transportation (formerly the Department of Roads), the National Park Service, and some non-profits have created nine interpretive panels in southeast Nebraska that mention the Otoe-Missouria.

## MONUMENT MESSAGES: THE OTOE-MISSOURIA

**Lewis and Clark's First Council**

Settlers have found the Otoe-Missouria worthy of mention primarily because the tribe was the first to meet Lewis and Clark and to hold a council with them on the eastern side of the Missouri River in what became the town of Council Bluffs, Iowa.

These markers sometimes contain important historical information about the Otoe-Missouria, such as the "Captain William Clark and Private Reuben Field" marker in Omaha, which notes that Clark and Field found some mounds along the Missouri River *"of Deffirent hight Shape & Size, Som Composed of Sand Some earth & sand.... all of which covered about 200 acres."* The marker notes "mounds may have been the remains of earth lodges, which served as dwellings for Oto Indians who had formerly lived nearby, or they may have been natural." The drafters of the marker narrative missed an opportunity to consult with the tribe about their historical knowledge.

**Ties to the Land Minimized**

Even when the Otoe-Missouria are mentioned, their presence and claim to the land is minimized. The 1776 Bicentennial Prairie Marker, for example, in Lancaster County, gives great attention to the flora and fauna of the area and mentions the Otoe-Missouria (and the Pawnee) people in passing:

> You are overlooking original prairie never broken by a plow. Nebraska looked much like this 200 years ago before the white men came: Grasses on which buffalo, elk, deer and antelope fed; ground cover for homes for quail, grouse, and prairie chickens; pure spring-fed streams where thirsty animals and birds could drink and where fish spawned; areas where wild strawberries, grapes, plum and chokecherry bushes bore fruit; walnut, cottonwood, and willow trees provided shade; where colorful flowers bloomed--wild indigo, purple coneflower, goldenrod, daisy fleabane, ground plum, dogtooth, and crowsfoot

> violets. A trail once used by the Pawnee Indians is now U.S. Highway 77. The area was shared with the Oto tribe.

**Victims of Their Own Making**

When the Otoe-Missouria Mission is commemorated in Bellevue, the plaque praised the Merrills while diminishing the Otoe-Missouria. The historical marker for the Oto Mission near Bellevue reads in part:

> . . . The Merrills were the first Christian missionaries sent to Nebraska. . . As the Mission developed, Merrill prepared a spelling book, a reader, and hymnals in Oto language. More buildings were erected, and a blacksmith and farmer joined the staff. The Oto were plagued by diminishing game supplies and demoralized by liquor. On April 28, 1837, Iatan was killed in an Indian feud, and his successor was unable to maintain the village at the Mission.

In this marker, Otoe-Missouria people are painted as victims of poor game and a disposition for alcohol, even though both of those problems can be directly traced back to settler society's encroachment on Indigenous territory. The marker also disparages Native leaders and paints the Otoe-Missouria as unable to govern themselves.

**Removal as a Simple Choice**

Some markers convey the Otoe-Missouria story of ceding land, encroachment on their reservation, and removal to Oklahoma, but in most cases, the narratives portray this as a voluntary choice on the part of the Otoe-Missouria, when the reality was so much more complex.

For example, the 1880 Diller marker in Jefferson County devotes most of its narrative to the freighters, settlers, stage drivers, and Pony Express riders that traveled on the overland trail through the area. It then mentions:

> In 1854 the Oto and Missouri tribes conveyed their lands to the U.S. Government in exchange for a reservation of some 160,000 acres along the Nebraska-Kansas border; Diller lies at its western end. The reservation was slowly surrounded by advancing white settlement and in 1869 three men pre-empted the land on which Diller is now situated. In 1876 the Indians agreed to sell part of their reserve, and in 1881 they moved to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

While acknowledging Otoe-Missouria land loss, the marker suggests that the Otoe-Missouria willingly "conveyed their lands to the U.S. government," sold their reservation, and moved to Indian Territory.

Similarly, the "Oto and Missouria Agency" marker in Barneston, Nebraska, asserts:

> After 1854 the Oto and Missouri Indian village and agency were located near here. For many years the two tribes had been living along the lower portion of the Platte River, but when Nebraska became a territory, they relinquished all claims to those lands. . . In the early 1870's the Oto and Missouri expressed a desire to move to Oklahoma.

As explored below, these markers and the collective story they tell could be strengthened by adding tribal perspective and analysis.

## Historical Markers that Mention Otoe-Missouria

| | |
|---|---|
| Before Creighton | Douglas |
| Captain William Clark and Private Reuben Field | Douglas |
| The Council Was Held | Douglas |
| Endeavor to Make Yourself Acquainted with the Indians | Douglas |
| Fort Lisa | Douglas |
| From Indian Lands to the Golden Gate | Douglas |
| Lewis and Clark Campsite, July 27, 1804 | Douglas |
| Oto Indians | Douglas |
| The Oketo Cutoff | Gage |
| The Oto and Missouria Agency | Gage |
| 1880 Diller | Jefferson |
| Cook | Johnson |
| 1776 Bicentennial Prairie Marker | Lancaster |
| Narcissa Whitman | Morrill |
| Half-Breed Tract | Nemaha |
| Earth Lodge Villages | Otoe |
| Village of Steinauer | Pawnee |
| The Villasur Expedition, 1720 | Platte |
| Pawnee Woman's Grave | Red Willow |
| Lewis and Clark Campsite, July 13, 1804 | Richardson |
| Bellevue | Sarpy |
| The Great Platte Valley | Sarpy |
| Oto Mission | Sarpy |
| Native Americans in the Lower Platte River Valley | Saunders |
| Platte River | Saunders |
| Saunders County | Saunders |
| The Yutan Oto Indian Village | Saunders |
| Fort Atkinson | Washington |
| Lewis and Clark Camp Site, July 30-August 2, 1804 | Washington |
| Lewis and Clark Camp Site, August 3-4, 1804 | Washington |
| "Up the Missouri" | Washington |
| Indians of Nebraska | York |

# THE TOP 15 MOST HONORED PEOPLE IN SOUTHEAST NEBRASKA

Lewis and Clark*

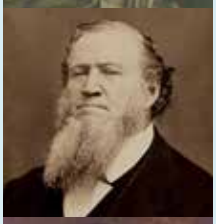
**15**

John C. Fremont

**8**

Willa Cather

**7**

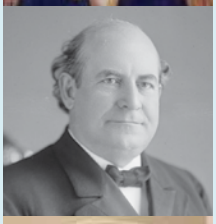


Brigham Young

**7**

Major Stephen Long*

**6**

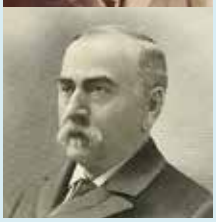


William Jennings Bryan

**6**

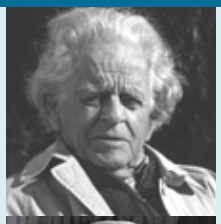
Buffalo Bill Cody

**5**



J. Sterling Morton

**3**



John G. Neihardt

**3**

Dwight D. Eisenhower

**3**

Franklin D. Roosevelt

**3**

Joseph La Flesche

**3**

Major Frank North

**3**

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte*

**3**

Barbara Mayhew

**3**

Chief Yutan (Ietan/Itan) / Sų Manyi Kathi

**3**

*Historic connection with Otoe-Missouria people

## ANALYSIS OF TOP 15

Of the top five individuals who are commemorated, four are men who spent minimal time in southeast Nebraska. Three (Lewis and Clark, Fremont, and Long) were explorers with military experience charged with surveying the area for future colonization and settlement. Brigham Young led a party of Latter-Day Saints through the area on the way to settling in Utah. Other than the Indigenous persons on the list, only six of the settlers in the top 15 spent any significant time in Nebraska as residents: Willa Cather, William Jennings Bryan, William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, J. Sterling Morton, John G. Neihardt, and Barbara Mayhew.

