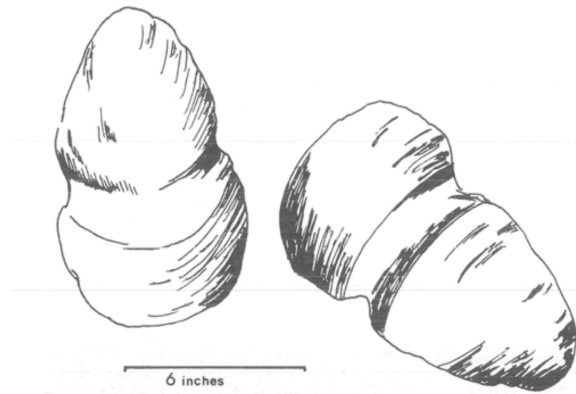


THE PRE-EUROPEAN NATIVE INHABITANTS.



Grooved hammer heads found locally. They were once used to pound pemmican

**Reprinted from "Strathcona - Portrait of a Prairie Municipality"
The original was prepared in consultation with Mr. L. Syms, archaeologist, Brandon University.**

There has been little archaeological research within Strathcona Municipality and most of that was done over thirty years ago. However, work done elsewhere in Manitoba and throughout the North American plains region is useful in reconstructing the early cultural history of the area.

Although much work has yet to be done in unraveling the complex Prehistoric archaeological record of Southern Manitoba, the pattern which is beginning to emerge reveals that there was a long and interesting history of occupation by various Native groups throughout at least 12,000 years. In fact, it seems highly probable that Native people have lived in North America throughout the last 40,000 years, but Manitoba has been obliterated by the most recent -Wisconsin- stage of the Pleistocene glaciation between 24,000 and 14,000 years ago. As the ice gradually began to recede from Southern Manitoba, and the climate ameliorated, a rich vegetation and fauna became established.

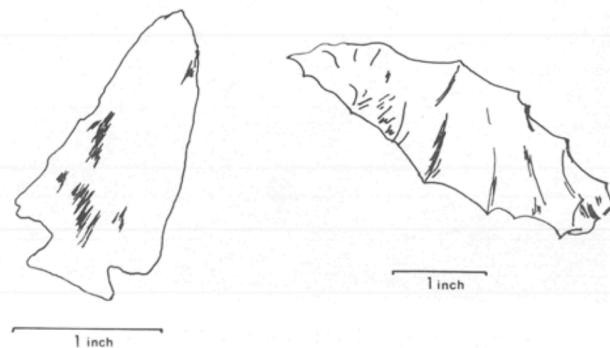
The period between 11,500 and 7,000 B.P. (before present) is referred to as Paleo-Indian and can be divided into the earlier Clovis-Folsom period (11,500 - 9,600 B.P.) and the later Plano Period (circa 10,400 - 7,000 B.P.), named after major excavation sites to the south. The Clovis and Folsom people essentially were stone age in culture, and hunted the now extinct Pleistocene megafauna: the mammoths and mastadons (or Ice Age elephants), camels, dire wolves, horses, giant ground sloths, giant beavers and bison. In Manitoba, they were confined to the southwest, as it was the only part of the province not covered by the retreating ice cap or by huge glacial lakes. The work of palynologists in southwestern Manitoba indicates that at this time the small area of deglaciated, lake-free land was covered by dense spruce forest which extended right up to the receding ice and even onto the moraine and debris covered margin of the ice itself. Only a few isolated spear points, of the distinctive Clovis or Folsom shape have been found in southwestern Manitoba as a record to these people, but evidence from the high plains to the southwest suggests that they lived in small groups and probably had a quite

sophisticated and technology, using bone needles for sewing clothing, and manufacturing wood, bone and stone implements for butchering animals and processing food.

The Plano Period (circa 10,400 - 7,000 B.P.) overlapped in time with the Folsom period. About 10,500 B.P. the giant Pleistocene elephants became extinct, for reasons so far undetermined, and the Folsom people relied primarily upon the bison for food, employing "drives", whereby several score animals could be killed at the same time (Pettipas, pp. 8-9). The dense spruce forest woodlands also disappeared during this time giving way to grassland, and hunters shifted their attention to other plains fauna, such as the musk ox, pronghorn antelope and elk, as well as the wolf and badger.

