

Kansa Village Locations in the Light of McCoy's 1828 Journal

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AS AN aid to an archaeological survey of the Kansas river valley, the Kansas State Historical Society has been making a study of documentary sources dealing with the Kaw or Kansa Indians, in an effort to establish the location of their villages. These Indians, of special interest through having contributed their name both to the river and the state, occupied this area from the time they were located by European explorers, until 1846 when the tribe was moved to the Council Grove area. The problem has already received some attention, particularly from George P. Morehouse and Waldo R. Wedel, who have used documentary sources and archaeological methods in defining Kansa sites on the Missouri and Kansas rivers.¹ Morehouse, a member of the Kansas State Historical Society for more than 40 years, and its president in 1918, was a devoted student of the history of the Kansa. Dr. Wedel, curator, division of archaeology, Smithsonian Institution, is a native Kansan who has conducted much of the archaeological work carried out in the state.

One source on the Kansa apparently has been overlooked, namely, Isaac McCoy's journal of his 1828 exploring expedition in present eastern Kansas. McCoy (1784-1846), a Baptist missionary, was one of the leading proponents of the policy of removing the Indians to the West, believing this would save them from the degenerating influence of contact with the whites. Following the 1828 expedition, McCoy played a leading role in the selection and survey of Indian lands in Kansas.

In 1828 McCoy visited one Kansa village and traveled in the vicinity of three others; at least three of these appear not to have been recognized heretofore. The purpose of the present paper is to trace McCoy's route as far as is necessary to establish his position on reaching the Kansas river, and to determine at least the general location of the villages mentioned in the journal. The journal, which is in the possession of the State Historical Society,

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1. G. P. Morehouse, "History of the Kansa or Kaw Indians," *Kansas Historical Collections*, v, 10 (1907-1908), pp. 327-368; W. R. Wedel, "Insuring an Archaeological Survey in Kansas," *Smithsonian Institution, Explorations and Field Work*, 1937, Publication No. 3480 (1938), pp. 109-110; W. R. Wedel, "The Kansa Indians," *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science*, v, 49 (1946-1947), pp. 1-35. The writer is indebted to Wedel for reading this article and making many helpful suggestions.

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In the summer of 1828 McCoy, then Baptist missionary at Carey, Mich., was commissioned by the War Department to accompany a group of Potawatomi on a visit to the area west of the Mississippi. This was a preliminary stage in the program of Indian removal to that area. Leaving Carey in July, McCoy and party traveled to St. Louis, where they were delayed for some time. In August they were finally permitted to leave for the West, and at once set out, reaching Harmony Mission in western Missouri on September 2.²

On the night of September 4 McCoy camped on the Marais des Cygnes river within the boundaries of the present state of Kansas. For the next week his route followed the course of this stream to the west, through present Linn, Miami, Franklin, and Osage counties. On September 11, early in the morning, McCoy reached the Santa Fe trail about three miles from camp, and was able to determine his position: "By my map, the measurement of the Santa Fe road, made our encampment last night eighty one miles west of the state of Missouri." The camp of the evening of September 10 must have been a few miles north of Admire, Lyon county, near the point where the Santa Fe trail crossed the upper Marais des Cygnes.³

The expedition proceeded northwest and west on September 11, but on the 12th, "We proceeded Southwest in order to find a branch of Neosho river," the branch being found at a distance of about 12 miles. From September 12 to 15, an estimated 58 miles of travel, they proceeded southwest, crossing a number of branches of the Neosho river. A large branch was reached on September 15, and McCoy wrote: "My map appears to be incorrect so that I am not able to decide which branch of Neosho this is. I supposed it to be a middle fork, but Mograin [McCoy's Osage Indian guide] says it is the main Southern branch." The main southern branch is the Cottonwood river, while the Neosho itself was the "large branch" crossed on September 13.⁴ Mograin's accuracy is confirmed both by the distance traveled and by subsequent events.