Ironically, then, even Nebraskans are not focused on honoring the individual settlers who stayed in the area. This reinforces the notion that the state is merely a place to pass through.

Interestingly, many of the top 15 memorials could have brought out Otoe-Missouria connections, but instead only focused on the settler narrative. For example, the explorer Stephen Long collected word lists from Otoe-Missouria and other tribes. A member of his expedition offered the first European detail drawings of individual Otoe-Missouria people. Buffalo Bill Cody hired several Otoe-Missouria as part of his Wild West Show.

The top 15 include just one Otoe-Missouria individual, Chief Sų Manyi Kathi (Yutan), who is mentioned in three historical markers, though not by his Otoe-Missouria name. In all cases, the markers only note that the Indian village of Yutan and subsequent settler town of Yutan were named for the chief. One marker notes Yutan was chief from about 1830 until his death in 1837, but otherwise, none of these markers include any further information about the chief's or tribe's history. Only two other Native individuals—Joseph La Flesche and his daughter Susan La Flesche Picotte, of the Omaha Tribe—are featured in historical markers.

With 15 examples, Lewis and Clark gain the lion's share of attention among the modern historical markers. Interestingly, they garner only a passing mention in the earlier granite markers. Only one early marker in Rulo concentrates on them. Nationally, Lewis and Clark have nearly 40 monuments, second only to Christopher Columbus.[34]

[34] Miron, "Statues, National Monuments, and Settler Colonialism."

The writer Willa Cather is another beloved subject in southeast Nebraska. The "Catherland" historical marker in Red Cloud—like much of her writing—presents the epitome of a settler narrative that lionizes "courageous" pioneers and renders Indigenous people invisible. It reads:

> Here on the Divide between the Republican and the Little Blue lived some of the most courageous people of the frontier. Their fortunes and their loves live again in the writings of Willa Cather, daughter of the plains and interpreter of man's growth in these fields and in the valleys beyond. On this beautiful, ever-changing land, man fought to establish a home. In her vision of the plow against the sun, symbol of the beauty and importance of work, Willa Cather caught the eternal blending of earth and sky. Willa Cather wrote from her heart the wonderful tales she heard and the vital drama she saw in her growing years. In her books those she loved and admired live forever. My Antonia, earth mother of the plains, grew to maturity, loved, worked, and died within a few miles of this spot, yet she is known and loved all over the world. 'The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman.' The history of this land

began in the heart of Willa Cather.

The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie historical marker, also near Red Cloud, quotes more extensively from her work and further mythologizes the "pioneers [who] tamed the wild land":

> Willa Cather first came to Webster County from Virginia in 1883 at the age of nine. The vast open prairies of Nebraska made a lasting impression on her. 'This country was mostly wild pasture and as naked as the back of your hand. I was little and homesick and lonely, and my mother was homesick, and nobody paid any attention to us. So, the country and I had it out together and by the end of the first autumn, that shaggy grass country had gripped me with a passion I have never been able to shake.' Her life task became portraying how the pioneers tamed the wild land."

The narrative of taming wild land—and by extension its original inhabitants—has real implications for Native people. Through ideologies such as Manifest Destiny and policies such as displacement of Native peoples, the mythology of taming the wild land portrays settlers as heroic characters while ignoring the brutal, devastating reality of what Native people faced because of their romanticization of the West.

# RE-INDIGENIZING SOUTHEAST NEBRASKA: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

In this section, we offer alternatives to the settler-centered narratives that abound in the historical markers. We identify two approaches that help to correct the collective historical narrative: 1.) Historical markers about tribal history that do not mention settlers and 2.) historical markers that present multiple perspectives, present historical reality, and provide analysis. Historical societies and organizations should consult with tribes about historical markers and/or invite them to submit their own memorials.

## HISTORICAL MARKERS THAT CENTER INDIGENOUS PEOPLE:

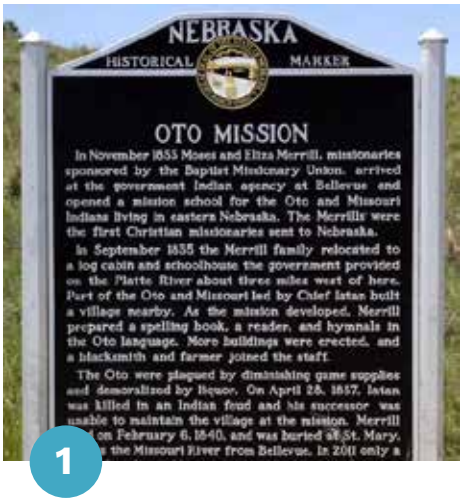
The "Earth Lodges" Marker, in Nebraska City, Nebraska, is at the end of the Earth Lodge Trail, which begins at the Lewis & Clark Missouri River Visitors Center. It was erected in 2013 by the National Park Service and Mouth of the Platte Chapter, Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc.

> "The Otoe and Missouria people who lived in this area in the 1700s and 1800s built villages with small groupings of earth lodges. Like the Omahas, Poncas and Pawnees who lived in Nebraska and Kansas, and Mandans, Arikawas and Hidatsas in the Dakotas, their earth lodges were permanent structures.
>
> A framework of heavy timber posts supported the circular, dome-shaped structures, with a covering of poles, prairie grass, and sod providing strength and insulation from heat and cold. In the summer, they constructed arbors to provide shade, and scaffolds to dry meat, vegetables and firewood.
>
> Nearby were family garden plots, where women and children sowed and harvested corn, beans, watermelon, tobacco and pumpkins.
>
> For brief trips in the spring and summer, and during buffalo hunts, they traveled with their "mobile homes" made of poles and animal skins, known as tipis.
>
> [Inset photo caption reads] Earth lodges such as the replica lodge constructed here would have been home to 20 to 25 people, plus a few prized ponies."

Otoe-Missouria people, their culture, and their history were set apart from any interactions they had with settlers. By mentioning that "their earth lodges were permanent structures," it also counters the notion that the Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous people were only temporary dwellers on the land, easily removable. More of these kinds of markers, especially initiated by tribal nations and written from the first-person, tribal perspective, would be welcome.

## HISTORICAL MARKERS THAT PRESENT MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES, PRESENT HISTORICAL REALITY, AND PROVIDE ANALYSIS:

We offer the following revisions of three historical markers important to the Otoe-Missouria as an example of how to weave together multiple perspectives while presenting historical reality and providing analysis.



1

2

3

## CURRENT TEXT: OTO-MISSOURIA MISSION (BELLEVUE)

"In November 1833 Moses and Eliza Merrill, missionaries sponsored by the Baptist Missionary Union, arrived at the government Indian agency at Bellevue and opened a mission school for the Oto and Missouri Indians living in eastern Nebraska. The Merrills were the first Christian missionaries sent to Nebraska. In September 1835 the Merrill family relocated to a log cabin and schoolhouse the government provided on the Platte River about three miles west of here. Part of the Oto and Missouri led by Chief Iatan built a village nearby. As the Mission developed, Merrill prepared a spelling book, a reader, and hymnals in Oto language. More buildings were erected, and a blacksmith and farmer joined the staff.

