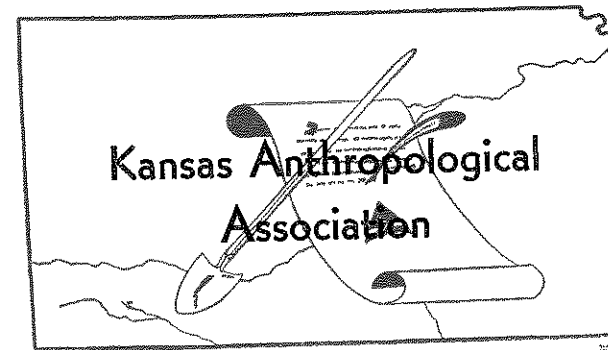


Mr. R. D. Brent, President
Box 378
Smith Center, Kansas 66967

Mr. Harold Reed, First Vice-President
Rural Route 1
New Cambria, Kansas 67470

Mr. O. L. Graves, Second Vice-President
222 Curtis
Pratt, Kansas 67124



15-2111
Mr. John E. Rhine, Secretary-Treasurer
Box 41
Hays, Kansas 67601

Mr. Thomas Witty, Editor
Kansas State Historical Society
10th and Jackson Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612

NEWSLETTER

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K.A.A. SUMMER DIG, 1972, FORT ZARAH

by

Tom Witty

The 1972 summer dig of the Kansas Anthropological Association was held this year for nine days, June 3-11, at the site of Old Fort Zarah some two miles east of Great Bend, Kansas. This year it had been decided to hold one long dig for the members to participate in rather than two short digs such as had been the schedule for the past few years. In addition to giving the opportunity for more people to participate, it gave us the time to excavate a more significant portion of the selected site. Archeologists John Reynolds, Tom Barr and the writer from the Kansas State Historical Society supervised the investigations.

The location for the dig was historically the scene of the Walnut Creek Crossing of the Santa Fe Trail. The overall site, 14BT301, is not a new one for the K.A.A. as we carried out a lot of work there in another area in 1969. At that time the remains of a burned building some 20 feet wide and 80 feet long were excavated and a relatively large amount of artifact material was recovered (Witty, 1969). Tentatively the building represented was identified as being the trader store or ranch at the Crossing. The ranch, usually referred to as Allison's Ranch, had a series of operators beginning with William Allison around 1855 and passing in turn to George Peacock, Charles Rath and finally Joseph Douglass (Schulz, 1969; Midgorden, 1970; Barry, 1971). Douglass' ranch was burned on May 19, 1868 by Cheyenne and Arapahoes which terminated the operation. A study of the gun parts and ammunition components recovered from the site provided a date for the destruction of the building the K.A.A. uncovered as being in the late 1860's (Schmits, 1971). That estimate agrees closely with the historical documentation for the destruction of Douglass' ranch.

In addition to the traders building at the Crossing a series of other facilities were built. In time these included a mail station (1858), bridge (1863) and dugouts and buildings associated with a small defense post placed there for protection of the Crossing from Indian raids (1864-1869) (Barry, 1971). First named Fort Dunlap, the post was renamed shortly afterward Fort Zarah. Two drawings exist that depict the Crossing and identify the structures there in 1867 (Plate 1).

These sketches were made by Adolph Hunnius a topographic engineer employed by the army. The originals of those sketches are now in the archives of the Kansas State Historical Society. The Fort Zarah of the drawing consists of a rectangular one-storied adobe building with a mud roof. Associated with this were an adobe corral and a "round house." This latter structure was actually octagonal and built of stone with a tin roof that served as a blockhouse. In December of 1867 a larger stone fort building was completed approximately one-half mile north and the garrison moved there. It is supposed that the earlier building was abandoned by the military at that time. The second fort is the best known of the two fort constructions and its location, north of US-56 highway, is well known to the members of the Apache Chapter and the Barton County Historical Society.

During the 1969 excavations at Allison's Ranch a low mound in a cultivated field some 1,000 feet to the west and north was shown to the writer. This mound was some 70 feet long and 30 feet wide and approximately one foot high in the center. The surface of the mound was littered with fragments of sandstone, glass sherds from window panes and bottles and miscellaneous metal pieces. The debris looked to be contemporary with the Allison Ranch remains. Some members of the Apache Chapter identified this as the location of the Indian agent's headquarters but the evidence of this opinion was not shown to the writer until the 1972 dig was in progress.

