

Frontier Stories: Reading and Writing Plains Archaeology

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Today W. Duncan Strong (1899-1962) has been all but forgotten in the history of American archaeology. He made no front-page discoveries or theoretical breakthroughs; his single claim to fame was his contribution to Great Plains archaeology. This work, carried out in the early 1930s at the beginning of his career during the otherwise unremarkable Nebraska State Archaeological Survey, merits a place in the discipline's history merely because his were the first substantial publications on this previously neglected region. For students of American literature and culture, however, his Nebraska field journals and publications offer an extraordinary opportunity for investigating popular images of the Great Plains. Specifically, Strong's writings reveal the ways in which stories about the American frontier, from historical documents and scientific reports to novels and folk memories, shaped perceptions of the region's landscape and history.

Strong craved adventure, and he found it equally in archaeology and in books. Over the course of his career, he wintered with a band of nomads in Labrador, lost two fingers in a hunting accident in Honduras, and excavated numerous ancient sites in Peru. When real-life excitement slowed, he read adventure stories. It is telling that, while supervising a New Deal work relief dig in California, he read books about exploring Brazil, riding horseback through the Americas, and pioneering in the San Joaquin Valley.¹ He especially loved the

literature of the western frontier. His grandparents had been among the first pioneers in Oregon Territory in the 1850s, and he had been raised on family memories of those rough-and-ready days. As a young man, he read ballads and novels about the Wild West; later he loved soldiers' memoirs and explorers' journals.

Consequently, Strong arrived in Lincoln, Nebraska, late in the summer of 1929 prepared to see the Great Plains as a place caught in time. Wherever he traveled, landmarks evoked the beloved fireside tales, historical accounts, and popular novels that, in turn, provided him with both practical and imaginative resources for constructing the archaeological past. Indeed, frontier stories not only colored his interpretation of artifacts but provided a set of frames for his own storytelling. Transposing the familiar plot of frontier conquest onto the prehistoric past, he invented a narrative of Plains peoples from the Ice Age through the early nineteenth century. At the same time, claiming the legacy of Lewis and Clark, he presented the archaeological survey as an episode in the saga of American exploration and endowed his account of the past with eye-witness authority. In this way, Strong made stories of the frontier truly his own.

Surveying Nebraska's Archaeology

Upon receiving a doctorate in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1926, Strong joined the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago as an assistant curator and, in this capacity, accompanied the Rawson-MacMillan Subarctic Expedition of 1927-1928. After the prestige of the Field Museum and the challenge of field work in Labrador, a teaching appointment at the University of Nebraska must have appeared unattractive to an ambitious young anthropologist looking for research opportunities. Ethnologists had already thoroughly studied Plains cultures; linguists had documented the native languages. Plains archaeology, however, was an open field. The existing literature on Nebraska consisted of a mere handful of reports on isolated sites and chance discoveries. And so, seeing an opportunity to advance his career, Strong accepted the job at the university and immediately began staking out Plains archaeology as his professional territory.²

Thanks to the efforts of the National Research Council, an advisory organization created in 1916 to further research in the natural and social sciences across the nation, over the previous decade several states in the upper Midwest had organized archaeological surveys that brought together civic groups and government agencies under the direction of accredited archaeologists. Arriving in Lincoln in 1929, Strong lost no time in securing a federal grant and persuading the university to launch a similar survey of Nebraska. His first goal was an overview of the state's archaeological remains, and he turned to residents for information. A query he circulated in city and small-town newspapers, including the Omaha *World Herald*, the Hastings *Daily Tribune*, and both of Lincoln's papers, the *Star* and the *State Journal*, generated an overwhelming response as

physicians and farmers, laborers and businessmen, clerks and school teachers from all over the state reported local sites and sent sample artifacts.³

Strong relied heavily on this network of assistants—indeed, without them he could not have covered as much territory as he did in less than eight months of field work. He taught at the university for only two academic years; and except for fair-weather excursions to nearby sites, he was grounded in Lincoln during the semester. He left for his new post at the Bureau of American Ethnology in July 1931, then returned briefly to western Nebraska the following summer to conclude his research. Of all the survey volunteers, he most valued three dedicated men who had begun investigating Plains archaeology before his arrival and who carried on after his departure: Thomas L. Green, Asa T. Hill, and Waldo R. Wedel. Sons or grandsons of pioneers, these three shared Strong's family's experiences. Raised on first-person stories of the frontier, they shared a fascination with historical heroes and a curiosity about Indians that drew them to archaeology. Their family experiences, moreover, provided a very personal context for reading other frontier narratives.

Born in 1899 and raised in Portland, Strong often heard his family's tales. In 1850, his grandfather William Strong had gone west by ship to serve as a judge in Oregon Territory while his grandmother crossed the Plains by covered wagon. His godfather, William Duncan, served at a mission outpost in Alaska and during his visits regaled the family with his adventures. Strong's father, an attorney for several Pacific Northwest tribes, gathered both native oral traditions and pioneer memories, which he handed down to his son with pride. Strong remembered a pilgrimage with his father to the cliff overlooking the Columbia River where in 1805 the Cathlamet Indians had witnessed the arrival of Lewis and Clark. Not surprisingly, frontier fiction seduced the young Strong. He read the "Canadian Kipling," Robert Service, in high school and the "American Kipling," the cavalry officer Charles King, whose novels for young boys celebrated the western campaigns of the 1870s and 1880s. Strong was also familiar with King's memoir of the Sioux War, and at some point he read the journals of early American explorers. These historical narratives were to prove useful in his professional work.⁴

Thomas L. Green (1884-1954) of Scottsbluff, Nebraska, also came from a family with close connections to Native Americans. His maternal grandfather had been a government Indian agent in Kansas while his father, Major Albert L. Green, also an agent, had worked among the tribes of Nebraska in the early 1870s. Again much like Strong's father, who recorded the lore of the Columbia River tribes, Major Green wrote a history and ethnography of the Oto Indians.

Born in the small town of Beatrice, Nebraska in the mid-1880s, Green had a respectable education for the times. He attended local public schools and even spent a year at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. When he returned to Nebraska in 1905, he entered the banking business. Within a decade he became the vice president of the Platte Valley State Bank in Scottsbluff. He held this posi-

tion and executive offices in other financial institutions until the Depression forced him into early retirement in 1933. As a public figure, Green was active in civic organizations, including the Scottsbluff Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club, but he devoted most of his energies to promoting local history. He took charge of the Nebraska Chapter of the American Pioneer Trails Association and served on the board of the Nebraska State Historical Society. An amateur historian, he wrote a handful of articles on forts, trading posts, and buffalo hunting for the society's quarterly magazine.⁵

Green's fascination with the frontier led him further and further back in time. According to his own account, he had launched his self-directed study of Nebraska's history with nineteenth-century pioneer farmers, moved next to fur trappers, then continued on to sixteenth-century Spanish conquistadors. But what came before recorded history? he wondered. Looking for an answer, he took up archaeology as a hobby and spent weekends scouting the countryside around Scottsbluff. It was he who notified Strong about Signal Butte, a key site in western Nebraska, and who made all the local arrangements for Strong's brief expedition in 1932.⁶