The Oto were plagued by diminishing game supplies and demoralized by liquor. On April 28, 1837, Iatan was killed in an Indian feud, and his successor was unable to maintain the village at the Mission. Merrill died on February 6, 1840, and was buried at St. Mary, across Missouri River from Bellevue. In 2011 only a stone fireplace and chimney remain at the mission site."

1


## NEW DRAFT TEXT: OTOE-MISSOURIA MISSION (BELLEVUE)

In the early 1830s, one group of Jiwére-Nút'áchi (Otoe-Missouria) people, led by Chief Sų Manyi Kathi (known to settlers as Chief Ietan or Yutan) moved from their village on the Platte River to an area on the Missouri River near present-day Bellevue.

In 1832, two Baptist missionaries, Moses and Eliza Merrill, opened a mission school for Otoe-Missouria children 8 miles west of Bellevue. Moses Merrill created a writing system for their language, in part so he could Christianize them. His diary mentions that some Otoe-Missouria learned his system and were able to read their language. Moses Merrill wrote the first book published in what would become the state of Nebraska, *Wdtwhtl Wdwdklha Eva Wdhonetl (Wadotą Wawagaxe Etawe Yąwe Waxonyitą [Otoe Book of Hymns])*. Merrill also translated Rev. Samuel Lieberkuhn's The History of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in Jiwére-Nút'áchi ich'e. During this time, Merrill created the First Ioway Reading Book and left behind detailed diaries with names and pronunciation keys. Merrill's efforts, while aimed at undermining Indigenous society and culture, inadvertently helped future Otoe-Missouria and Ioway people preserve and maintain their languages. Moses Merrill passed away on February 6, 1840, and was buried in St. Mary across the Nyi Sóje (Missouri River).

## CURRENT TEXT: THE OTO AND MISSOURIA AGENCY (BARNESTON)

"After 1854 the Oto and Missouri Indian village and agency were located near here. For many years the two tribes had been living along the lower portion of the Platte River, but when Nebraska became a territory, they relinquished all claims to those lands. In exchange they received yearly cash payments, agricultural equipment and other goods in addition to a reservation of approximately 250 square miles around the village.

According to Indian Agent Major A. L. Green the community in 1870 consisted of 40 earth lodges plus several bark houses and tipis. There were also a combination school and church and a two-story frame house for the agent. South of the village was a blacksmith shop, a steam-powered sawmill and grist mill and residences for the other agency employees.

In the early 1870's the Oto and Missouri expressed a desire to move to Oklahoma. The reservation was sold, and by 1881 the two tribes had left Nebraska for their new home. After the Indians left, Francis M. Barnes opened a store near here to accommodate the settlers. The community of Barneston was named in his honor."

2


## NEW DRAFT TEXT: THE OTOE AND MISSOURIA AGENCY (BARNESTON)

Barneston sits atop one of the largest Otoe-Missouria village sites from the 19th Century. For many generations, Otoe and Missouria people lived in southeastern Nebraska along the Platte River (Nyi Brathge) and its tributaries in various villages. In 1854, the Otoe-Missouria Tribe, facing starvation, ceded by treaty more than a million acres of land near the Platte River to the United States. About 600 Otoe-Missouria were forced to move to a reservation along the Big Blue River in Gage County. Several Otoe-Missouria families, most of mixed descendancy, established small farms in the eastern end of the reservation. Prominent among them was the family of Francis Marion Barnes, a white settler married to Mary Jane Drips Benoist, an Otoe woman, who operated a trading post in what would become Barneston. In the 1870s, Congress voted to sell the western half of Otoe-Missouria land to settlers who were already illegally squatting on the land. The Otoe-Missouria people received almost no money from the land sales and faced constant harassment from the trespassers. The Coyote faction of Otoe-Missouria moved away from encroaching white settlement to live among their relatives, the Ioway, and their former enemies, the Sauk, in both Nebraska and Indian Territory. In 1881, Congress authorized the sale of remaining Otoe-Missouria lands and the removal of the entire tribe to Indian Territory near present-day Red Rock, Oklahoma.

## CURRENT TEXT: THE YUTAN OTO INDIAN VILLAGE (YUTAN)

"Spanish colonial correspondence from 1777 noting the presence of an Oto Indian village on the Platte likely refers to the Yutan site, named after the Chief Ietan. Yutan would have been the first Indian settlement seen by fur trappers and military expeditions traveling up the Platte Valley to the Rocky Mountains. In 1833 the village was the site of a treaty between the Oto, Pawnee, and Delaware, and in 1835 the Oto abandoned the site. Two decades later, the reservation period began for the tribe."

3


## NEW DRAFT TEXT: *WĄNGEGIHI SỤ MÁNYI KÁTHI, CHÍNA IGÍGANYE NĄHĄ*/CHIEF PRAIRIE WOLF AND THE VILLAGE THEY NAMED FOR HIM

The Otoe people established a village on the Platte River near here in the early 1700s, and Spanish correspondence from 1777 noted the presence of this site. Their relatives the Missouria people joined them in the late 1790s. Eventually, they split into two villages on the site, which they occupied until 1837. The village came to be known as Ietan or Yutan, which were names Europeans knew Chief Sụ Manyi Kathi by. It is likely he received the name Yutan after a battle with a tribal group known as the Ietan. He was "distinguished early in life as a daring, active, and successful warrior." He rose to the highest leadership role in the tribe through his position in the Bear Clan.

This site was the first major Native settlement seen by Spanish, French, and American fur trappers and traders going up the Platte to hunt bison and trap beavers. The Otoe and Missouria positioned themselves as the gatekeepers to the Omaha, Ponca, Lakota, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes in the upper Missouri River valley. The Otoe and Missouria generally had favorable relationships with Europeans, except when the Otoe and Pawnee fought together against the Spanish Villasur Expedition in 1720.

# AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As we examined the current historical markers, we identified several topics that merit further research and commemoration, including:

Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous interactions with French traders and the prominence of Indigenous people in trade.

Stephen Long's interaction with the Otoe-Missouria and other Indigenous people in the area, including the 2003 excavation of his winter quarters. Long's expedition provided the first artistic representations of Otoe-Missouria people. He also collected words from tribes he met—a resource for contemporary language revitalization.

Otoe-Missouria Civil War service of James Whitewater, Buffalo Black, and Richard Roubedeaux. Archival research could provide further information for families of the three Otoe-Missouria soldiers who served the United States even though they weren't considered citizens or persons with freedom.

Possible new markers at the identified Otoe and Missouria sites by the Nebraska State Historical Society. These sites include Ashland, Good Earth, Milford and Gillette Grove, Eagle Ridge, Downtown Omaha, Woodcliff, and the Mouth of the Platte.

# METHODOLOGY

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln Community and Regional Planning Program was tasked with conducting an analysis of the current commemorative landscape in 44 counties in southeast Nebraska that encompass the Otoe-Missouria's territory. Researchers used textual and content analysis of the Nebraska Historical Marker program, sponsored by the Nebraska State Historical Society. Researchers analyzed the historical markers using MAXQDA, a mixed methods content analysis program, which has tools for coding, visualization, and statistics. Researchers coded markers for three main topics: "Indigenous people," "settlers," or both "settlers and Indigenous people."

Co-directors Christina Goodson and Margaret Jacobs supplemented this analysis of the Nebraska Historical Marker program with additional analysis of the earlier, pre-World War II granite markers as well as commemorations developed by the National Park Service, the Nebraska Department of Transportation, and Nebraska Game and Parks.

