

The Pawnee built earthlodge villages near a river and the fields where they grew crops. They left their village each summer and winter to hunt buffalo.

“The following morning the South Side family rode up to the lodge, dumped their goods outside, set up the beds, and laid the mats. Then they brought in the rest of their things, and the house was crowded with parfleches of dry meat, corn, beans, and everything they had gathered. The women talked of storing them in the cache pit. Grandma and Old-Lady-Grieves-the-Enemy told about how they had looked over the pit when they first got home from the hunt and cleared off some mold that had developed on the grass lining and that it was now clean and ready to be filled. After the pit was filled this time, it would not be open until the middle of November when they were ready to go off on the winter hunt. It did not do to open the pit more than once a month at the most. Otherwise, if one opened it often, a storm might come up and water might leak in. In the wintertime there was less danger of this. From time to time one would hear that a certain woman had not put enough earth on the lid of the pit and water had leaked in, with the resulting tragic consequence that all her corn was destroyed—the bags and everything having turned moldy (*us-kutu*, “hair-rotton,” viz., mold). Two years of hard work and the security it could bring destroyed by one careless oversight. In the Pawnee way of life, vigilance could seldom be relaxed!

“The storage pit was built nearby when the earth lodge was constructed. It was an indispensable part of the earth-lodge economy. The usual size was about 10 feet deep. It was bell-shaped, with a narrow neck and a round bottom about 10 feet in diameter. . . . The bottom was covered with clean sand and on top of this some sticks as a sort of grating and these covered with grass. The walls were lined with thatch grass fastened in place with sticks that were shored up against it.

“Tanned hide sacks of various sizes were used to store the corn and beans in the pit. The largest was the *hax-kaitu*, made by sewing two buffalo hides together, folding them over and sewing them along the bottom and the long side. It was 6 feet high and 3 feet in diameter when full and was used only to store the mature dried corn kernels known as *rikis-tahis*, “corn-dry,” that had been pried off the cob after the corn had matured on the stalk.

“The second size was the “large sack,” about 3 feet high and 2 feet in diameter when filled, containing 1 ½ bushels or more. The next size, “the small sack,” *asa-karusu*, “dog-sack,” stood about 3 feet high and 1 ½ feet in diameter when full, holding about a bushel or 50 to 60 pounds of dried corn kernels. . . . A still smaller sack was called *rits-a-kusu*, “intestine-of-sack,” standing about 8 inches high and a foot in diameter when full. Sometimes the supplies were simply wrapped around with a piece of tanned hide or old tent skin.”

Source Information

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Anthropologist: Gene Weltfish

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