A paunchy, beardless man of sixty with glasses and an enormous fingerring, known to his friends as "A.T.," Asa T. Hill (1871-1953) of Hastings, Nebraska, would have looked at home on Wall Street when Strong first met him in 1930. Yet, this successful businessman knew the hardships of frontier life firsthand. As a six-year-old, he had traveled with his parents to western Kansas in a covered wagon and grown up in a sod house. In the wake of the Indian Wars of the 1870s, relations with Plains tribes remained tense. Even as an elderly man, Hill remembered the day his mother hid with the children in a ditch full of tumbleweeds (or a straw stack—there are differing versions of the story) while the Cheyenne warrior Dull Knife and his band swept through the neighborhood.⁷

Schools were few and far between on the Kansas frontier and, besides, A.T.'s parents relied upon him, the oldest of their six children, to help with the farm work. As a result, his formal education never went beyond the fourth grade. Hill left the farm at age eighteen to ride the rails through the Southwest, up and down the Pacific Coast, and all over the western states. Along the way, he took up a variety of odd jobs. In his more colorful roles, he was an itinerant salesman, a market hunter, a portrait painter, a traveling photographer, and a dishwasher in a Colorado mining camp. Those rambling days left their mark. Once, jumping from a moving freight train, he injured an ankle. He had no money for medical treatment—not even pain medicine—and the accident left him with a permanent limp. But it was only one of many experiences that earned him an unshakable self-confidence and a willingness to try his hand at anything. After he had married and settled back home in Logan, Kansas to raise his own family, he and his father started a general store. The business eventually failed, and though Hill was nearly forty, he went to work at an auto dealership, a pioneering

enterprise in the 1910s when the automobile was still somewhat of a novelty and paved roads were scarce. Hill quickly proved himself a capable salesman and eventually rose to an managerial position.⁸

Hill's interest in archaeology arose from this same self-confidence and willingness to try anything. He first embarked upon archaeology with a search for the Pawnee village where in 1806 Zebulon Pike had hauled down the Spanish flag and hoisted the stars-and-stripes. A hundred years later, the citizens of Republic, Kansas, memorialized this event with a monument on the outskirts of the town. Hill attended the dedication ceremony. But later, after comparing local topography with the original account of Pike's party, he concluded that the monument was misplaced and set out to find the true site. At last, in 1923 near Red Cloud, Nebraska, he discovered the ruins of a large village that corresponded precisely to the historical record. He bought the land, gradually excavated the site, and built an extensive, meticulously catalogued collection. Upon retirement from the auto sales business in 1933, he became director of the Nebraska State Historical Society's museum and carried on the state archaeological survey for over a decade.⁹

The third of the survey's key collaborators was Waldo R. Wedel (1908-1996), a spare, towering graduate student in Strong's classes at the University of Nebraska. Wedel too had grown up on a Kansas homestead, but he was a good deal younger than Hill and he had the advantage of a thorough education. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Arizona, where he studied archaeology both in the classroom and in the field. Upon graduation in 1930, news of the state survey drew him to the University of Nebraska. Under Strong's direction and through Hill's generosity in making his private collection available for study, Wedel wrote a master's thesis on the material culture of the historic Pawnee. He then completed his graduate training at Strong's alma mater, the University of California, Berkeley, and received the PhD in 1936. Thanks to his excellent credentials, that same year the Smithsonian Institution appointed him assistant curator of archaeology. He remained at the Smithsonian until his retirement forty years later.

Wedel always claimed that the romance of exploration had first drawn him to archaeology. As a schoolboy, he set out to find the legendary city of Quivira. At the age of eighty, he was still looking for evidence of Coronado's expedition. Larger questions also propelled Wedel's research, however. What could archaeology reveal about the ecology of the Great Plains? How had its temperamental climate affected human culture and history? A witness to devastating droughts, he felt that the answers to these questions should inform policy decisions about the region's future. Turning down whatever opportunities for archaeological research in more exotic lands that may have come his way as a curator at the Smithsonian, he continued to devote himself to the Great Plains because of his genuine love for the land and desire to know its past.¹⁰

These four men—Strong, Green, Hill, and Wedel—formed the inner circle of the Nebraska State Archaeological Survey. If similar family histories and an enchantment with history had aroused their fervor for archaeology, real differences still existed in age, education, and livelihood, differences with potential for fragmenting the circle. What united these men—what gave them a shared agenda, a key for identifying archaeological remains, and a language for articulating their experiences—was a common set of stories.

Conferring with Frontiersmen

Strong and his collaborators collected stories about the Great Plains ranging from sixteenth-century Spanish narratives to twentieth-century scientific reports. In their correspondence, they exchanged reading lists that Strong further circulated in the bibliographies of his publications. For his monograph, *An Introduction to Nebraska Archeology*, Strong also compiled a catalog of historic maps of the Great Plains, starting with Pere Marquette's map of 1673 and running to Stephen Long's map of 1819 tracing the great expeditions of North American exploration.¹¹ As he began corresponding with local hobbyists, Strong discovered that many were surprisingly conversant with accounts of nineteenth-century explorers. Just as Hill had scoured the documents to locate the site of Pike's triumphant flag-raising, one man had spent two decades looking for an Indian village mentioned by Lewis and Clark. "[R]ejoice with me," he exclaimed when at last he found it. Then, as if to counter any doubt, he quoted Strong the relevant passage from the explorers' journals.¹² Though marking the footprints of frontier heroes was not the survey's object, historical accounts answered the very practical problem of locating remains buried under acres of crops and prairie grass.

Explorers' accounts also proved useful for dating. Before the advent of radio-carbon dating, the primary challenge in American archaeology was establishing cultural sequence. Stratigraphy, seriation, and dendrochronology revolutionized Southwestern archaeology in the 1910s and 1920s, but these techniques had little use on the Great Plains where stratified sites were rare, pottery styles crude, and long-lived trees scarce. Instead, Strong advocated a technique particularly suited to this region, the *direct historical method*. Comparable to stepping stones through time, historic accounts led from nineteenth-century military expeditions back to sixteenth-century exploring parties and beyond or, as he liked to say, "from the known to the unknown."¹³

In order to demonstrate this research method in his monograph, Strong organized the site reports in reverse chronological order, reflecting the movement from written accounts back into the archaeological record. In the discussion that followed, he grouped these sites into six cultures running from the most recent to the earliest: Pawnee, Upper Republican, Nebraska, Sterns Creek, Signal Butte II, and Signal Butte I. Pawnee Culture was well-documented for the historic era. Strong placed Upper Republican Culture and Nebraska Culture

together in the era immediately preceding the historic Pawnee. Where the historic record dropped off, he had to rely on stratigraphic evidence. Underneath a layer of Nebraska Culture material at a stratified site in eastern Nebraska, the survey team had discovered a layer of Sterns Creek Culture, so he placed Sterns Creek next in his reverse chronology. Signal Butte exhibited three cultural levels. The top contained artifacts that were clearly Upper Republican. Strong could not link artifacts from either the middle or lowest cultural levels to material collected elsewhere and so he designated them, respectively, Signal Butte II and I.¹⁴

