



# The Pottery Bowl

CHAPTERS OF ARKANSAS HISTORY • A PUBLICATION OF HISTORIC ARKANSAS MUSEUM

## Chapter One

Now that I am old, I think about things that happened when I was young. I think about the country where we used to live and the people I knew when we lived there. Most of all, I remember my grandfather.

When I was a child, we lived along another river, the one the Frenchmen now call the Ouachita. We left there to join our cousins on this stream they call the Red River, but I remember the place where I grew up. I remember how Grandfather loved it there.

Every morning, even when it was very cold, he would swim in the river. He knew every part of the river and how it changed when the heavy rains came and when the dry season came. He knew where it was easy to catch fish and where to look for mussels.

Up along the banks, he knew where the bear stayed and where the deer would go to find salt. I sometimes thought he knew them by name. He knew the open places where flocks of turkey would often gather, and it almost seemed that he could talk with them.

## Chapter Two

As soon as I was old enough, Grandfather would take me along almost everywhere he went. Sometimes we would spend a whole morning trailing a small herd of deer or watching squirrels build a nest,

# Most of all, I remember my grandfather

and we would never say a word. Sometimes, while he was teaching me to build a fish trap or how to shape an arrow point from the fine, hard stone we found upriver, we would talk.

“They want me to kill more bear so we will have hides to trade,” he said one day, shaking his head. “Why do we need to trade? We have everything we need here. There’s plenty of game to hunt and there’s every kind of fish we could ever want. Your mother has corn, beans and pumpkins in her gardens. We had the good sense to live where salt can be found,



*Henderson State University has made a long term loan of ancient Arkansas pottery to Historic Arkansas Museum, for safe keeping. The collection of clay pots inspired this Chapter in Arkansas History. Who made the pots? How did they use them? Who found the pots? How do they use them? Read and find out!*

not like those fools who come here from the east.”

Grandfather believed we should only kill the animals we needed for food and for skins to make robes and rugs. He saw no reason for having anything to do with outsiders. “It only leads to trouble,” he would say.

He did believe in knowing the land where we lived. He taught me to remember the shoals and eddies of the river, the deep woods and the little prairies, and the paths of the animals, especially the haunts of the great brown bear. “This is how we know who we are,” he would say. “By knowing the place where we live.”

## Chapter Three

When father and the other leaders of the village began to talk about leaving, Grandfather never said a word. “We must go,” they would say. “We can’t live by ourselves any longer because sickness has left so few of us and new enemies have come into our country. We must go where we can trade for the things we need and be safe among our cousins.”

Grandfather would get up and leave or just busy himself with something, seeming to ignore all the talk. One night, Father and Mother were talking about Grandfather. We were in our house and thought that Grandfather was visiting the house of his cousin. It stood nearby, and it was just like ours,

*(continued on page 4)*



# Reading a Place



If we pick up a book that's written in a language we don't know, we might not learn very much. We might recognize a word or two here and there. There might even be a photo or a drawing that will give us a hint what the book is about.

We need someone who can read that language. With such a person to help, each page of the book can become a story, each paragraph a new idea, and each sentence a nugget of information.

It can work the same way with a place. We might walk through the woods and never even notice a small hill we pass. An archeologist might recognize the hill as a mound that was built by people who lived there ages ago.

We might see a clump of bright yellow flowers in a clearing and think nothing about them. An anthropologist might know that those flowers wouldn't grow wild, but are the kind of flowers that people planted around a house that used to stand there. The next thing you know, you might begin to see foundation stones from the house. Over there is a well, and that faint, old path leads to where the barn once stood.



## **Reading trees, streams and rocks**

A botanist might find a story in the way certain kinds of trees stand along one level on a hillside overlooking a stream. The story is about how the stream changed

the land over ages of time. A historian or archivist might stop and examine a pile of rocks. It might be the key to understanding a yellowed map that can be found in a musty file in the local courthouse.

