

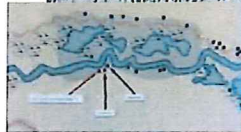
Shawnee
Landscape
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Tinta Otonwe • the Village on the Prairie

Many Dakotas consider the Minnesota River Valley to be their spiritual home. The Dakota Indians were the last group of native peoples to live in the valley near the site. Starting in the mid-1600s, they migrated here in successive waves from the north of Minnesota, near Mille Lake.

The village of 600 on the banks of the St. Pierre or St Peter's River (later called Minnesota River), was called several names. The original name was Tinta Otonwe, or the village on the prairie. French voyageurs called it Prairie des Francois, or the French Prairie. U. S. Military and Indian Agency records referred to it as Little Sixes or Sixes, a translation of the Dakota name of the chief, Sakpa. Reverend Samuel Pond named it Prairieville. And the European-American called it Shakopee.

Sakpa band was led by a hereditary chief, Sakpa (Six), for whom all succeeding chiefs were named. Sakpa's village, was known by various spellings: "Tintowan," "Tintonwan," and "Tintahton" or "Teen-tah-o-ton-wa," but the actual name was Tinta Otonwe.



The ground near it is neatly laid out, and some fine corn-fields were observed in the vicinity. There were scaffolds annexed to the houses, for the purpose of drying maize, etc.; upon these we were told that the Indians sleep during very hot nights." Near the village were seen various scaffold burials, while "In the midst of the corn-fields a dog was suspended, his head decorated with feathers, and with horse-hair stained red; it was probably a sacrifice for the protection of the cornfields during the absence of the Indians."



In Tinta Otonwe, the corn was planted by the women, and the women and children were required to stop the birds who attacked the corn. A scaffold was set up to do this. A picture by Seth Eastman showed the women and children watching the corn in a Dakota village.



The Dakota village of Tinta Otonwe was a summer planting village, occupied not year round, but at particular times in the warmer months. At this time, they live in bark houses, which are more spacious, and when seen from a distance, resemble in form and appearance, the log cabins of the

whites. Tinta (prairie) Otonwe (village) was located in the river bottoms, in areas that might be subject to flooding in the spring. The village was occupied sporadically, starting after the St. Peter's River had subsided in the spring, and continuing until the fall, when the inhabitants left the river to hunt for deer.

At Tinta Otonwe, the Dakota erected a bank lodge village. The wide valley was an oak savannah, abounding in animals for hunting and trapping including beaver, deer, elk, muskrat, wolf, and even bison. Many natural springs flowed out of the rock formations. Dakota women raised crops using digging sticks, and planted beans, corn, squash, and other crops. They also harvested wild rice in some of the shallow flood-plain lakes and along the St. Peter's River. In the spring, they tapped maple and birch trees for sugar and medicines. The valley was a great source of building materials, from cedar and basswood trees used to shape dugout canoes and snowshoes to elm and willow trees that supplied bark for their summer lodges.



In June of 1838, Joseph Nicollet observed, "The Village of Six, 34-36 miles by water from St. Peters (Mendota) is only 12-14 by land. The name of the village was well as the locality is Tinta otonwe 'the village on the prairie.' The son of the former chief, the 'Six', was elected chief by the village last year. He just redeemed for himself the right to keep for himself the name of his father Shakopee the Six." (The son of the former chief is Sakpe II.). "the lodges are from eight to fifteen feet in diameter, about ten to fifteen feet high and made of buffalo-skins tanned. Elk skins are used for this purpose also. The summer house is built of wood, or perches set upright, twenty or thirty feet long, by fifteen or twenty wide. The perches are set in the ground about one foot, and are about six feet out of the ground. Over this is put a roof of elm bark. They are very comfortable for summer use. The lodge of skin lasts three or four years; the lodge of wood seven or eight years."



In Tinta Otonwe, burial scaffolds were set up. The scaffolds were about 8 feet tall, 10 feet long, and about 5 feet wide. Four stout post with forked ends were firmly set in the ground. Forks were laid cross and side poles. The body was carefully wrapped to make it watertight, and laid to rest on the poles. Many baskets and buckets of food and drink were attached for the dead.



In winter time and when traveling, the Dakota lived in skin tepees. These are formed of long, slender poles, stuck in the ground, in a circle of about eight feet in diameter, and united at the top, and covered with the raw hide of the buffalo, having the hair scraped off. They are in the form of a cone.

Early in July, 1823, Stephan Harriman Long and his group of explorers rested at the

mouth of the St. Peter's River, and began ascending that stream. Having advanced a short distance they arrived at the village of Taoapa, better known as Sakpe's Village from the name of the chief of this band of the Mdewakanton. It was also known as Tinta Otonwe, and in the summer of 1823, "consisted of fifteen large bark lodges, in good order; they were arranged along the river. Some of them were large enough to hold from thirty to fifty persons, accommodated as the Indians usually are in their lodges.



In Keating's writing during the Long's Expedition in 1834, described the burial scaffolds: "On these scaffolds, which are from 8 to 10 feet high, corpses were deposited in a box made from part of a broken canoe. Some hair was suspended, which we at first mistook for a scalp, but our guide informed us that these were locks of hair torn from their heads by the relatives to testify their grief. In the centre, between the four posts which supported the scaffold, a stake was planted in the ground; it was about six feet high, and bore an imitation of human figures, five of which had a design of a

petticoat, indicating them to be females; the rest, amounting to seven, were naked, and were intended for male figures; of the latter four were headless, showing that they had been slain; the three other male figures were un mutilated, but held a staff in their hand, which, as our guide informed us, designated that they were slaves."

"The boxes in which the corpses were placed are so short that a man could not lie in them extended at full length, but in a country where boxes and boards are scarce this is overlooked. After the corpses have remained a certain time exposed, they are taken down and buried."

SHAKOPEE HERITAGE TRAIL

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