Explorers' stories had other practical uses as well, and the journals of Lewis and Clark proved particularly valuable. Strong had three editions of the journals to choose from—Biddle (1814), Coues (1893), and Thwaites (1904). Though familiar with all three, he consistently quoted Thwaites. Not only was this the most complete edition available at the time and the one closest to the original journals (the exhaustive documentary edition was not available until 2001), but it had been compiled and annotated by a professional editor, the highly respected Reuben Gold Thwaites, who had numerous documentary editions of explorers' narratives to his credit. His eight-volume set of the Lewis and Clark journals included full-sized maps as well as the captains' scientific notes, which did much to restore their reputation as naturalists. Strong declared them "great scientific explorers" and praised their "keen eyes and clear judgment."¹⁵

The stories of Lewis and Clark fleshed out the artifactual record by identifying former inhabitants and recording their customs. With a mandate from Thomas Jefferson to establish trade agreements with native peoples, the explorers collected data about the arts and crafts as well as the population, territory, and political alliances of potential economic partners. "They saw much of the living Indians," Strong maintained, "and more surprisingly many things that pertained to the past activities of the Indian people." He then quoted four sizable passages in which Clark discussed mounds in eastern Nebraska.¹⁶

One of the most celebrated archaeological features of North America, the earthworks dotting the Mississippi Valley had inspired storytellers since the colonial era. Popular folklore attributed them to a lost tribe of "Mound Builders," perhaps related to the Egyptians, which had disappeared before the arrival of modern Indians.¹⁷ Surely Strong knew of these colorful tales, although he refused to discuss them in his monograph. The significance of the Nebraska mounds, he insisted, lay in what they revealed about cultural relations between Plains peoples and their neighbors to the east. To this end, he set about determining if the mounds are artificial or natural and, if artificial, what their intended purpose had been. Even as he steered away from popular mythology, he nonetheless turned to stories for answers. How he went about the question of the Nebraska mounds shows the way in which he evaluated the validity of conflicting stories.

Strong first examined the stories told by William Clark. As the Corps of Discovery traveled along the “Ne-Ma-haw” river in July 1804, Clark stopped to investigate a cluster of mounds. In his journal he called them “artificial Mounds” or “graves” and noted that the “Indians of the Missouri” buried the dead on “high ground.” A fortnight later, he twice recorded mounds in an area formerly occupied by the “Otteaus” or the “Otteauze.” He also visited the monumental grave of “Mahars King Black Bird,” a mound that, in Clark’s estimate, was twelve feet wide at the base and six feet high, with an eight-foot pole rising from the center.

When Strong quoted Clark in *Nebraska Archeology*, he identified the first passage as a description of the mouth of the Nemaha River in Richardson County, Nebraska. The second site was just south of Omaha; the third was near the confluence of Indian Creek and the Missouri River at Council Bluffs, Iowa. In a footnote to one block quotation, Strong explained, “this paragraph follows the original manuscript”—meaning the Thwaites edition—and referred to Biddle and Coues, which read differently, as “later editions.” It is noteworthy that Strong consistently quoted Thwaites yet still took the trouble to compare this edition with others. Moreover, by citing the date of a journal entry as well as the page number in Thwaites, he allowed readers without access to this expensive scholarly edition to find a quoted passage while, simultaneously, he accentuated Clark’s credibility as an eyewitness.¹⁸

Strong next turned to stories told by ethnologists. Just over a century after Clark’s visit to Blackbird’s grave, Alice Fletcher and Francis La Flesche published the authoritative volume on the Omaha. These two authors came with excellent credentials. Fletcher had studied under F.W. Putnam of the Peabody Museum and received several professional honors, including executive offices in leading anthropological organizations. Despite a lack of academic training in anthropology, La Flesche had risen to a post at the Bureau of American Ethnology. In addition to his collaborative publications with Fletcher, he published a number of his own articles and monographs. Equally important, he was an insider. Part Omaha Indian, he had grown up on a reservation and participated in tribal life as a young man. Consequently, when Fletcher and La Flesche wrote that the Omaha buried the dead by seating the body in a shallow grave, then building a pole framework overhead and covering it with earth, Strong took their word.¹⁹

When Strong reviewed the archaeological literature on Nebraska, however, he became highly critical. With few exceptions, he condemned his predecessors for ungrounded speculation and sloppy documentation. He complained of one author’s “tendency to so confuse his concrete data with various theoretical considerations that the two are often hopelessly intermingled.” Of another, he remarked bluntly: “it is hard to tell where [Gerard] Fowke gets his information.” Pointing out that the presence of human remains did not prove a mound was man-made, he called for “scientific” excavation. If a mound were artificial, a

cross-section would reveal the boundary between the natural ground level and the soil piled on top.²⁰

When it came to archaeology, Strong believed that the most credible story was one that posed as a transcription of a text inscribed in the earth itself. In the 1920s and 1930s, during the on-going bid for control over American archaeology, Strong and his academic colleagues denounced rapacious pot-hunters and well-intentioned hobbyists alike for destroying the nation's heritage. The propaganda piece "Archaeology and Relief," which Strong co-authored with Frank M. Setzler of the Smithsonian, illustrates the fledgling profession's rhetorical strategy of equating archaeology with historical scholarship. Calling for preservation, Strong and Setzler asserted that archaeological remains were "the very stuff of American history," an "irreplaceable heritage" belonging "to the people as a whole." Nonetheless, these fragile "material documents" containing "valuable records can only be read by those trained for such . . . work." The federal government, therefore, had an obligation to protect archaeological sites as national monuments and to permit excavation only by qualified professionals.²¹

Strong again compared an archaeological site to a document in another article intended for a popular audience, "Signal Butte, a Prehistoric Narrative on the High Plains." Here he described stratigraphic layers as "chapters in a book" relating the "story of early man in the western plains." Along with these verbal images, he portrayed archaeology as historical scholarship in three dimensions through visual images. In a photograph of Signal Butte, the clean, straight walls of the excavation trench recalled an aisle in a library. Later, in *Nebraska Archeology*, he carefully detailed the stratigraphic techniques used to excavate this site, layer by layer, square by square.²²

Strong commonly referred to an archaeological site as the "scientific record"—that is, incontrovertible data. Significantly, he also referred to it as the "story that is hidden in the ground," suggesting a story encoded in language so esoteric that only the professional archaeologist with his specialized techniques could read it.²³ This metaphor further intimated that he *merely read* it. He did not invent it. Following such logic, Strong denied that he too was telling stories about the archaeological past.