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# APPENDIX: OTOE-MISSOURIA HISTORICAL MARKERS WITH FULL TEXT

## DOUGLAS COUNTY

***Before Creighton***

Located at: 1821 California St, Creighton University, Omaha.

Erected by:

Text: "Archaeological evidence shows periodic Native American residence in this general area for some 12,000 years. From the mid-1600s to the early 1700s the Omaha, Ponca, Oto, and Ioway migrated from the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes to today's western Iowa and eastern Nebraska. The Pawnee were the only Native Americans then living in the region. In the 1860s the Winnebago and Santee Sioux were relocated to Nebraska. From the 1730s to the 1760s the Oto occupied an earthlodge village extending from today's Creighton campus to downtown Omaha. In 1804 Lewis and Clark recorded the ruins as "ancient village of the Ottoes on mounds." Jesuits began work among North America's Native peoples in the 1600s, and in 1829 opened a mission center in St. Louis. In 1838-39 Father Pierre J. DeSmet and other Jesuits founded St. Joseph's Mission for the Potawatamie tribe across the Missouri River from here. Although the Pawnee, Oto-Missouria, and Iowa nations now reside elsewhere, the Omaha, Northern Ponca, parts of the Winnebago and Santee Sioux, and a significant urban Indian population in Omaha and other Nebraska cities remain Creighton's neighbors and partners."

**Captain William Clark and Private Reuben Field**

Located at: 41° 15.682′ N, 95° 55.417′ W in Omaha. Marker can be reached from Riverfront Drive, 0.1 miles north of Dodge Street, on the right when traveling north. The marker is located on an observation deck at the Lewis and Clark Landing on the Missouri River.

Erected by: Mouth of the Platte Chapter, Lewis and Clark Heritage Foundation, Inc. Nebraska State Historical Society.

Text: "On July 27, 1804, Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery left their "White Catfish" camp and proceeded up the Missouri River. After traveling some distance, Clark "took one man R. Field and walked on Shore with a View of Examoning Som mounds" on the Nebraska side. He found the mounds "of Deffirent hight Shape & Size, Som Composed of Sand Some earth & sand.... all of which covered about 200 acres." The mounds may have been the remains of earth lodges, which served as dwellings for Oto Indians who had formerly lived nearby, or they may have been natural. Most were located between what is now Farnam, Davenport, Eight, and Eleventh streets of downtown Omaha. Clark and Field did not reach the evening campsite, near present day Eppley Airfield, until after dark. The next morning the expedition proceeded on. On August 3 Lewis and Clark met with Oto and Missouria Indians at a place the captains named "Council Bluff," near present day Fort Calhoun, Nebraska. It later became the site of Fort Atkinson."

**The Council Was Held**

Located at: 41° 15.918′ N, 95° 55.439′ W in Omaha. Marker is on the grounds of the National Park Service Lewis and Clark Historic Trail Headquarters.

Erected by: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Text: "Near here, the Corps of Discovery held its first council, making speeches and presenting gifts to the Otoe and Missouria. Communicating through an interpreter, members of the Expedition believed their messages were clear. But were they? This meeting was the first of many formal and informal exchanges between members of the Expedition and tribes along the trail. The Expedition crossed the territories of more than 100 American Indian tribes. Oral tradition, passed from generation to generation within tribes, preserves their stories of the Expedition."

**Endeavor to make yourself acquainted with the Indians**

Located at: 41° 15.922′ N, 95° 55.454′ W in Omaha. Marker is on the grounds of the National Park Service Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Headquarters.

Erected by: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Text: "In August 1804, members of the Expedition visited villages like this one, homes to the Otoe and Missouria who lived in what is today Omaha. Planning to invite these tribes to a council, or meeting, the explorers found the villages deserted. The tribes had left to hunt buffalo. Through their journeys, the men of the Expedition held formal councils with the tribes they met. Jefferson instructed the explorers to make themselves "acquainted...with...the nations," to note the "articles of commerce [the Indians] may need or furnish," and to prepare descriptions of "food, clothing, & domestic accommodations." The explorers met with tribes for reasons of trade, ethnography, and diplomacy. They also relied on American Indians for information, food, and clothing."

**Fort Lisa**

Located at: 41° 22.401′ N, 95° 57.217′ W near Omaha. Marker is is located at the entrance to Hummel Park at the intersection of John J. Pershing Dr. and Hummel Rd.

Erected by: Nebraska Society U.S. Daughters of 1812 in 1927.

Text: "Built near this site in 1807 by Manuel Lisa, trader and indian commissioner, through whose influence the Omaha, Pawnee, Ponca, Otoe and Sioux tribes remained loyal to the United States during the War of 1812."

**From Indian Lands to the Golden Gate**

Located at: 41° 20.264′ N, 95° 57.639′ W in Florence. Marker is on 30th Street, on the right when traveling north.

Erected by:

Text: "Florence was a small town with a big history. The Oto, Missouri, and Omaha Indians lived and hunted here. Frenchmen, Canadians and Spaniards traded along the Missouri river. Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery made their first contact with Indians near N.P. Dodge Park in 1804 and arranged for an official Council a few miles up the river. The Lewis and Clark Expedition opened the area to American fur traders. Pioneers followed soon after. The first to migrate through here were the Mormons. Persecuted for their religion, they were forced to leave Illinois in February 1846, crossing the frozen Mississippi River. Four months later they arrived, discouraged and tired, at what today is called Florence. The Omaha Indians gave the Mormons permission to build a settlement on their land. Winter Quarters was built as a temporary city for about 4,000 Mormons. They spent two years renewing their strength and confidence. They ordained a President and prepared to continue their journey to religious freedom. In 1848, the Mormons abandoned their city, leaving behind a mill, cemetery, and a network of roads, bridges and ferries. One year later, in 1849, California gold was discovered and "gold fever" infected the nation. Thousands of "gold rushers" traveled the Mormon Trail through here. By 1852, the North Mormon Ferry became known as the "Golden Gate" because of the large numbers of gold rushers crossing the Missouri River. This was the land where the fabled and adventurous West began."

**Lewis and Clark Campsite, July 27, 1804**

Located at: 41° 21.513′ N, 95° 57.106′ W near Omaha. Marker is located inside NP Dodge Memorial Park and can be reached from Dodge Park Road, 0.6 miles east of John J. Pershing Dr. Follow the signs towards the campsite to find the marker.

Erected by: Nebraska State Historical Society; National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Text: "At the camp established very near here Captain Clark wrote about the "butifull Breeze from the N W. this evening which would have been verry agreeable, had the Misquiters been tolerably Pacifick, but thy were rageing all night." Clark may have exaggerated when he noted that the mosquitoes were as big as house flies. They would continue to plague the explorers until winter. That evening Clark and Ruben Fields "walked on Shore with a View of examoning Som mounds." Although the mounds were probably natural features, Clark noted that the Oto Indians formerly lived there. Lewis and Clark had been trying to contact Indians who lived in the area. On July 28 one of the hunters "brought in a Missouri Indian who resides with the Otteauz, this Indian & 2 others were Hunting in the Prarie their Camp is about 4 miles off." On August 3 the explorers met with the leaders of the Oto and Missouria tribes at a site they named "Council Bluff," near present Fort Calhoun, Nebraska."

**Oto Indians**

Located at: 27702 F St, Waterloo.