The decision to excavate at this mound was made for several reasons. Work at the Allison's Ranch site created an interest with the K.A.A. and among some of the historians in the state in the happenings of the Walnut Creek Crossing. Some of this interest was reflected in the site being nominated and accepted for recognition in the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service on April 26, 1972. Secondly the Great Bend centennial celebration was to be this year and it seemed an appropriate time to do work on the early history of that area. Lastly that portion of the site was in a cultivated field and would ultimately be destroyed.

After conversation with Bob Button and Earl Monger of the Apache Chapter it was decided to hold the 1972 dig at 14 BT301 with the local chapter hosting. The landowner, Warren A. Rujan, was contacted and he generously gave permission for the work to be carried out. His cooperation is greatly appreciated for without it investigation of the site would have been impossible.

On May 30, 1972 Bob Button, Earl Monger and the writer carried out testing at the site of the mound now formally designated House 2 at 14BT301. Using a solid probe and an Oakfield soil coring tool we were able to locate and delineate the solid stone footing or foundation of the perimeter wall of the building. The footing was some 35 feet wide and 70 feet long and trended in a west southwest to east northeast line. A grid of ten foot squares was laid out parallel to the long axis of the footing, 40 feet wide and 80 feet long in order to completely incorporate the anticipated remains. It became obvious that we could not excavate the entire remains even with the extended dig period. It was decided to attempt to excavate only the east half of the house site. A grid map was prepared with the squares prenumbered with a consecutive series of numbers 101 to 205 over the area of the work. This simpler designation eliminated the compound intersecting coordinate numbers so often employed in archeological grids.

The dig began Saturday, June 3, at the northeast corner of the anticipated foundation. The pattern of excavations was to locate that corner, then excavate following the east wall to the southeast corner. The excavations were then

extended down the north and south walls. The inner squares were dug in north-south tiers working westward. At the end of the dig period on June 11 an area equivalent to 18 full ten foot squares had been excavated.

The individual squares were dug in 0.5 foot thick levels. The first level was disturbed by cultivation and was removed by shovels in thin cuts so as to recover any displaced artifacts present. The next one or two levels were trowelled and/or skimmed with shovels. The depth of the overburden was relative to the position of the overlying mound. Material on the edge was found 0.5 to 1.0 foot below the surface while more centrally located remains were in the 1.0 to 1.5 foot deep zone. The fill consisted primarily of mixed loam with small fragments of sandstone and some charcoal.

The principal surviving architectural features were the building's sandstone footings (Plate 2 A). Constructed of coursed tabular blocks of stone arranged in a footing measuring 2.5 to 3.0 feet wide and one foot thick. The top inner edge was recessed to form a sill some .8 foot wide and .8 foot deep. Two fireplace hearths were exposed in the east half of the structure. The first was against the east wall, five feet from the southeast corner, and open to the west. The surviving evidence consisted of a scattered layer of bricks and mortar laid in sand fill in an area approximately six feet wide and extending into the room three feet. The top of the brick was flush with the top of the footings and set into the sill. The second fireplace was near the center of the building, 36 feet west of the east wall and eight feet south of the north wall and open to the east. Its overall size was the same as the first. An abundant concentration of ash was still present which contained large quantities of nails in assorted sizes and strips of dried window putty. In line with the back of the hearth were traces of mortar trending north to south suggesting a plastered sod wall. Another feature complex was a thick cluster of sandstone blocks four feet square buried flush with the assumed floor level and found in the approximate center of the east half of the building. This was interpreted as the base for a roof support to hold a center beam.