Instead, he set himself up as the authoritative critic of stories by others and proceeded with a cross-examination of historic accounts, ethnological publications, and archaeological reports, all of which he measured against his own findings. He challenged the assertion that the mounds were earthlodges or forts because his survey team had found no supporting evidence. He questioned if a village in southeastern Nebraska was truly Pawnee because its pottery did not resemble the style from definitely identified Pawnee sites. Besides, he found no "historical references" either to this particular village or to Pawnee occupation of the area. He dismissed the claim that the Pawnee had constructed burial mounds because Wedel's research did not confirm it. The Pawnee did occupy central Nebraska in historical times, however, and Strong proposed that the mounds

there were built primarily for defense, with perhaps some small earthworks for ceremonial purposes. The mounds in the southeastern and east central parts of the state, along the Missouri River, were constructed by sedentary Siouan tribes. Archaeology and ethnology both verified Clark's account: these mounds were in fact built by humans, specifically for burials.²⁴

From Strong's appraisal of the mounds, it becomes clear that he granted authority to the "scientific record" (i.e., professional archaeological work) and the "historic record" (i.e., eyewitness accounts). He took for granted that the two complemented one another and apparently never confronted a conflict between his own data and the explorers' accounts. When the artifactual evidence was inconclusive, he resorted to the historic record—often the very documents that had guided him to the site in the first place. To an extent, Plains Indians also counted as eyewitnesses. As noted above, La Flesche commanded credibility both as a professional ethnologist and as an Omaha Indian. When the survey team could not find the remains of a village described by La Flesche and Fletcher, Strong did not question their veracity. Instead, he determined that cultivation and diversion of the river had obliterated the site.²⁵

Wedel apparently judged sources by the same criteria. Puzzled by some peculiar flat stones unearthed in Nebraska, he proposed that they were hide scrapers. Yet he had little confidence in this identification until an Indian woman on an Oklahoma reservation confirmed that they were in fact used for cleaning animal hides. Written documents by white observers nonetheless remained the final authority. During that same reservation visit in 1934, he listened to an aged Indian's memories of the U.S. cavalry's attack in 1874 at Palo Duro Canyon. This story, Wedel noted, "paralleled closely the documentary records."²⁶

Unable to imagine that documentary records too were stories, Wedel chose to overlook their biases. Lewis's journal was a case in point: it was a political manifesto, equating a fertile land with a great nation. When he set out for the Louisiana Territory, Lewis understood that it was his patriotic duty to proclaim the land's potential for cultivation and industrial development. Literary description weighed as much as scientific data in building an argument for the young nation's promising future. And so, during the first months of the expedition, before his idealistic expectations confronted the rugged reality of the Far West, Lewis filled his notebooks with idyllic depictions of the midwestern Plains.²⁷

More than a century later, these images of lush woods and abundant game impressed Wedel, a farm boy from drought-stricken Kansas. In his journal for the Nebraska survey expeditions of 1930-1931, he juxtaposed early travelers' notes with his own observations. Where once they had discovered thriving villages beside flowing streams and gurgling springs, he now found ruins buried in dry creek beds and silent springs smothered by erosion. About this time, he started a loose-leaf notebook with the title "Environment and Archeol[ogy] in the Gr[eat] Plains." The first half contained quotations from John Bradbury, Stephen Long, Lewis and Clark, and other nineteenth-century adventurers de-

scribing herds of deer, flocks of water fowl, banks of berry bushes, and groves of fruit and nut trees. The second half assembled excerpts from twentieth-century scientific publications, such as “Misconceptions concerning Dry Farming” and “Severe Heat and Drought over the Middle West,” that pictured the region as an arid, inhospitable land.²⁸ Separated by little more than a century, these contrasting scenes suggested to Wedel a narrative of decline and fall.

Refuting the common misperception of the Great Plains as a uniform environment, Wedel explained that the Plains actually consisted of several distinct ecological regions. He identified four in Nebraska alone and demonstrated a “definite correlation” between these regions and the state’s prehistoric cultures. In western Nebraska, nomadic hunters had occupied the Sandhills and High Plains while in the east gardeners resided in the Drift Hills and on the Loess Plains. All was not well, however. In the archaeological record Wedel read evidence of large-scale migrations that he attributed to successive droughts that had forced prehistoric peoples from their homes just as the Dust Bowl of the 1930s was now chasing farmers from theirs. The present ecological crisis was only one in a recurring cycle, he concluded, although modern agriculture had aggravated it.²⁹

In an effort to bring this story home to the people of Nebraska, in 1935 Wedel wrote an article for the historical society’s *Nebraska History Magazine*. Once upon a time, he began, fields of grass and groves of hardwoods covered the Republican River Valley. Beaver and otter lived in the wooded bottoms while buffalo and antelope roamed the uplands. But then, as the ax felled the trees and the plow ripped the prairie sod, wind erosion ravaged the land.³⁰ Before the article went into print, however, the society’s executive officer, Addison E. Sheldon, demanded that Wedel change his story.

Sheldon grudgingly accepted the general narrative of ecological deterioration, yet he asserted that Nebraska’s eastern Drift Hills had never, as Wedel claimed, been “covered with deciduous forests.” Since the 1800s, frontiersmen had reported nothing but grass on the hills along the Missouri River, Sheldon insisted. “I have known the hills myself over sixty years and the friends with whom I have conversed have known them over eighty years.” No one recalled trees there.³¹ As a long-time resident of the state, he claimed eyewitness authority for his statement. As the magazine’s editor, moreover, he controlled the stories that appeared in its pages. And so Wedel agreed to rewrite the offending passage before the article went to press.

Landscape of the Imagination

A wide array of frontier stories not only served practical purposes—locating sites, establishing chronology, identifying artifacts and determining their cultural affiliation—but also provided resources for the archaeological imagination by shaping the ways in which the survey team envisioned the landscape and their place in it. As we have seen, explorers’ tales of a land of milk and

honey from the early nineteenth century heightened Wedel's awareness of the Plains environment during the dry, dusty 1930s. Strong, in contrast, tried to assure himself that nothing had changed since frontier days. When he accepted the job at the university, his brother, also an energetic reader, recommended Willa Cather's pioneer novels *My Antonia* and *O Pioneers!* because they captured "the real 'feel' of Nebraska."³² But long before Strong moved to Lincoln, a life-time of reading fiction and history had already taught him to see the Midwest. As he drove across the Plains, he noted symbols of the frontier days: a stage depot, a trading post, an old steel bridge brought west on ox carts in the 1860s. Each one evoked a story.

Late one Saturday afternoon during an expedition in western Nebraska in 1932, Strong met Thomas Green for the drive to his mountain cabin in Wyoming where the two men and their wives planned to spend the Independence Day weekend. Heading north and west, they crossed the state border and continued along the North Platte River. During the heyday of the frontier, westward-bound adventurers had transformed the river into a highway, and as evening fell Strong scoured the valley for historic landmarks. Just at dusk, he spotted the ruins of Fort Laramie. A key military post during the Indian Wars of the 1870s, the crumbling fort stirred his imagination. "A most romantic setting," he wrote, "long barracks, drill ground, old sod house where Jim Bridger traded. The black line of the Rockies to the west and Laramie peak in the afterglow." Strong might have copied these lines straight from a book—and in a way he did. He even cited the text. Pointing out the dormitory called "old bedlam," he noted, "(see novels by Chas. King)."³³

Strong had in mind the mystery "*Laramie: or The Queen of Bedlam, A Story of the Sioux War of 1876* (1890). The "Bedlam" of the title was both the nickname for the officers' quarters and a reference to the havoc caused by a series of thefts. The author, General Charles King, had begun his literary career with an account of the Fifth Cavalry under General George Crook during the Indian Wars and had gone on to write numerous novels about the western campaigns. By the time of Strong's visit to Fort Laramie, King's popularity had faded, although he remained a national figure through the 1920s. Establishing himself as an authority on the Indian Wars, King defended the legend of his friend "Buffalo Bill" Cody and led a campaign to memorialize western historic sites. Toward this end, he published a map tracing the Fifth Cavalry's 1876 military expedition, which Strong carried on his own 1932 archaeological expedition.³⁴