Erected by:

Text: "Prehistoric Indians were the earliest inhabitants of this area. By 1760, the Oto and part of the Missouri Tribe occupied an earth lodge village near here on the west bank of the Platte River, a short distance above the mouth of the Elkhorn. Spanish and French explorers contacted the Oto during the late 18th century. In July 1804, men from the Lewis and Clark expedition traveled to the Oto village only to find the tribe away on their

annual buffalo hunt. When the Indians returned, the explorers held a council with them at a site on the Missouri River which became known as "the council bluffs." During the 1830's, Baptist missionaries Moses and Eliza Merrill worked among the Oto and Missouri. In 1854, the tribes ceded their lands along the Platte and Elkhorn and moved to a reservation on the Blue River near the Nebraska-Kansas border. The present-day community of Yutan is named after Itan, chief of the Oto from about 1830 until his death in 1837. Two Rivers State Recreation Area, at the confluence of two historic waterways, was opened in 1960 by the State Game and Parks Commission."

## GAGE COUNTY

**The Oketo Cutoff**

Located at: Nebr. 8, milepost 74.6, west of Odell.

Text: "From October 1862 until March 1863 stagecoaches of the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express passed near here along the Oketo Cutoff. The cutoff diverged from the Ft. Leavenworth to Ft. Kearny Military Road northeast of Marysville, Kansas, angled northwest to cross the Big Blue River near Oketo, Kansas, and passed through the Otoe Indian Reservation and land that would be the short-lived village of Charleston, just south of the later site of Odell, Nebraska. The cutoff rejoined the main trail between Steele City and Diller, Nebraska. Express company owner Ben Holladay, who had the government contract to carry mail and passengers from the Missouri River to California, ordered the cutoff laid out at an estimated cost of $50,000, producing a shorter, better road and bypassing Marysville after the town refused to improve the Military Road. Although Holladay's coaches used the Oketo cutoff, freighters' and other travelers continued to follow the Military Road, which had been popular since the late 1840s. After only a few months Holladay abandoned the cutoff, although the road may have seen continued use."

**The Oto and Missouria Agency**

Located at: 40° 2.692′ N, 96° 34.525′ W in Barneston. Marker is on State Highway 8 east of 108th Road, on the right when traveling west.

Erected by: Barneston Village Council, Barneston Bicentennial Committee, and Nebraska State Historical Society.

Text: "After 1854 the Oto and Missouri Indian village and agency were located near here. For many years the two tribes had been living along the lower portion of the Platte River, but when Nebraska became a territory, they relinquished all claims to those lands. In exchange they received yearly cash payments, agricultural equipment and other goods in addition to a reservation of approximately 250 square miles around the village. According to Indian Agent Major A. L. Green the community in 1870 consisted of 40 earth lodges plus several bark houses and tipis. There were also a combination school and church and a two-story frame house for the agent. South of the village was a blacksmith shop, a steam-powered sawmill and grist mill and residences for the other agency employees. In the early 1870's the Oto and Missouri expressed a desire to move to Oklahoma. The reservation was sold, and by 1881 the two tribes had left Nebraska for their new home. After the Indians left, Francis M. Barnes opened a store near here to accommodate the settlers. The community of Barneston was named in his honor."

## JEFFERSON COUNTY

**1880 Diller**

Located at: City Park, east side of Nebr. 103, Diller.

Erected by:

Text: "Diller lies in the Blue River Valley near the route of the old Oregon and California trails. Freighters from Atchison and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, passed near here while supplying military outposts to the West. Settlers in covered wagons, the Pony Express, and stage lines also followed the route. In 1854 the Oto and Missouri tribes conveyed their lands to the U.S. Government in exchange for a reservation of some 160,000 acres along the Nebraska-Kansas border; Diller lies at its western end. The reservation was slowly surrounded by advancing white settlement and in 1869 three men pre-empted the land on which Diller is now situated. In 1876 the Indians agreed to sell part of their reserve, and in 1881 they moved to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. Platted in 1880, Diller was named for Samuel Diller, who assisted early settlers. David Kelley was the first postmaster. In 1881 the Republican Valley Railroad, later part of the Burlington system, completed tracks into the town. Incorporated on April 22, 1885, Diller reached a maximum population of about 500 between 1910 and 1920. Diller maintains the proud spirit of its pioneer forefathers after a century of the Good Life."

## JOHNSON COUNTY

**Cook**

Located at: 40° 30.563′ N, 96° 9.869′ W in Cook. Marker is in Cook City Park and can be reached from West Main Street (State Highway 49A Spur) just west of South Third Street.

Erected by: Nebraska State Historical Society and Farmers Bank of Cook.

Text: "This region was once home to Oto and Missouri Indians, who ceded their land to the government before Nebraska Territory was created in 1854. White settlers arrived in 1857 and founded a town and post office named Helena about four miles west of here. Spring Creek Post Office was established in 1868 about two miles to the southeast. A settlement named Bob Town, with a school, a church, and a few businesses, grew up nearby. When the Crete branch of the Missouri Pacific Railroad was built along the south fork of the Little Nemaha River in 1888, the rails bypassed Helena and Bob Town. John William Cook founded a new town named after his father, Andrew Cook Sr., on the railroad right-of-way. Spring Creek Post Office moved to Cook; Helena and Bob Town disappeared. Cook had about fifty residents when the first train arrived in November 1888, and the village incorporated in 1891. Because of many artesian wells nearby, Cook became known as "Artesian City."

## LANCASTER COUNTY

**1776 Bicentennial Prairie Marker**

Located at: East of HWY 77 on Sprague Rd.

Text: "You are overlooking original prairie never broken by a plow. Nebraska looked much like this 200 years ago before the white men came: Grasses on which buffalo, elk, deer and antelope fed; ground cover for homes for quail, grouse, and prairie chickens; pure spring-fed streams where thirsty animals and birds could drink and where fish spawned; areas where wild strawberries, grapes, plum and chokecherry bushes bore fruit; walnut, cottonwood, and willow trees provided shade; where colorful flowers bloomed--wild indigo, purple coneflower, goldenrod, daisy fleabane, ground plum, dogtooth, and crowsfoot violets. A trail once used by the Pawnee Indians is now U.S. Highway 77. The area was shared with the Oto tribe. To the east in 1856 John Prey, A. J. and Richard Wallingford, and others became some of Lancaster County's first settlers. A few miles to the north, the Fort Kearny Cut-off carried wagon trains westward during the 1850's and 1860's. Sod like you see was cut and used by settlers to build homes. This marker rests on railroad land purchased by William Mitchell in the early 1880's and has been preserved by his descendants including his grandson, Charlton Mitchell."

## MORRILL COUNTY

**Narcissa Whitman**

Located at: 41° 33.408′ N, 102° 43.848′ W near Lisco. Marker is on U.S. 26, 7 miles west of Lisco.

Erected by: Oregon-California Trails Association and Nebraska State Historical Society.

Text: "Narcissa Whitman, trailblazer and martyred missionary, is one of the great heroines of the frontier West. In 1836 she and Eliza Spalding, following the north side of the Platte on horseback, became the first white women to cross the American continent. The Protestant 'Oregon Mission'was composed of Dr. Marcus Whitman, Rev. Henry Spalding, their new brides, and William Gray. They traveled from New York to Otoe Indian Agency (Bellevue, Nebraska), then joined an American Fur Company caravan led by Thomas Fitzpatrick. From the Green River rendezvous, they journeyed westward with traders of the Hudson's Bay Company. In November 1847, Narcissa, her husband, and eleven others, were massacred by Cayuse Indians at their Walla Walla mission, now a National Historic Site. The missionaries passed this point in June 1836. In May 1847 the Mormon Pioneers passed here en route from Winter Quarters (present North Omaha) to Salt Lake Valley, calling these formations "Ancient Bluff Ruins." Beginning with the California Gold Rush in 1849 this "Mormon Pioneer Trail" became "the Council Bluffs Road" to emigrants bound for the West Coast."