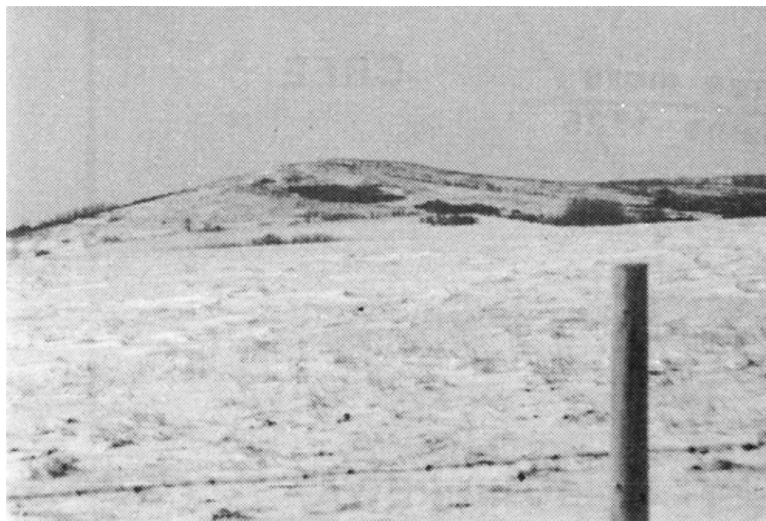
The Archaic Period in Manitoba lasted approximately from 7,000 to 2,200 years ago, and was marked by many changes in the vegetation pattern and the fauna. A far greater variety of environments appeared, as did distinctive variations in culture and life style between the people living in the Boreal forest areas to the east, and those living in the aspen parkland areas of the west. Archaeologists have identified a variety of cultures that belong to this period, but population movements with respect to artifact styles are as yet not too clearly understood. Bison hunting appeared to be generally important, but was supplemented by the collection of nuts, seeds, tubers and shell fish, and by the hunting of small game, and the grinding of seeds. The Archaic Stage is well represented along Rock Lake, and at sites along Pelican Lake. It includes the Oxbow Complex (3,500 - 1,600 B.C.) and the McKean, Duncan and Hanna complexes dated 3,000 - 1,000 B.C.

The period approximately 2,200 to 1,000 years ago is termed the Initial Woodlands Ceramic Stage. Trade routes had developed throughout much of North America, and on the western plains a variety of tribal ethnic groups could be found. They were characterized by burial mounds, temporary house structures, the use of domesticated plants, and the manufacture of conical or conoidal ceramic vessels which were used for storage and cooking. Little evidence for this stage has been reported in Strathcona, but this may be due to a lack of recent analysis. The Besant complex occurs at this time. Late Plains Woodland Groups occupied the area from approximately 900 or 1,000 years ago until the fur trade began to emerge. The sedentary, and largely agricultural Mandan and Hidatsa tribes to the south traded domesticated foods with the hunters of Manitoba. Pottery vessels had round, globular forms, and the bow and arrow became a universal tool, with the arrows tipped by small, notched, triangular flint



Notched point and flint scraper found locally and now in the museum at the Pelican Lake Training School.

points. A variety of other tools used for butchering and preparing hides and meat appeared, such as flint scrapers, knives, awls and incising tools. There is ample evidence of religious activities and of a concern for the dead. A series of seven or more burial mounds and the McLaren earthworks, all to the north of Rock Lake, and several mounds including the McKay Mound and the Sykes Mound (or Medicine Hill) just to the southwest of Hilton, are religious sites set aside for ceremonial purposes and burials. Most, if not all of these mounds date from 800 A.D. to about 1400 A.D. and could have been in use as late as 1500 A.D. Early researchers, with no means of carbon dating, felt that all the artifacts were of the same date. Recent research suggests that many groups occupied the area, and different groups left different burial items. The Sykes and McKay mounds are being re-assessed in the light of this new orientation.



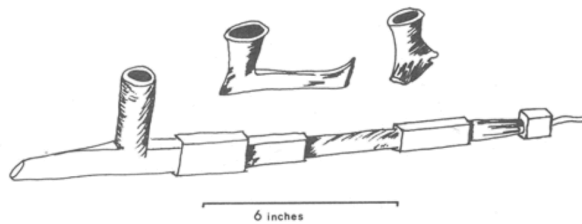
McKay Mound



Sykes Mound or "Medicine Hill"

The mounds were partially excavated in 1933, and again in 1943 by the Manitoba Museum Association. Both mounds contained multiple burials together with varied artifacts: late, side-notched projectile points, bone beads and shell necklets and pendants. Many fragments of grit-tempered pottery, with a geometric design made by cord impressions or straight incised lines, have been found. The pottery, artifacts, and the construction of the mounds and earthworks suggests a high degree of village organization, yet as no mention of these people was made by La Verendrye when he passed close to this area in 1738, it must be assumed that by that time they had already left the area. One of the most plausible reasons for their disappearance is that they were forced to migrate during one of the recurrent periods of drought, probably during the 16th century A.D.

The Lowton village site was relatively recent in origin; most recent studies would suggest A.D. 1000 to 1500. (P.E.W. Reid, 1972) Several thousand artifacts and a similar number of pottery fragments were discovered there, including scrapers, knives, projectile points, grooved hammers and some fine examples of pipes made of catlinite (red pipestone). These ceremonial pipes were made of material found in Minnesota and were used to smoke domesticated tobacco on ritual and ceremonial occasions.