If Strong treated King's war memoirs as fact, he found in King's novels truth of another sort. The storyteller's real-life experience endowed them with veracity and authenticity for those who could know the sights, sounds, and smells of the frontier only second-hand. Strong's professional colleagues too were surprisingly conversant with the novels. When Strong asked Clark Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History for historic references to Signal Butte in

Nebraska, for example, Wissler replied that he could not think of any offhand but recommended looking in King's books. A vague recollection of *Signal Butte* (1896) might have prompted this suggestion, but apparently Wissler had forgotten that this novel was set in Arizona.³⁵

The familiarity of well-educated men such as Strong and Wissler with King's second-rate literature may seem odd. When historian Walter Prescott Webb interviewed magazine editors for a chapter in *The Great Plains* (1931), however, he learned that westerns drew all classes of readers, from workers to professionals, from all regions of the country but particularly from the Mississippi Valley. The stories owed their popularity to characters with whom white, male readers identified and to the setting in a time and a place distant enough to be exotic yet close enough to be familiar. Westerns, according to the editors, were so widely read because they were about "our own country." In order to illustrate their appeal on a personal level, in *The Great Plains*, Webb quoted a passage from Sherwood Anderson's autobiography in which the author described privately acting out a hero-rescues-lovely-maiden scene from a movie western. At that moment, Anderson confessed, "All my early reading of American literature comes into my mind, and I try to do a thing that is always being spoken of in the books."³⁶

True, when Webb characterized the "literature of the Plains" as "a literature action, of adventure, of a strange and exciting life in a strange and wonderful country where anything may happen," he was speaking primarily of cattle-kingdom westerns.³⁷ This characterization applies equally to the frontier stories that appealed to Strong and his colleagues for the very reasons Webb enumerated. A combination of popular fiction and historic accounts enlivened the archaeological imagination by transforming the Plains into a richly inhabited landscape.

Green described this invisible world in a presentation to the Scottsbluff Rotary Club. Since he had taken up local history as a hobby, he testified, a whole new dimension had unfolded before him. "This river [the Missouri River] is no longer just a waterway supplying irrigation water. It becomes the Ne-brath-ka of the [I]ndian, the trapping ground and highway down which the fur-trappers floated their bull-boats loaded with furs towards St. Louis." Looking further back in time, he continued:

This little knoll is not just a piece of ground too high for irrigation. It[']s where teepees once were pitched where rain would not bother. And this little spring in the hills is not just a watering place for cattle. It[']s where ancient camps were made or the patient savage lay in ambush for the deer who came down to drink, or for his enemy. And that barren useless butte: on it, signal fires once burned in the days before the pyramids were built.³⁸

To his fellow Nebraskans Green declared, “romance is not a thing pertaining to Europe or New England alone but is here, in your own country.”³⁹ Smoke mushrooming from Signal Butte, fur-trappers packing their boats, the cavalry galloping away from Fort Laramie—these scenes evoked a thrill of romance.

Upon entering this storybook landscape, members of the survey team imagined themselves in roles drawn from the past. Significantly, they did not choose the role of Indian. Today, amid debates over repatriation and reburial, the general disregard for native American claims over cultural remains and grave sites may seem cavalier. It is important to keep in mind, however, that Strong and his associates had a concern for Native Americans, albeit paternalistic. This attitude would certainly have been familiar to Green, whose grandfather and father had been Indian agents. So too with Strong, who attributed his career choice to his family’s close acquaintance with native peoples and whose parental role models were a judge, an attorney for Northwestern tribes, and a missionary to the Alaskan natives.⁴⁰

Hill likewise believed that he stood for Indian interests. In the early 1920s, the Trenton [Nebraska] Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the local branch of the American Legion, decided to memorialize Massacre Canyon, where the Pawnee and the Sioux had fought their last battle in 1873, with a monument and an annual “pow wow.” Hill protested that commercialization would override historical accuracy. He sympathized, moreover, with Indians still grieving slain kinsmen. Through negotiations with survivors of both tribes, he was instrumental in staging a peace-pipe treaty between these ancestral enemies. Clearly he considered himself a self-appointed guardian of the Indians.

No, the leaders of the state survey did not play Indian. Rather, out in the field, they took the explorer’s role. Strong’s journals show them consciously emulating their nineteenth-century heroes as they surveyed the frontiers of Nebraska archaeology.

Exploring Nebraska Archaeology

In a travelogue or a personal letter, Strong’s description of Fort Laramie quoted above would hardly seem noteworthy; but this provocative passage appears in his journal among excavation records, sketch maps, and diary entries. The attempt at poetics [“black line of the Rockies to the west and Laramie peak in the afterglow”] and the parenthetical citation [“(see novels by Chas. King)”] together suggest that he envisioned an audience.⁴¹ Did he really believe that anyone would read the raw journal? Though the original manuscripts remained under lock and key in distant archives, he and his associates knew the explorers’ journals as published volumes, always ready-to-hand for reference or bedtime reading; and they invented a publishing system of sorts for their own journals.

More highly valued than artifacts, field notes were also more fragile. Hill, for example, had amassed an enormous collection of notes, and Wedel lamented the loss of a great treasure when during a fishing trip Hill’s ““little black book””

accidentally flopped overboard. Whether or not this story was apocryphal, at the end of every field season while Hill directed the historical society's archaeology projects, he had his journals typed and sometimes hand-copied as well. He even asked his secretary to transcribe notebooks kept by high school boys who volunteered for summer expeditions. Multiple copies simultaneously ensured the journals' survival and allowed them to circulate. Today, a record of the 1932 Signal Butte expedition by the surveyor Maurice Kirby is found with Strong's papers in the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian, while both the manuscript of Strong's 1929 journal and a typed copy reside in the papers of John L. Champe, another of the survey's assistants, at the Nebraska State Historical Society.⁴² This circumstantial evidence and the conscious imitation of the exploration classics together suggest that Strong wrote his journals with readers in mind.

The explorer's journal is a hybrid. It is a narrative like a novel with a journey as the plot, an explorer as the hero, and land and weather as antagonists. It is effusively descriptive, like a poem. At the same time, it claims to be solidly factual, like a scientific report, and poses as an eye-witness account. But a journal does not, in fact, document events play-by-play. From the first crude notes scrawled *ex post facto* during a pause in the action, the author begins to craft raw experience into a story. The refining process continues with each successive draft through publication. Even after the author's death, the revision of his story goes on with every new scholarly edition.⁴³ What messiness remains preserves the illusion that the narrator merely recorded events as they happened. Allegedly writing in the moment, he could not determine what was incidental to the plot and what was critical.