## NEMAHA COUNTY

**Half-Breed Tract**

Located at: 40° 23.576′ N, 95° 49.306′ W near Auburn. Marker is on Central Avenue (U.S. 136) near Half-Breed Road, on the right when traveling west.

Erected by: Auburn Junior Woman's Club and Historical Landmark Council.

Text: "It was an accepted custom for many early fur traders to marry into Indian tribes. As the Indians ceded their lands, the rights of the half-breed descendants were not always identified. This situation was recognized by the government in 1830, by the Prairie Du Chien Treaty which set aside a tract of land for the half-breeds of the Oto, Iowa, Omaha and Santee Sioux tribes. This tract was located between the Great and Little Nemaha rivers. In 1838, the land was surveyed by John C. McCoy, who placed the western boundary as specified. This caused problems, as later white settlers were to settle on Indian lands west of McCoy's line. Congress ordered the land resurveyed, and in 1858 the McCoy line was made official. On September 10, 1860, Louis Neal received the first patent. The owners were never required to live on their property and many eventually sold their lands to whites. One of the original survey lines is now partly identified by the Half-Breed Road which runs in a southeast direction from here. The descendants of some pioneer fur traders still live in the area."

## OTOE COUNTY

**Earth Lodge Villages**

Located at: 40° 40.054′ N, 95° 49.917′ W in Nebraska City. Marker is at the end of the Earth Lodge Trail, which begins at the Lewis & Clark Missouri River Visitors Center.

Erected by: National Park Service and Mouth of the Platte Chapter, Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc.

Text: "The Otoe and Missouria people who lived in this area in the 1700s and 1800s built villages with small groupings of earth lodges. Like the Omahas, Poncas and Pawnees who lived in Nebraska and Kansas, and Mandans, Arikawas and Hidatsas in the Dakotas, their earth lodges were permanent structures. A framework of heavy timber posts supported the circular, dome-shaped structures, with a covering of poles, prairie grass, and sod providing strength and insulation from heat and cold. In the summer, they constructed arbors to provide shade, and scaffolds to dry meat, vegetables and firewood. Nearby were family garden plots, where women and children sowed and harvested corn, beans, watermelon, tobacco and pumpkins. For brief trips in the spring and summer, and during buffalo hunts, they traveled with their "mobile homes" made of poles and animal skins, known as tipis."

[Inset photo caption reads] Earth lodges such as the replica lodge constructed here would have been home to 20 to 25 people, plus a few prized ponies.

Left, Pe'Dagahi and his wife at Omaha Earth Lodge Home, 1869.

Photo by William Henry

Earth Lodge Replica and Marker image. Click for full size.

Photographed by William Fischer, Jr., June 23, 2013

2. Earth Lodge Replica and Marker

Jackson, Nebraska State Historical Society, RG1289-20-01.

[Background] Illustration by Linda S. Meigs, 2013.

## PAWNEE COUNTY

**Village of Steinauer**

Located at: 40° 12.254′ N, 96° 10.918′ W near Steinauer. Marker is on Nebraska Route 67B Spur just west of Nebraska Route 50, on the left when traveling east. Marker is in a pull-out on the north side of Nebraska 67B, about 3 miles east of Steinauer.

Erected by: Nebraska State Historical Society and Steinauer Historical Society.

Text: "Warnings to avoid 'bloody Kansas' prompted the Steinauer brothers, Anton, Nicholas, and Joseph, to settle here in Pawnee County. They arrived in September 1856, only two years after the creation of Nebraska Territory. Famine and depression had forced them to leave their native Switzerland in 1852. Although the brothers were among the first to claim land in this area, other immigrants of Swiss, German, Austrian and Bohemian descent soon settled nearby. Nebraska City became their chief social and trading center.

Indians, including the Oto, hunted and trapped in the region. Turkey Creek and Linden were early popular designations for the site which became Steinauer post office in 1874. After the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railway reached Steinauer in 1887, the village grew steadily, and incorporation followed in March 1893. With railroad development, St. Joseph, Missouri became the chief urban market for the agricultural products of Steinauer and the surrounding area. By 1910, the village's peak population of 248 had been achieved. Over the years, the pronunciation of the name evolved to "Steener" though the original spelling has been retained. Today, Steinauer is a quiet community which remains rooted in the history and traditions of its pioneer settlers."

## PLATTE COUNTY

**The Villasur Expedition, 1720**

Located at: 41° 25.382′ N, 97° 22.126′ W in Columbus. Marker is in Pawnee Park at the intersection of 33rd Avenue (U.S. 30/81) and 7th Street, on the right when traveling south on 33rd Avenue.

Erected by: Nebraska State Historical Society.

Text: "In June 1720 a Spanish military force led by Sir Pedro de Villasur left Santa Fe, New Mexico, to gather information on French activities near the Missouri River. The force included 45 veteran soldiers, 60 Pueblo Indian allies, some Apache scouts, and a priest. Indian trader Juan L'Archeveque, and Jose Naranjo, a black explorer who had reconnoitered Nebraska's Platte River, accompanied the expedition. Near present Schuyler, Nebraska, Villasur's command met large numbers of Pawnee and Oto Indians who were allies of the French. The Spanish withdrew to approximately this area and camped. The next morning, August 14, 1720, the Indians attacked. Within minutes Villasur, L'Archeveque, Naranjo, 31 soldiers, 11 Pueblo Indians, and the priest lay dead. The survivors fled across the prairie and reached Santa Fe September 6. Spanish losses were the greatest suffered by Europeans in any battle with Indians on Nebraska soil. The Villasur expedition was the deepest official penetration of the Great Plains until the 1790s, when Spanish fur traders ascended the Missouri River. After 1720 no Spanish military force reached Nebraska country until the 1806 Melgares Expedition visited the Pawnee village on the Republican River."

## RED WILLOW COUNTY

**Pawnee Woman's Grave**

Located at: 40° 14.088′ N, 100° 25.319′ W in Indianola. Marker is located in city park on U.S. 34, 0.1 miles west of 7th Street, on the right when traveling west.

Erected by: Bicentennial Ladies Group and Nebraska State Historical Society.

Text: "The Republican Valley was the center of one of the major buffalo ranges of the Great Plains. It was a favorite hunting ground of several Indian tribes. Pawnee, Sioux, Oto and Cheyenne spent much time here as late as 1874. These tribal hunts, however, created problems, for they brought together tribes traditionally at war. The major encounter in the region was the Battle of Massacre Canyon, fought on August 5, 1873. It took place twenty-five miles west of here near present Trenton. A thousand Sioux warriors surprised and defeated a Pawnee hunting party of 350 men, women and children, killing 69 of them. The Pawnee retreated to this vicinity, where they mourned their dead throughout the night. One survivor was a severely wounded Pawnee woman, whose child had been killed in the battle. A homesteader found her a few miles upstream and brought her here to Indianola a frontier settlement established in 1872. The woman was cared for by the settlers until she died a few days later. A crude coffin was prepared, and she was buried on the banks of Coon Creek. Her body was reburied here in 1975 by the community during the American Revolution Bicentennial Year. Representatives of the Pawnee Indian Tribe took part in the ceremony."