Examples of red catlinite pipes, found locally, and now in the museum at the Pelican Lake Training School.

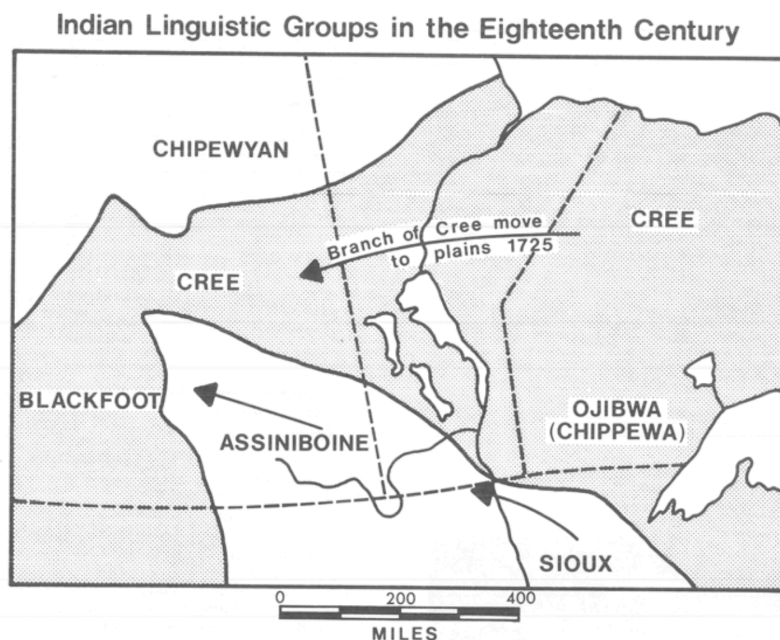
By the time of the early fur trade, L. Syms (1975) estimates that southwestern Manitoba was the home of some 28,000 Assiniboines (Stoney). They were nomadic hunters who spent the summer on the plains hunting bison, elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope and other small game. Towards the fall they migrated southwards to the horticultural villages of the Mandan and Hidatsa, along the Missouri valley, and then returned during the winter months to hunt the herds of animals sheltering in the aspen parklands and in the forested regions of southwestern Manitoba (such as Turtle Mountain). The Cree groups of the boreal forest region to the east, also moved into the aspen parkland during the winter, and the region was periodically visited by other groups such as the Gros Ventre, Dakota (Sioux) and probably by the Cheyenne and Blackfoot.

La Vérendrye recorded visiting an Assiniboine village of 102 lodges near Turtle Mountain. His description is of an economy based upon the buffalo. The vast herds formed an easy prey and supplied the community with food: the meat could be eaten fresh or dried and pounded with berries to form pemmican. The hides provided clothing and material for tents, sinews were used as bow strings, even the dung

provided fuel, bones were carved into utensils, and the stomach used as a water container. The Assiniboine needed little in trade from the early European explorers, but they traded guns and powder, axes and knives with the Mandan for corn, tobacco and fur, fulfilling the role of middleman between the Mandan and the Hudson's Bay Company.

In the account of his travels in 1738, LaVérendrye wrote that the Assiniboines had no horses, but Alexander Henry (Sr.) recorded in his journal in 1776 that by then they were using horses, which greatly extended their hunting range.

By 1832 most of the Assiniboine appear to have moved further west, as by that time Ojibway (Chippewa) people were moving westwards into the Turtle Mountain and Pelican Lake area. In 1836 a smallpox epidemic swept across the west and it is believed that nearly half the Assiniboine people died. By 1858 H.Y. Hind reported there were only very few Assiniboines left in the Turtle Mountain region, and by this time Sioux and Métis were competing for control of the area.



The vanishing Assiniboine tribes, like the rapidly vanishing buffalo, left some fleeting evidence of a past way of life. When the first settlers came they found deep buffalo trails worn into the prairie sod, and buffalo bones lay in piles at the site of old pounds or cliffs where the animals had been stampeded to their death. Small circles of stones, used to anchor tents, often remained a mute testimony to former Assiniboine camps.

Meanwhile the Sioux competed with the Métis in huge well-organized buffalo hunts. Despite their defeat by the Métis at Grand Coteau, North Dakota, in 1851, they achieved some degree of co-existence, and moved northwards into the Turtle Mountain and Pelican Lake region. These were the Indians encountered by the first settlers, and these were also the Indians who signed the first Treaty with the Manitoba Government in 1871, thereby signing away Indian Title to the land.

Thus for many centuries before the arrival of European settlers, various groups of Native Indian peoples occupied the area. They lived, hunted, traded, built homes and raised

their children, grieved and buried their dead. They organized complex societies and cultures, utilizing the resources of the region, without ever breaking the sod.

** Note that recent evidence found south of Melita suggests that some groups did break sod.