Artifacts found at the site were chiefly concentrated in the corners and adjacent to the footings. Those occurring in the central area were usually the large heavier pieces. Four broken but restorable bottles found were for ink, beer, bitters, gargling oil and a small perfumer was found intact. Sherds from medicine and wine bottles were also recovered. Ammunition components consisted of .56 caliber Spencer cartridges, .58 caliber Williams and modified mini bullets, .36 caliber conical and spherical bullets, large primer caps and cap boxes. Seven of the Spencer cartridges had apparently been in a paper box which decayed for the specimens were arranged side by side, alternately with base up or base down. Items of general hardware which were recovered consisted of a door knob, an iron keyhole cover, a knife blade, a tin cup, hinges, a skillet handle, an iron plate, stove pipes, a harness ring, a large buckle, a wagon end bolt, two large staple-like specimens, iron wire, a large sheet metal box lid, stove furniture, chain links, nails, tin cans, scraps of sheet metal and window glass sherds. Miscellaneous specimens were a celluloid hairpin, two military buttons, an ornate brass button, a flat tin can with an 1867 shield nickel inside, brass wire braid and a section of fabric with grommets. Faunal material consisted of what appeared to be raccoon limb bones, large rib sections, probably from bison and egg shells.

The dig was well attended and as expected the majority of persons participated on the weekends. The crew during the week was small but dedicated and in

the nine days we were able to accomplish our original goals at the site. We exposed the remains of a structure which by its contents dates from the 1860's.

The specific identification of the building however will be made probably from historical documentation. The local opinion of the site as the Indian agent's headquarters was made on the basis of an 1866 survey by Goot. The original survey records are reportedly in the Barton County engineer's office. Copies of the pertinent portion of that survey were given to the writer by Scott Midgorden and Ted Schulz. The survey notes specifically identify a building at that location in 1866 as the Indian agent's headquarters. A check of the supposedly complete file of survey documents at the State Auditor's office in Topeka failed to locate a copy of that particular survey but data apparently from it appears on later 1868 and 1871 surveys of that region.

Additional clarification for that identification can be found in a report that the Indian agent I. C. Taylor was stationed at Fort Zarah in September of 1866 (Oliva, 1967; p. 182). It would appear that the Goot notes and the Hunnius drawings and designations are not contradictory but report the happenings at Fort Zarah first in 1866 and again in 1867. The role and personnel of this out-post appears to have been varied during its short life. On the basis of this it appears to the writer that the 1972 K.A.A. dig exposed a portion of the main building of the early Fort Zarah facility.

The Apache Chapter in hosting the dig did another excellent job. Special thanks should go to Ruth Curry, Marie Horn and Nadine Schloemer for bringing the coffee and other refreshments during the nine day dig. Thanks should also go to Gordon Jones for bringing the pop out on one hot afternoon.

The exposed dig was left open for the Great Bend Centennial and was back-filled during the latter part of July. The first long K.A.A. dig the writer thought was a success. We had the time to complete our project and were not hurried. The attendance was good, however not as many members participated as was hoped. Whether this was due to the time of the year or the location of the dig is yet uncertain. In any case those who did participate accomplished a great deal and several said they felt this was one of our most satisfactory digs to date.

K.A.A. 1972 DIG ATTENDANCE

Days Worked at Site					
Parker Parish	8	Nadine Schloemer	7	Pat Barr	2
Harold Reed	8	Earl Anderson	4	Patrick Barr	2
Marjorie Reed	8	R. D. Brent	4	George Elmore	2
Steve Reed	8	Earl Monger	4	Norman Horn	2
Debbie Reed	5	Iris Monger	4	Marie Horn	2
Kathy Reed	5	John Reynolds	4	Mr. & Mrs. Gordon Jones	2
Lori Reed	5	Bob Button	3	Neil Rogers	1
Tom Witty	7	Ruth Curry	3	Diana Rogers	1
Mary Anne Witty	3	Scott Midgorden	3	Mr. & Mrs. H. Case	1
David Witty	3	Orrie Graves	3	Millard Schloemer	1
Linda Witty	3	Lois Graves	1	Bernita Schloemer	1
Don Schloemer	6	Tom Barr	2	Milton Reichart	1