## RICHARDSON COUNTY

**Lewis and Clark Campsite, July 13, 1804**

Located at: U.S. 159, east side of Rulo.

Text: "On this day the explorers passed along this stretch of the Missouri River and camped a few miles north of here on the Nebraska side. The tranquil weather recorded by Clark in his journal for July 13 was in sharp contrast with violent storms the night before. Two notable incidents occurred on July 12. Private Alexander Willard was court-martialed for falling asleep on guard duty and sentenced to receive "one hundred lashes on his bare back, at four different times in equal

propation." Captain Clark went a short distance up the Nemaha River, where he "observed artificial mounds (or as I may more Justly term Graves) which to me is a Strong indication of this Country being once Thickly Settled." This site is a prehistoric Oto village and cemetery. Near the mouth of the Nemaha River, Clark 'observed Some Indian marks, went to the rock which jutted over the water and marked my name & the day of the month and year.' No evidence of his inscription can be found today."

## SARPY COUNTY

**Bellevue**

Located at: Bellevue City Hall, 210 West Mission Ave, Bellevue

Erected by:

Text: "Bellevue, gateway to the upper Missouri and the fur trade empire, is the oldest continuous settlement in Nebraska. This town was born, became important, almost died, and now in the 20th century, has been revitalized. Fur traders dealing with the Omaha, Ponca, Oto, and Pawnee, first gave it life. Manuel Lisa probably named it for the beautiful view at the junction of the Platte and Missouri Valleys. In 1823, an Indian Agency was established in Bellevue. Here and at the Peter Sarpy fur trading post travelers such as Prince Maximilian, Carl Bodmer, George Catlin, and John C. Fremont, were welcomed. By 1846 Bellevue was a steamboat landing and the site of an important Indian Mission. Here Francis Burt, the first territorial governor, arrived in 1854, and the first territorial newspaper, the Nebraska Palladium, was published. When the territorial capital was located at Omaha, and the Pacific Railroad was routed to the north, Bellevue faded. In the 1940's the town was rejuvenated when thousands of military personnel, who man the Strategic Air Command center of defense for the western world, made Bellevue their home."

**The Great Platte Valley**

Located at: I-80 rest area, westbound, near Gretna.

Erected by:

Text: "Here is the great Platte Valley, Highway to the West. On these nearby bluffs prehistoric Indians built their homes. The Pawnee and Oto established large earthlodge villages near here. As you travel west in the valley you will follow the route of the Indians, white explorers, and the early trails to the western United States. In 1820, an exploring party under Major Stephen Long followed the Platte Valley to the Rocky Mountains, as did an 1826 expedition under General William Ashley. By 1830, the valley had become the major supply route for fur traders in the Rocky Mountains. Beginning in 1847, the Mormons on their way to Utah followed a trail along the north side of the Platte. The Oregon Trail reached the Platte 150 miles west of here and followed the south side of the river. By the late 1850's, it was estimated that 90% of all traffic which crossed the Plains followed the Platte. The famous Pony Express followed the Platte Valley, as did the first transcontinental telegraph line. By 1869, the first transcontinental railroad was completed and it, too, followed the valley, opening the land along the river for permanent settlement."

**Oto Mission**

Located at: 41° 4.524′ N, 95° 55.726′ W near Bellevue. Marker is on 10th Street north of Laplatte Road, on the left when traveling north. Marker can be seen from U.S. 75 south of Bellevue on the west side of the highway.

Erected in 2011 by: Sarpy County Historical Society and Nebraska Historical Society.

Text: "In November 1833 Moses and Eliza Merrill, missionaries sponsored by the Baptist Missionary Union, arrived at the government Indian agency at Bellevue and opened a mission school for the Oto and Missouri Indians living in eastern Nebraska. The Merrills were the first Christian missionaries sent to Nebraska. In September 1835 the Merrill family relocated to a log cabin and schoolhouse the government provided on the Platte River about three miles west of here. Part of the Oto and Missouri led by Chief Iatan built a village nearby. As the Mission developed, Merrill prepared a spelling book, a reader, and hymnals in Oto language. More buildings were erected, and a blacksmith and farmer joined the staff. The Oto were plagued by diminishing game supplies and demoralized by liquor. On April 28, 1837, Iatan was killed in an Indian feud, and his successor was unable to maintain the village at the Mission. Merrill died on February 6, 1840, and was buried at St. Mary, across Missouri River from Bellevue. In 2011 only a stone fireplace and chimney remain at the mission site."

## SAUNDERS COUNTY

**Native Americans in the Lower Platte River Valley**

Located at: 41° 5.052′ N, 96° 16.526′ W near Ashland. Marker is on the Westbound Rest Stop (Interstate 80 at milepost 431).

Erected by: Nebraska Department of Roads & Nebraska State Historical Society.

Text: "The Lower Platte River valley landscape is dotted with villages affiliated with the Central Plains Tradition—the term used by archaeologists to define the vast prehistoric Native American population that lived in Nebraska from A.D. 1000 to 1400. These people built and lived in permanent earth lodges, grew crops, and hunted a variety of wild animals. Their artifacts were beautifully crafted and included many tools, pottery vessels, and ornaments. Today, these lodges are mere ruins, indicated by subtle changes in soil color and texture, with occasional charred posts, rafter sections, and other evidence. The inhabitants dug basement-like foundations one to three feet deep, above which they built a substantial timber framework. Large storage chambers were dug into the house floors. They were dug to store corn and other food, but when damaged by rodents or water seepage, were filled with trash. What had been a successful adaptation apparently failed. Climatic deterioration and resource depletion led to the northward expansion of Central Plains people. Between A.D. 1300 and 1400, sites like those once in Nebraska appear in South Dakota. Conflict occurred between Central Plains Tradition people and tribes already inhabiting the Upper Missouri. By 1400 there is no archaeological evidence for Central Plains people. New groups moved in during the 1600s and 1700s ancestral to the Pawnee, Omaha, Ponca, and Oto."

**Platte River**

Located at: 41° 0.102′ N, 96° 19.109′ W near Ashland. Marker is south of the visitor center in the eastbound rest area from Interstate 80 at milepost 425.

Erected by: Department of Roads and Nebraska State Historical Society.

Text: "Eastbound travelers will soon cross the Platte River, which has paralleled the Interstate across most of Nebraska. It has long been noted for its great width and shallow depth. The Platte is a major tributary of the Missouri River, which it flows twenty-five miles east of here. In recent years, the amount of water reaching the Missouri has been diminished, due to the increased demand for it in agricultural irrigation. A short distance above the Platte River bridge, the river is joined by Salt Creek, a small stream whose saline qualities were first recorded by the French in 1718. A site at the mouth of Salt Creek was the home of several different Indian groups over a period of 700 years. Archeological excavations and radiocarbon dating give evidence that it was settled by an agrarian people as early as 1000 A.D. Most recently, it was utilized by the Oto Indians, as French explorers recorded their presence here in 1718, though the village was abandoned before 1800. Other pre-historic houses and village sites within a few miles were settled as early as 1000 AD. The presence of the saline deposits made the area especially attractive to both Indian and white. White homesteaders began to take possession of the land as early as 1854."

**Saunders County**

Located at: 41° 12.57′ N, 96° 37.37′ W in Wahoo. Marker is located southeast of the Saunders County Courthouse on North Chestnut Street (U.S. 30A&77) south of West 5th Street, on the right when traveling south.

Erected by: Wahoo Lions Club and Historical Landmark Council.