These people can tell us about others who lived in a place, one after the other, for hundreds or even thousands of years. They know how to read a place.

## **Reading the 'Grandfather' story**

Archeologists, historians, and others were able to read the place where the Caddo bowl came from. They found some excellent stories to tell us. If you carefully read the story about Grandfather, you will find clues about some of the "hidden" stories.

In the story, Grandfather knew where all the animals were. He knew the habits of bear, deer, turkey, different kinds of fish, and many other animals. These animals were important to the Caddo people. They helped to provide food, shelter, and even some tools. How do we know?

Archeologists have studied the places where the Caddo people lived in Arkansas. They have sometimes dug into the ground to find where the Caddo people cooked and ate. They have found where the Caddo people built their houses and where they held meetings and ceremonies.

Near the places where the Caddo cooked and ate, bones from deer, turkey and other animals were found. Is that a clue that meat from those animals was part of the Caddo diet? Probably so.



## **Beehive-shaped houses**

Grandfather lived in a house near the grandchild who was telling the story. They both had "beehive" shaped houses. What is a beehive shape and how do we know the houses were built that way? The houses were round with a kind of domed roof and sides made of bundles of twigs, long stemmed grasses, and mud. The floors were often made of baked clay.

We have two kinds of reasons to believe these things. First, archeologists have found remains of Caddo houses. The posts that formed the frame were driven or dug into the ground, and their remains form a circle. Fragments of twigs and grasses, matted together with a mixture of mud and clay are often found on these sites. Inside the circle, there may still be a hard, smooth, clay surface underfoot.



## **Reading European journals**

Second, historians tell us that the first Europeans who visited the Caddo wrote about seeing their beehive shaped houses. Why should we pay so much attention to what someone from France or Spain wrote about the Caddo?

The reason for that is simple. The Europeans did write about it. The Caddo didn't have a way to write down what they did and how they lived so we could read about it today.



If we find clay pipes with fragments of tobacco and tobacco ash, we have a clue that the Caddo smoked tobacco. If we find large, flattened bowls with salt caked on them we think the bowls were used to make salt. If those bowls were found near a salt spring that still runs today we're even more convinced about the salt making. If written accounts by early European explorers say that they saw the Caddo smoking tobacco and making salt, all of those things together made a pretty convincing case.

One very important piece of evidence about Caddo life is fragments of novaculite. Novaculite is a kind of crystal-like rock. It is very hard, but it is easy to shape into sharp points. It was the best possible stone for making hunting points and tools for cutting.

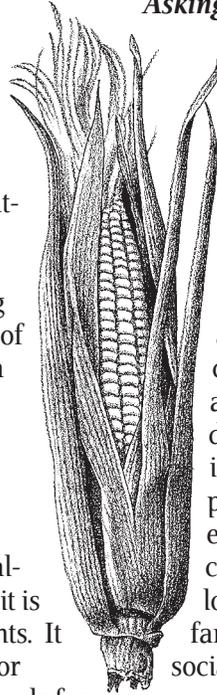
Novaculite is found along the Ouachita River, especially near Hot Springs. The Caddo became skilled at mining and shaping points from novaculite. They traded the points to other people and Caddo points have been found hundreds of miles away.

Some pieces of evidence are a little harder to figure out. And some pieces of evidence get us into things we have to stop and think about. Here's an example. We think that the Caddo changed over many years from eating mostly meat to eating a lot of corn and vegetables. Why do we think so? The evidence is in the condition of teeth found in Caddo skulls.

In the skulls found at early Caddo sites teeth were often broken, but had no cavities. In much later sites, it was the other way around. This causes scientists to believe that the early Caddo ate a lot of meat, sometimes breaking their teeth on the bones of the animals. Later on they ate more

and more corn. Corn contains sugars, and the Caddo began to experience cavities.

### Asking hard questions



Should we find human skulls and study them? Is that disrespectful? Or is it more respectful to learn all we can about the people who lived here long before us?