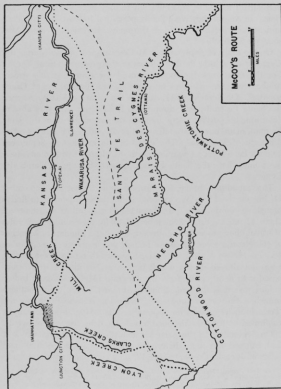
On September 16 the party went north up a creek on which it had camped the night before, reached the Santa Fe trail, and followed it east. On September 17, they continued east, and again

2. Lela Barnes, "Journal of Isaac McCoy for the Exploring Expedition of 1828," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, v. 5 (August, 1936), pp. 227-244 *passim*.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 246-250; W. E. Connelley, *History of Kansas* (Chicago and New York, 1925), v. 1, p. 113.

4. Barnes, *loc. cit.*, pp. 250-252.

met the trail; here McCoy was able to calculate his position as 122 miles west of Missouri. The trail at this distance from Missouri is a little east of Lost Springs in Marion county. Working back from this position, it seems likely that the creek McCoy followed north on September 16 was Brook creek, which enters the Cottonwood not far from where McCoy must have reached that



river. He stated, "Left camp quarter after 8. proceeded up the creek on which we had s[le]pt, north, about 9 crossed & passed between forks of nearly equal size."⁵ This description fits Brook creek, which forks about two miles above its mouth.

The remainder of McCoy's description of the events of September 17 is contradictory. From the point where he ascertained his position, he "steered north, from 12 till five o'clock, when we encamped as I believed on the waters of Ne[os]ho which we had descended about two miles." In the same passage he stated that the day's journey was across land separating the Neosho and Osage from the Kansas: "We have now left Neosho waters. . . ."⁶ Obviously, McCoy did not camp on the Neosho, which he had left, nor could he descend it going north. From the latter statement quoted it is apparent he was descending a branch of the Kansas. On the basis of his position as calculated on the Santa Fe trail, the branch must have been either Lyon or Clarks creek.

The following day, September 18, McCoy's party descended to the Kansas river and reached a village of the Kansa Indians. McCoy found this, the "upper Indian town on the river," to be 125 miles due west of Missouri. The distance places McCoy and the Kansa in the vicinity of Junction City, near the mouth of the Smoky Hill or perhaps that of Clarks creek, allowing a few miles of possible error in his calculation. Two topographic features mentioned support McCoy's figure. He viewed the river, and found that it passed between relatively high hills, and that the country was broken and hilly near the river. This agrees with the valley topography near Junction City. Secondly, while descending the creek early in the day, "on top of a high natural mount we discovered an artificial mound of stone, apparently constructed from the same principles on which our earthen mounds are to be east."⁷ Junction City is the center of a pre-Columbian complex designated the Schultz Focus, typified by rock burial mounds and related to the Hopewell culture of the eastern United States.⁸ It was unquestionably one of these mounds that McCoy saw.

McCoy traveled down the river on September 19, and going a little north of east passed between two small villages in the course of ten miles. The river flows northeast between Junction City and Manhattan, a distance of 18 miles, and the two villages must have

5. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 254-256.

8. C. E. Eysen, "The Schultz Focus: a Woodland Mound Complex of the Lower Republican Valley, Kansas," unpublished manuscript, Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

been located in this area. At one o'clock McCoy was in sight of the principal Kansas village seven miles away. He went southeast to see the country on a large creek (probably Deep creek) and here estimated he was still seven or eight miles from the village mentioned. This "principal" village must have been fairly close to Manhattan. It is entirely possible that this was the village near the mouth of the Blue on the north side of the river, visited by Thomas Say in 1819, which would have been visible from McCoy's position on the opposite bank. McCoy covered 30 miles that day and probably camped in the vicinity of McFarland or Alma in Wabaunsee county.⁹

Early the next morning a large creek, probably Mill creek, was crossed. A total of 20 miles was traveled, bringing the party to a point about 70 miles west of Missouri and 15 miles south of the Kansas river.¹⁰ McCoy was now near the head of the Wakarusa river. The party continued eastward along the divide between the Kansas and Osage, and on September 24 reached the Missouri boundary.