A brief passage from Lewis and Clark illustrates the conventions of the explorer's journal. Clark reported that on the night of 30 July 1804 the Corps of Discovery made camp at a wooded spot at the foot of the bluffs above the Missouri River. Appearing to resume writing the next morning, he recorded the latitude, the fair weather, and the disappearance of the horses. He enumerated the game for the day—four deer, a buffalo fish, and a live beaver—although he did not accompany the hunters afield. He ended the day's entry by noting the chill evening and the bothersome mosquitos.⁴⁴

The party stayed at this campsite awaiting representatives of the Oto and the Missouri tribes and then continued up the river on 3 August. The main event for the day's entry was a storm, and Clark reported the encounter in detail. Toward evening, his men had sighted the storm approaching from the northwest and swiftly made ready. It struck at seven o'clock with a gust of rain. The "wind lasted with violence for one hour after the wind it was clear serene and cool all night." It started blowing again in the morning as the party pushed upstream. This day was uneventful, so Clark filled the page with descriptions of the landscape and waterways along the route. He remarked in closing: "Reed a man who went back to camp for his knife has not joined us."⁴⁵

Considering the number of revisions the journals underwent, the casualness of this remark appears disingenuous. Reed had deserted. Yet Clark designs his story so that the listener shares in the captains' gradual realization that the man had jumped ship. When Reed did not appear the next day, they began to wonder. When another two days passed without a sign of him, suspicion ripened into conviction. Now, Clark recorded, four men were sent in search of "the Deserter reed with order if he did not give up Peaceably to put him to Death &c." A week later, on 18 August, captured and repentant, Reed stood trial and was sentenced to a lashing and four circuits of the gauntlet. So ended the deserter's tale.⁴⁶ Yet it was only one thread among many running through Clark's chronicle of the Corps of the Discovery.

Written a century and a quarter later, Strong's journal reads much the same way. He too kept record of the weather, the landscape, the wildlife, and the doings of various members of his party, even when he was not with them. On 23 August 1931, encamped at the fork of the Dismal River, Strong awoke to a rainy Sunday morning and ate breakfast in his tent. Outside, the party's handyman Mike O'Heeron spotted a mule deer and Strong's dog Pronto went wild pawing her fresh tracks. As the weather cleared, O'Heeron and Strong searched for the remains of a fort but found only rotten tree stumps. Meanwhile, Wedel and Hill headed downstream. Wading into the river, Hill plunged his foot into a spring, sank up to his chest, and soaked his gun.

Everyone returned to camp in the early afternoon and packed into the truck for the drive to a nearby excavation site. This was cattle country, Strong observed, pretending to be writing en route. He had heard that local ranchers tried raising sheep, until the animals tore up the grass and the soil blew away. At the excavation site, the party unearthed two hearths and a good collection of pottery along with a variety of obsidian, jasper, and copper artifacts. Strong ventured that the copper pieces actually dated from a later period but had somehow been buried in a layer of earlier artifacts.

The day's work done, the men went shooting. They had bagged a few prairie dogs when Wedel chanced on a huge raccoon. The hunters drove it from its burrow and turned Pronto loose. It dashed up a tree, but there was no escape. Strong estimated that it weighed thirty-five pounds, and he skinned it that night in camp while the coyotes howled. In the morning he ate boiled coon for breakfast.⁴⁷ These parallels between the Lewis and Clark journals and Strong's Nebraska journals demonstrate his use of the expedition narrative as he eagerly cast himself in the role of a frontiersman.

Stories of Nebraska Archaeology

Raised on his family's pioneer tales, Strong longed for some of his own. Until adventure came his way, he appropriated the work of other writers. In high school he entertained friends with dramatic readings of frontier ballads by Robert Service. Years later, when he was supervising a New Deal relief project, he

read the exploration tale *Brazil Adventures* aloud to his field party.⁴⁸ This love of story-telling shaped his official report on the state survey, *An Introduction to Nebraska Archeology*, and did much to ensure the book's popularity.

Both professional anthropologists and local enthusiasts acknowledged *Nebraska Archeology*'s scholarly merit. Strong's colleagues declared that it "revolutionized" their understanding of Plains cultures because it overturned the prevailing belief that only nomadic hunters had occupied the region and demonstrated the existence of pre-Columbian horticultural societies.⁴⁹ One hobbyist called it a "scientific classic . . . the best work on the subject ever published." Rather than speaking only to scientists, however, it "combined science and literature in such a way that a novice can understand without constant recourse to an encyclopedea." This reader predicted that the book would have wide appeal—and he was proved right. Within weeks of publication, Strong received a flood of letters raving about *Nebraska Archeology* or requesting copies.⁵⁰

Strong's one-time surveyor reported that when the book arrived at the U.S. Engineer Office in Omaha, he immediately sat down to read it—until the supervisor intervened. "There wasn't any more work done that day," he confessed. "First I would read it awhile then my boss would take it away from me and read it himself. It see-sawed back and forth between us all day." Hill reported a similar reception at the historical society. "[The book] looks about three years old and as if it had had very rough usage," he lamented just five days after it arrived. "Between Waldo [Wedel] . . . and me, we have almost torn it up, jerking it from one another in our anxiety to see what it contains." Other Nebraskans were equally eager to read it. In fact, so many patrons demanded the book that the university librarian in Lincoln ordered four additional copies.⁵¹

How could a scholarly monograph of more than three hundred pages, packed with footnotes, tables, and diagrams have such popular appeal? First, like the immensely popular guides to birds and plants, it was an illustrated manual for identifying artifacts. Hobbyists compared pieces from their collections to Strong's photographs and adopted his classification scheme. One survey volunteer confessed that he had not understood the meaning of all the sherds, beads, and broken arrowheads before reading the book. "I wish I could have seen the material altogether in the days when we were just picking up the pieces, with no idea what went where. Or could go back over the sites . . . with the book, just to be sure what it was we were looking at."⁵²

The chief reason for the book's popularity, however, was the engaging way in which Strong presented what could have been a dull archaeological report with lists of sites and artifacts. In the words of one correspondent, *Nebraska Archeology* had "all the earmarks of a popular story."⁵³ Indeed, it combined three interconnected stories: a history of the Great Plains, an eye-witness account of the Nebraska State Archaeological Survey, and a chronicle of exploration.

After the site-by-site analysis in the main text, in the final chapter Strong synthesized all this information into a history of Great Plains cultures. Long

ago, he began, perhaps even during the Ice Age, hunters had wandered through Asia into North America and gradually drifted onto the Plains. Some time after these nomads had disappeared, migrants from the east settled on the continent's grasslands. For centuries, these skillful and innovative peoples planted gardens, built earth houses, and fashioned pottery vessels. With the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, native populations from the south and west swarmed onto the Plains, in part to escape oppression, in part to pursue the bison. These newly mounted hunters and warriors quickly decimated the horticulturalists' way of life. But only a few generations later, the nomads themselves were driven out by white agriculturalists.⁵⁴ In Strong's retelling, the story of the archaeological past echoed the familiar narrative of the American frontier: nomadic western hunters yielding to eastern farmers.