If we decide to learn about ancient peoples, do we have to dig up graves to do so? In fact, archeologists don't just set out to dig up graves. They try to examine every part of the life that people live. They look for houses and for places where they cooked, ate, and worked. They look for evidence of hunting, farming, pottery-making, and social activities.

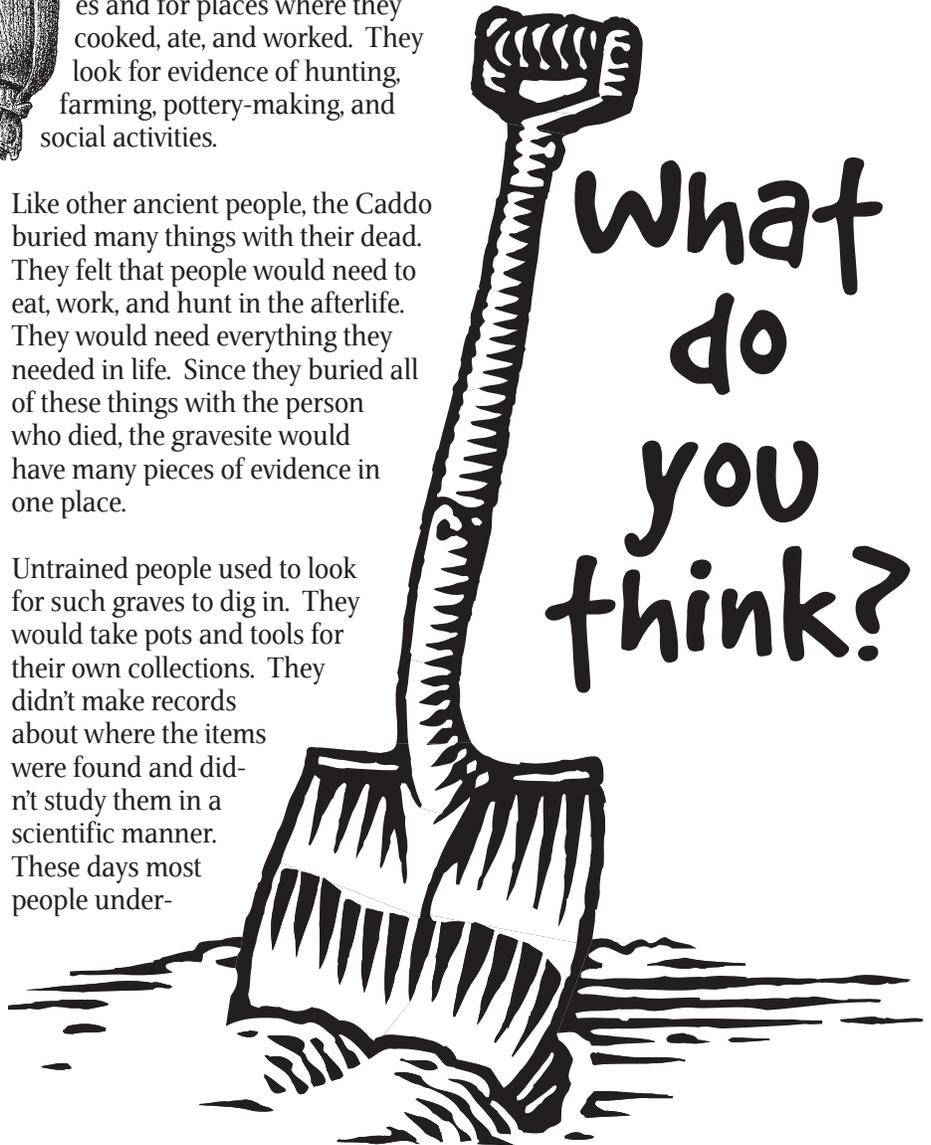
Like other ancient people, the Caddo buried many things with their dead. They felt that people would need to eat, work, and hunt in the afterlife. They would need everything they needed in life. Since they buried all of these things with the person who died, the gravesite would have many pieces of evidence in one place.