The three villages seen by McCoy, and possibly the fourth, were on the south side of the river between Junction City and Manhattan (shaded area on map, p. 154). None of them is mentioned in the literature. Either McCoy's journal has been overlooked as a source on the 19th century Kansa Indians, or the villages he visited have been confused with others located farther down the river. Root identified the villages as those of Hard Chief and American Chief (on Mission creek) in Shawnee county, and stated that McCoy was informed of Fool Chief's village north of the river.¹¹ McCoy did not give personal names of the Indians he met, nor did he mention any village north of the river. In addition, the distance from Missouri to Mission creek is only 65 miles. Finally, there is the statement of Frederick Chouteau, long a trader to the Kansa, that the Mission creek villages were not established until 1830, two years after McCoy's journey: "They built their lodges there the same year I went, 1830. . . . These two bands built their villages there because I was going there to trade, as I told them."¹²

McCoy's brief description of the Indian communities he visited

9. Barnes *loc. cit.*, pp. 256, 257; Edwin James, *Account of an Expedition From Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains, Performed in the Years 1819, 1820*, in R. G. Thwaites (ed.), *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846* (Cleveland, 1905), v. 14, pp. 186-198.

10. Barnes, *loc. cit.*, p. 257.

11. George A. Root, "Chronology of Shawnee County," *Shawnee County Historical Society Bulletin*, v. 1 (December, 1940), p. 4.

12. F. C. Adams, "Reminiscences of Frederick Chouteau," *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 8 (1903-1904), p. 425.

is important with reference to native settlement patterns in the early 19th century. The first village visited contained but 15 houses, while the villages McCoy passed between are described as small, and it seems probable the latter two were no larger than the first.¹³ This is in contrast to the village at the mouth of the Blue, where Say found 120 lodges in 1819.¹⁴ Wedel pointed out that it has long been suspected that the large, often fortified, villages of the early 19th century were frequently the center of a number of smaller satellite communities, and the McCoy journal helps to confirm this view.¹⁵ To some extent this pattern was followed when the Kansa moved downstream in 1830. Chouteau reported a large village of 700-800 persons at Menoken on the north bank of the river, with two others of respectively 500-600 and 100 persons south of the river on Mission creek.¹⁶ It may be noted that at both locations, the smaller villages are on the south side of the river. The reason for this is undetermined, though it may have been for greater protection against attack by the Pawnee.

McCoy's journal also confirms that both the circular earthlodge and the long bark-covered lodge were used by the Kansa in this period. At the first village encountered he was entertained in a "large bark hut."¹⁷ Sibley in 1811 also described the bark lodge at a Kansa village which Wedel believes to be the town at the mouth of the Blue.¹⁸ On the other hand, Say observed circular earthlodges at the Blue river village in 1819, and a lodge of this type has been excavated at this site.¹⁹

Identification of the remains of the villages visited by Isaac McCoy will raise considerably the total number of Kansa sites specifically located. It is hoped that excavations can be carried out at many of these, for several reasons. First of all, it will increase the knowledge of the economic life of the Kansa in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Secondly, recovery of aboriginal materials from Kansa sites of the period of European contact may make possible the identification of pre-European villages of this people and aid in placing them in their proper perspective relative to Plains history in general.

13. Barnes, *loc. cit.*, p. 256.

14. James, *loc. cit.*, p. 188.

15. W. R. Wedel, letter, April 2, 1958.

16. Adams, *loc. cit.*, p. 425.

17. Barnes, *loc. cit.*, p. 254.

18. Wedel, "The Kansa Indians," *loc. cit.*, pp. 13, 21.

19. James, *loc. cit.*, p. 189; W. R. Wedel, letter, March 7, 1957.