Attendance recorded by Nadine Schloemer and Cathy Reed

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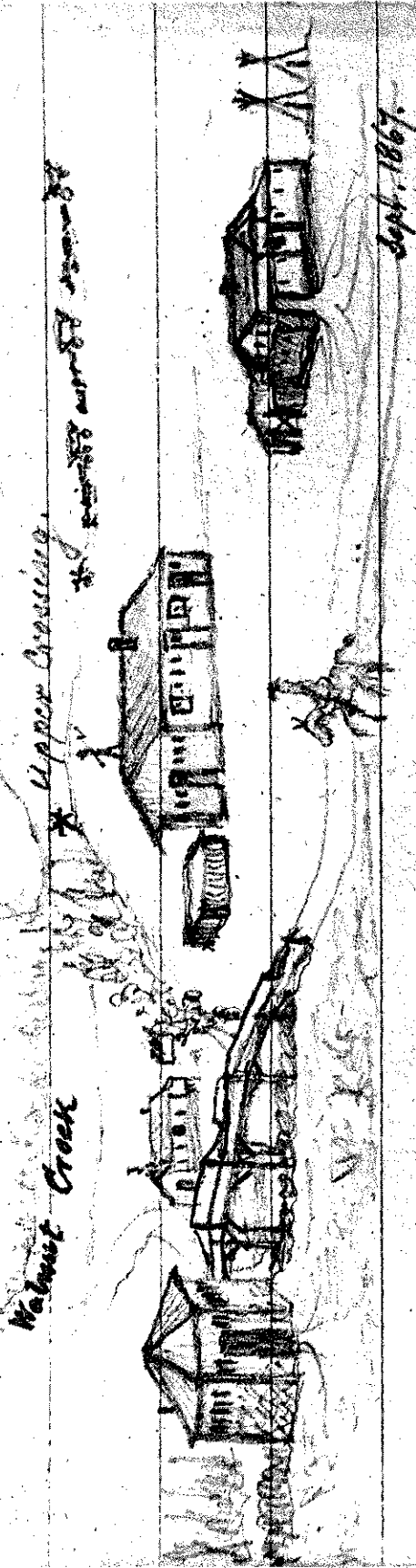
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Kansas State Historical Society
Topeka, Kansas

OT

High Ground "Cuyamaca Bottom"
Hunting Grounds



Round House
Stone
Fire Roof - 15' x 15' feet

Station Adobe
30 x 40
outside

Fort Karah
Adobe with
Mud Roof
20 x 50
inside

Indian Shelter

Fort Karah, Kansas in 1867.

A. Hannius
Topogr. Engineer

Established by the General R. Smith Sept. 1867. 6th
Squad, as a "look-out", with his head on the roof on a narrow board
Squad and 2 Corporals.

The garrison: 1 Officer, 1 Hospital Steward 20 men and five cooks at the fort
1 Sergeant and 8 men at the Round House, in all 35. Adobe
4 x 8 x 12"

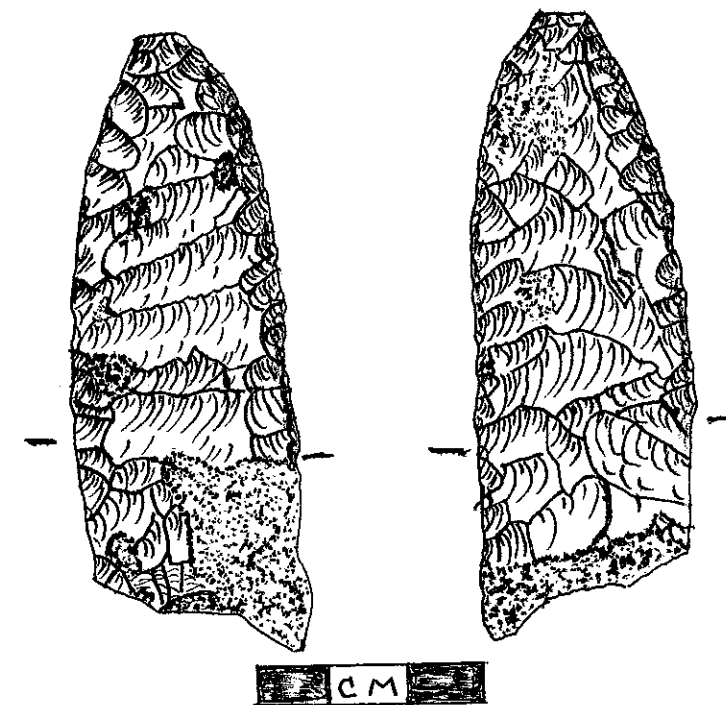
38 in thick.

Fort Karah was the place where Hannius

PLATE 1. Drawing of Walnut creek crossing in 1867 by Adolph Hannius.



A. Excavations at Fort Zarah. View to southwest of southeast corner of structure. Hearth in center foreground.



B. Plainview point from the Delaware river in northeast Kansas.