Text: "Saunders County was originally Oto Indian territory, and a large earthlodge village under Chief Itan was located here during the early historic period. Later, the Pawnee established villages in the area and in 1855 held peace conferences with General John M. Thayer. The Ox-Bow Trail, the primary route from Nebraska City to Fort Kearny in 1845-1859, passed through this area. Pioneers first settled here in 1856 and 1857. The county's organization was approved in 1867 and the county seat located at Ashland. Wahoo was surveyed three years later and became the county seat in 1873. The origin of the name "Wahoo" is uncertain, but it is probably derived from an Oto word. In 1883 Swedish settlers in Wahoo established a school which eventually became Luther Junior College. When Luther merged with Midland College in Fremont, the Wahoo campus was sold. In 1965 it became the site of John F. Kennedy College. Among Wahoo's prominent native sons are artist Clarence W. Anderson, geneticist and Nobel Prize winner George Beadle, baseball player "Wahoo Sam" Crawford, composer Howard Hanson and motion picture producer Darryl F. Zanuck."

**The Yutan Oto Indian Village**

Located at: Nebr. 92, just south of Yutan.

Erected by:

Text: "Spanish colonial correspondence from 1777

noting the presence of an Oto Indian village on the Platte likely refers to the Yutan site, named after the Chief Ietan. Yutan would have been the first Indian settlement seen by fur trappers and military expeditions traveling up the Platte Valley to the Rocky Mountains. In 1833 the village was the site of a treaty between the Oto, Pawnee, and Delaware, and in 1835 the Oto abandoned the site. Two decades later, the reservation period began for the tribe."

## WASHINGTON COUNTY

**Fort Atkinson**

Located at: 41° 27.364′ N, 96° 1.581′ W in Fort Calhoun. Marker is in front of the Washington County Historical Museum at the intersection of U.S. 75 and Monroe Street, on the left when traveling north on U.S. 75.

Erected by: Historical Landmark Council.

Text: "Civilization came to the west bank of the Missouri with establishment of Fort Atkinson in 1820 about a half mile southeast of here. Named after its founder, General Henry Atkinson, this western-most Fort protected the frontier's developing commerce. Established as a temporary camp in 1819, Fort Atkinson was the largest and strongest outpost above St. Louis. The permanent post went up a year later on the site of Lewis and Clark's Council with the Oto and Missouri Indians. From Fort Atkinson troops under the command of Col. Henry Leavenworth moved up the Missouri River in 1823 to punish the Arikara Indians after an attack on William H. Ashley's fur trading party. Members of the garrison ascended the river in 1825 on a mission of peace, participating in a series of treaties with the Indians. This spearhead of white civilization was abandoned in 1827. But in seven years Fort Atkinson had brought the first school, the first white family life, a library, a sawmill, a brickyard, a grist mill, and large-scale agriculture to the west bank of the Missouri."

**Lewis and Clark Camp Site, July 30-August 2, 1804**

Located at: 41° 27.311′ N, 96° 0.946′ W in Fort Calhoun. Located in the trees just north of the Visitor's Center in Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, the marker can be reached from Madison St, 0.6 miles east of U.S. 75.

Erected by: Nebraska State Historical Society and National Park Service.

Text: "On July 30 the explorers arrived at the bluff where Fort Atkinson would be built less than two decades later. Clark wrote, "The Situation of this place which we Call Council Bluff which is handsom ellevated a Spot well Calculated... for a fort to Command the Countrey and river the low bottom above high water & well Situated under the Command of the Hill for Houses to trade with the Natives." Four days later the Oto Indians, who lived in a village along the Platte River, came to the Lewis and Clark camp for a council. Captain Clark "mad up a Small preasent for those people in perpotion to their Consiqunce also a package with a meadile to accompany a Speech for the Grand Chief after Brackfast we collected those Indians under an orning of our Main Sail... Delivered a long Speech to them expressive of our journey and the wirkes of our government, some advice to them and Directions how They were to Conduct themselves."

**Lewis and Clark Camp Site, August 3-4, 1804**

Located at: 41° 32.093′ N, 96° 7.863′ W in Blair. Marker is in front of the Blair YMCA.

Erected by: Nebraska State Historical Society and National Park Service.

Text: "On August 3 Lewis and Clark held a council with the Oto and Missouria Indians at a site they named "Council Bluff," near present Fort Calhoun, Nebraska. It was the first of many councils they would hold on their journey to the Pacific Ocean. Following the council, the explorers moved upriver, camping south of today's community of Blair. Besides describing the council, Clark's journal notes the merits of "Council Bluff" as a location for "a Trading establishment & fortification." In 1819 the army established Fort Atkinson. From the Indians and "Mr. Faufong, the interpreter," they learned that it was a 25-day journey to Santa Fe. On August 4 the party camped at a site north of Blair. Clark was concerned over the disappearance of Private Moses B. Reed. Reed had asked permission to return to the previous night's camp to get a knife he left behind, but it was only a pretext to desert. He was captured two weeks later and dishonorably discharged from the army."

**"Up the Missouri"**

Located at: 41° 30.802′ N, 96° 2.226′ W near Blair. Marker is on DeSoto Avenue, on the right when traveling south.

Erected by: National Park Service and U.S. Department of the Interior.

Text: "During the summer of 1804, the river below looked very different. Unlike today's course controlled by dams and dikes, the Missouri River that Lewis and Clark knew flowed wild and erratic. Strong currents, floating branches, embedded logs, submerged sandbars,

and crumbling riverbanks formed imposing obstacles to the expedition. A large keelboat and two smaller crafts, called pirogues, carried the explorers and their supplies. When conditions were favorable, the men raised sails to assist the keelboat up the river. But usually they rowed, poled, or towed them through dangerous currents, using back-breaking labor. Here, along the lower Missouri River, they averaged about 13 miles a day.

July-August, 1804

1) July 11, 1804: Sixty days after leaving St. Louis, the expedition enters present-day Nebraska.

2) July 21, 1804: Some expedition members travel a short distance up the "Great River Platt."

3) July 30 - August 3, 1804: Lewis and Clark council with the Missouri and Oto tribes at "Council Bluff," north of present-day Omaha.

4) August 11, 1804: Expedition visits the grave of Blackbird, a former Omaha chief.

5) August 20, 1804: Sergeant Charles Floyd dies and is buried on a bluff overlooking the Missouri River.

6) August 25, 1804: Lewis and Clark visit "Hill of Little Devils" just north of present-day Vermillion, South Dakota.

7) August 30-31, 1804: Lewis and Clark council with a delegation of Sioux at "Calumet Bluff."

8) September 3-10, 1806: Canoeing down river two years later, the expedition travels through present-day Nebraska, arriving in St. Louis on September 23."

## YORK COUNTY

**Indians of Nebraska**

Located At: 40° 49.237′ N, 97° 38.549′ W near York. Marker can be reached from York Eastbound Rest Area (Interstate 80) 2.7 miles east of Road H.

Text: "The Plains Indians can be divided generally into two groups, both of which have called Nebraska home. The Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho were nomadic, roaming over the high plains of Western Nebraska in pursuit of buffalo. The Pawnee, Otoe, Omaha and Ponca, on the other hand, usually lived in semi-permanent villages and farmed. But they too went on twice yearly buffalo hunts. The coming of white civilization and the near extinction of the buffalo dramatically changed the ancient Indian lifestyle. Today, Nebraska's native Americans live on reservations and in communities throughout the state. Annual powwows are held on the reservations."