Untrained people used to look for such graves to dig in. They would take pots and tools for their own collections. They didn't make records about where the items were found and didn't study them in a scientific manner. These days most people under-



stand that such items should be left for trained people to study.

Nobody looks into a gravesite or a living site without feeling some hesitation about disturbing whatever was left behind by some ancient person. But archeologist and others believe that they are truly honoring such people by learning how they lived and what they believed. They believe the ancient people would want us to learn from them.





# Grandfather

(continued from page 1)

with a beehive shape and a thatched grass roof and sides.

Father was saying, "I'm worried about him. He is so old now, and he can't get around like he did. His back is bent and his joints are stiff. He even has trouble eating, because most of his teeth are gone. I'm not sure he can make the trip with us."

Just then, Grandfather stepped through the door. He had been just outside, coming to bring some tobacco to smoke with Father. He had heard what Father said.

"Don't worry about me," he said quietly but with a firmness in his voice I had never heard before. "I can take care of myself. And besides that, I'm not going anywhere. I belong here. So do you, but you don't seem to understand that." He turned and left, taking his tobacco with him.

*Contributing writer:*  
Charley Sandage

*Contributing photographer:*  
Bill Branch

*Designer:*  
Jann Greenland of Greenland Creative, Inc.



200 East Third St.  
Little Rock, AR 72201-1608  
(501)324-9351  
TDD (501) 324-9811  
[www.arkansashistory.com](http://www.arkansashistory.com)

Historic Arkansas Museum is a historic site museum, interpreting the territorial and early statehood periods of Arkansas, and Arkansas's creative legacy.



A museum of the Department  
of Arkansas Heritage

Accredited by the American  
Association of Museums

The museum opens its doors daily for tours of one of the state's oldest neighborhoods.

For information about field trips to Historic Arkansas, call (501) 324-9351 or e-mail the education staff at: [reservations@arkansashistory.com](mailto:reservations@arkansashistory.com).



*Pots on display at Historic Arkansas Museum*

## Chapter Four

Over the next few weeks, as we made preparations to leave, Grandfather acted as if nothing was happening. He would swim each morning, then go off into the woods as he always did. He would come back in the evening, later and later each day, it seemed.

Then, one evening, he didn't come back at all. The twilight ended and the dark night came and still Grandfather had not come in for supper. "We need to go find him," Father said.

"I know where he is."

Everyone turned to look at me, then Father nodded. "Yes," he said, "you would know. Show us where he is."

I led them to the head of the island, and then we swam the old, slack channel to the high banks. Just a short way along the branch that enters the river at that place was a small hill over a salt lick. It was where Grandfather loved to hide and wait to see his favorite bear, an old, black creature, bigger than any two men. I used to think the bear knew when we were there watching. I was pretty sure Grandfather talked with

the bear when I was not around.

Grandfather was there, or at least his body was, lying still as if he were waiting for the bear. Father picked him up gently and carried him like a child back to our house. For the first time, I realized how small and frail Grandfather had become.

We all knew we would miss Grandfather, but nobody was really too sad. He would have been unhappy living somewhere else. He probably wouldn't have left at all.

Father and the others prepared his burial place. They collected the things he would need on his journey – some hunting points and tools, a drinking cup and some shells. They let me help, even though I wasn't really old enough. They all knew that Grandfather was my best friend.

Just as we were about to finish, Mother brought her favorite food bowl. It was a rich, dark color that turned to a kind of red just where it narrowed toward the rim. It had fine engraving on the rim and body, and it was a bowl fit for a very important man. Grandfather hadn't been all that important, I suppose, but I was glad he would have such a fine bowl.

"He will like the bowl, Mother," I said. "And he will like being here on the island, with the river he loves passing on either side."