Just as he constructed a narrative of the archaeological past, Strong wrote a travelogue of the archaeological survey. When a reader turned to the pages on the Dismal River, he found an adventure tale reproduced almost directly from the field journal. Here though, Strong spoke in the third person. On 22 and 23 August 1931, "the author" visited the Dismal River forks with a few members of the survey team. Setting the scene, he described the landscape with a geographer's eye and a poet's sensitivity. "The river at this point flows through the desolate sand hill region of west-central Nebraska . . . in a rough, almost uninhabited terrain of rolling hills which often attain a height of 100 feet or more." Nonetheless, the Dismal River "deserves a more cheerful name, for it is a refreshing and attractive oasis," offering "the inevitable lure of fresh running water in an arid country." While camping there, the party had seen a mule deer as well as plentiful birds and small animals. "A large raccoon caught by the expedition's dog in a small gully furnished additional excitement," Strong added, leaving the details of the chase to his readers' imagination. Yes, the region was "still Indian country, though the natives have long been gone." He concluded with a nostalgic flourish: "One remembers the Dismal River and the sand hills with a thrill of pleasure, and plans to return."⁵⁵

Whereas Strong gave the dates for work at each site, he did not present the story of the archaeological survey from beginning to end because the primary narrative—cultural chronology—dictated the book's organization. Rock Bluffs, for example, was one of the sites investigated during the early months of the survey but in *Nebraska Archeology*, it appeared near the middle, following sites considered more recent. Only attentive readers, however, would notice this jumbling of the survey's storyline because it is wrapped in yet a third narrative—the story of North American exploration.

Just as Lewis compared himself to Christopher Columbus and Captain James Cook, Strong placed his comrades in an honorable lineage of explorers. On the first pages of *Nebraska Archeology*, he linked archaeologists to explorers by juxtaposing the history of Plains exploration with a summary of previous archaeological work in the region. Throughout the book, as he came to each exca-

vation site, he noted both the early explorers and the archaeologists who had visited there previously. Only then did he name the members of his field party and recount their work at the site.⁵⁶ In this way, he incorporated three narratives into a single epic of frontier adventure. At last he had a story of his own.

From Reading to Writing

Explorers' journals, folk memories, and popular fiction as well as scientific reports and artifactual evidence clearly shaped perceptions of the contemporary landscape and reconstructions of the archaeological past. Strong and his companions turned to this variegated collection of fiction and nonfiction for information, entertainment, role models, and a sense of frontier life. Despite his readiness to criticize professional colleagues for the failure to use professional methods, Strong was more concerned about authenticity than factuality. He judged stories by how convincingly they were told and their ability to transport him to the scene of action. In his monograph on Plains archaeology, imitating famous expedition journals, he adopted a discovery narrative and, by interleaving archaeological data with his own adventures, endowed his story of the past with eyewitness authenticity.

Nebraska Archeology, in turn, fulfilled the same purposes as the frontier lore that bound the survey team together by offering readers a common story. As local history, it commemorated the state archaeological survey and flattered participants by equating them with the great American explorers. Survey volunteers savored familiar scenes and shared memories. "The darned book nearly made tears come to my eyes," admitted one university professor who had often accompanied Strong's weekend field trips.⁵⁶ Readers who had not participated in the survey directly could also make Strong's story their own. When he identified a recurring pattern of western hunters and eastern farmers struggling for dominance of the Plains, he was not merely imposing a familiar pattern on the archaeological past. He was incorporating recent experience into a longer, ongoing process. So too, Wedel's tale of drought and depression in prehistoric times both domesticated the past and normalized the present. For Nebraskans, these were stories about the people who had first lived in their hometown.

Thomas Green eloquently explained the deep appeal of local history. In contrast to the remoteness of world history, local history was "very real and personal and living." It offered a sense of connectedness, he told his Scottsbluff neighbors, because it showed that "you are dwelling where others have dwelt before you back through long ages. And where others will dwell after you are gone through ages to come." Then, with the realization that "you yourself are a tiny link," the story became "really and truly your own."⁵⁷ Strong offered readers exactly such an understanding of Nebraska's past and a sense of community transcending time. With *Nebraska Archeology*, he added to the stock of frontier stories.

Notes

1. W. Duncan Strong, field journal, December 1933 to April 1934, Papers of W. Duncan Strong, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC [hereafter cited as Strong Papers].
2. Robert W. Neuman, "An Archaeological Bibliography: The Central and Northern Great Plains Prior to 1930," *Plains Anthropologist* 7 (1962): 43-57.
3. Carl E. Guthe, *The Committee on State Archaeological Surveys of the Division of Anthropology and Psychology, National Research Council*. Reprint and Circular Series of the National Research Council, 97 (Washington, DC: National Research Council, 1930); Fred W. Upson to E. A. Burnett, 14 October 1929; Burnett to Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution [C.G. Abbott], 1 and 16 November 1929; Abbott to Burnett, 8 November 1929, Record Group 2/10/03, University Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
4. Gordon R. Willey, *Portraits in American Archaeology: Remembrances of Some Distinguished Americanists* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1988), 75; Waldo R. Wedel, *Essays in the History of Plains Archeology* (Lincoln, NE: J&L Reprint Company, 1982), 1-17, 153; Thomas Nelson Strong, *Cathlamet on the Columbia: Recollections of the Indian People and Short Stories of Early Pioneer Days in the Valley of the Lower Columbia River* (Portland, OR: Metropolitan Press, 1930; ©1906 Thomas Nelson Strong).
5. James C. Olson, "Thomas L. Green," *Nebraska History* 35 (1954): 240-2.
6. Thomas L. Green, "Talk before Scottsbluff Rotary Club," Strong Papers; "Wonderful Otoe Indian Collection," *Nebraska History Magazine* 14 (1933): 169-74; Correspondence between Green and Strong, 1930 through 1933, Strong Papers.
7. "Biography of A.T. Hill: His Work in Archeology," Record Group 3562, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, [hereafter cited as NSHS 3562], 3-4; W. Duncan Strong, "Plainsman, Businessman, Scientist," *Nebraska History* 34 (1953): 68-71.
8. Charles C. Osborne, "Businessman, Friend," *Nebraska History* 34 (1953): 81-86.
9. *Nebraska History Magazine* 10 (1927): 157-261 [special issue, "The War between Nebraska and Kansas"]; Waldo R. Wedel, "Pioneer Nebraska Archeologist," *Nebraska History Magazine* 34 (1953): 71-9.
10. David M. Gradwohl, "Waldo R. Wedel, 1908-1996," *Plains Anthropologist* 41 (1996): 318; Wedel, *History of Plains Archeology*, 150-70; *Idem*, "Coronado, Quivira, and Kansas: An Archeologist's View," *Great Plains Quarterly* 10 (1990): 139-51; Wedel to Hill, 29 October 1935, Papers of Waldo R. Wedel and Mildred Mott Wedel, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC [hereafter cited as Wedel Papers].
11. John L. Champe to Strong, 22 August 1935; Strong to Mildred Mott, 24 November 1937, Strong Papers; Strong to Wedel, 18 October 1934; Wedel to Champe, 8 December 1936, 14 January 1937, Champe to Wedel, 14 December 1936, Wedel Papers. See Strong's bibliography in *An Introduction to Nebraska Archeology* Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, 93:10 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1935).
12. Robert F. Gilder to Strong, 2 April 1931, Strong Papers. Strong named this the Saunders Site. Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 168-75.
13. W. Duncan Strong, "From History to Prehistory in the Northern Great Plains," in *Essays in Historical Anthropology of North America* Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, 100 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1940), 353-94.
14. Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 245-72. Strong appeared uncertain about where to place the Dismal River Culture, although his tables (pp. 246, 272) suggest that it may be contemporaneous with Upper Republican. He also states that Dismal River artifacts were mingled with the Upper Republican artifacts in the upper most level at Signal Butte (p. 269).
15. John L. Allen, "'Of This Enterprize': The American Images of the Lewis and Clark Expedition," in James P. Ronda, ed., *Voyages of Discovery: Essays on the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1998), 255-280; James P. Ronda, "The Writingest Explorers: The Lewis and Clark Expedition in American Historical Literature," in *Ibid.*, 299-326. Ronda justifies the classification of the Lewis and Clark journals as stories in *Finding the West: Explorations with Lewis and Clark* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2001), xi-xx. The three best-known editions of the journals are Elliot Coues, ed., *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark* (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1893); Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1904); and Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1983-2001). Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 41 (quotation); comparison of editions, 42.
16. James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1984), 113-32; Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 41 (quotation); 41-4.
17. Robert Silverberg, *Mound Builders of Ancient America: The Archaeology of a Myth* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968; reprint, Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1986).

18. Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 41-3.
19. Joan Mark, "Francis La Flesche: The American Indian as Anthropologist," *Isis* 73 (1982): 496-510; Hartley B. Alexander, "Francis La Flesche," *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 35 (1933): 328-331; Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 205; Alice Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe Annual Report*, Bureau of American Ethnology, 27 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911).
20. Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 50-1 (quotations); 206-11.
21. F[rank] M. Setzler and W. Duncan Strong, "Archeology and Relief," *American Scholar* 6 (1936): 115-6.
22. W. Duncan Strong, "Signal Butte, A Prehistoric Narrative in the High Plains," in *Explorations and Field-Work of the Smithsonian Institution in 1932* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1933), 69; *Idem*, *Nebraska Archeology*, 227-8.
23. Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 5.
24. *Ibid.*, 50-1, 205-11.
25. *Ibid.*, 143-4.
26. Wedel to Strong, 21 November 1933, Strong Papers; Wedel, *History of Plains Archeology*, 155 (quotation); 155-7.
27. Thomas Hallock, "Literary Recipes from the Lewis and Clark Journals: The Epic Design and Wilderness Tastes of Early National Nature Writing," *American Studies* 38 (1997): 43-66.
28. Wedel, "Notes on the Archaeology and Ethnology of Nebraska and Adjacent Areas, 1930-1931," Wedel Papers; Wedel, "Environment and Archeol[ogy] in the Gr[eat] Plains," Wedel Papers. E.g. E[llery] C. Chilcott, "Some Misconceptions concerning Dry Farming," in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1911*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 247-56; P.C. Day, "Notes on the Severe Heat and Drought over the Middle West during the Summer of 1913," *Monthly Weather Review* 41 (1913): 1433-56.
29. Waldo R. Wedel, "Contributions to the Archaeology of the Upper Republican Valley, Nebraska," *Nebraska History Magazine* 15 (1935): 132-209; *Idem*, "Some Problems and Prospects in Kansas Prehistory," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 7 (1938): 115-32; *Idem*, "Plains Migrations Traced," *El Palacio* 47 (1940): 210-1; *Idem*, "Dust Bowls of the Past," *Science*, supplement 86:2232 (1937): 8-9; *Idem*, *Environment and Native Subsistence Economies in the Central Great Plains* Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, 101:3 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1941).
30. Wedel, "Archaeology of the Upper Republican Valley," 141-2.
31. Addison E. Sheldon to Wedel, 2 April 1935, Wedel Papers.
32. Ronald Strong to W. Duncan Strong, 1 October 1929, Strong Papers.
33. Strong, field journal, 1932, Strong Papers, 26.
34. Charles King, "*Laramie*," or *the Queen of Bedlam, A Story of the Sioux War of 1876* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1890). King later published his memoirs in *Campaigning with Crook and Stories of Army Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890; reprint New York: Readex Microprint Corporation, 1974). Don Russell, *Campaigning with King: Charles King, Chronicler of the Old Army*, edited by Paul L. Hedren (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1991), 97-102; Strong, field journal, 1932, Strong Papers, 3.
35. Strong to Clark Wissler, 4 January 1933, Wissler to Strong, 20 January 1933, Strong Papers. Charles King published this novelette and another in a single volume, *Trooper Ross and Signal Butte* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1896; reprint Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1978).
36. Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (original, 1931; reprint, Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1981), pp. 465-70, 478 (quotation).
37. *Ibid.*, 476.
38. Green, "Talk before Scottsbluff Rotary Club," Strong Papers, 1.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Wedel, *History of Plains Archeology*, 4.
41. Strong, field journal, 1932, Strong Papers, 26.
42. Wedel, "Pioneer Nebraska Archeologist," 73. Field journals for 1934-1941, Files of the Archaeological Division, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE; NSHS 3562; Maurice Kirby, "Diary of Party," Strong Papers; Strong, Personal Archaeological Record, 1929-1930, Papers of John L. Champe, Record Group 4985, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE [hereafter cited as NSHS 4985].
43. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 72-3. Thomas P. Slaughter brilliantly exposes the behind-the-scenes composition of the Lewis and Clark journals in order to caution historians against reading them as first-hand accounts of what "actually" happened in *Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and Wilderness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 47-64.

44. According to E.E. Blackman of the Nebraska State Historical Society, as cited by Thwaites, this place was in the vicinity of the later town of Fort Calhoun. Thwaites, *Original Journals*, vol. 1, 94-6.
45. *Ibid.*, 99.
46. *Ibid.*, 101-12, quotation from 102.
47. Strong, field notes, 1931-1932, Strong Papers, 130-2.
48. Willey, *Portraits*, 75; Strong, field journal, December 1933 to April 1934, Strong Papers, 84-5, 100. The book's correct title was *Brazilian Adventure* by Peter Fleming (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933).
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51. Kirby to Strong, 19 August 1935; Hill to Strong, 20 August 1935; Gilbert Doane to Strong, 1 November 1935, Strong Papers.
52. Mark V. Barrow, *A Passion for Birds: American Ornithology after Audubon* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), 33-40; Elizabeth B. Keeney, *The Botanizers: Amateur Scientists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1992), esp. 22-37. Royal A. Prentice to Strong, 20 September 1935; Robert Reynolds to Strong, 10 December 1935, Strong Papers.
53. Gilder to Strong, no date, (quotation), Strong Papers.
54. Strong, *Nebraska Archeology*, 271-99.
55. *Ibid.*, 212-3.
56. *Ibid.*, 8-29; Hallock, "Literary Recipes," 47; Ronda, *Finding the West*, 17-28.
57. Reynolds to Strong, 10 December 1935 (quotation); Strong, Personal Archaeological Record, 1929-1930, NSHS 4985, 3, 5, 6-14; *Idem*, *Nebraska Archeology*, 217-20.
58. Green, "Talk before Scottsbluff Rotary Club," Strong Papers, 1