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August 1994

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## **“MAKE-BELIEVE WHITE-MEN” AND THE OMAHA LAND ALLOTMENTS OF 1871-1900**

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**Abstract.** *The (Dawes) General Allotment Act of 1887 was meant to fulfill the United States Government policy of allotting individual parcels of Indian reservation lands in an effort to break up communal societies, forcing tribes to move towards the white man's ideal of civilized culture. Three decades earlier, Article 6 of the Treaty of 1854 allowed for the survey and allotting of the Omaha's northeastern Nebraska reservation, placing the Omaha Nation at the leading edge of federal policy a generation before the Dawes Act. Two interrelated groups of tribal members identified as “Make-Believe White-Men” and the “Progressives” who signed an 1882 petition are tracked through the allotments of 1871, 1883-1884, and 1900. Though numerically small these politically active groups had a great impact on the shaping of federal policy relating to the Omaha Nation. Their success or failure at emulating white culture was interpreted as an example of the attitude of all Omaha people. Their patterns of land-taking, as well as the unexpected growth of land leasing which developed with allotments, showed Omaha innovation within a traditional framework.*

### **Preface**

*I bring to you news which it saddens my heart to think of. There is a coming flood which will soon reach us, and I advise you to prepare for it. Soon the animals which Wako<sup>a</sup>da has given us for sustenance will disappear beneath this flood to return no more, and it will be very hard for you . . . do what you can to help each other, even in the troubles with the coming tide. Now, my people, this is all I have to say. O<sup>a</sup>po<sup>a</sup>tonga (Big Elk), 1853, (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911:84).*

In 1854, one year after the death of Big Elk, seven Omaha leaders “touched the paper” in Washington, which ceded all of their lands claimed on

either side of the Missouri River. In exchange, the Omahas retained a portion of their homelands in northeastern Nebraska. Article 6 of the treaty of 1854 allowed for the survey and portioning (allotting) of this reservation to individual members of the Omaha tribe (Kappler 1904b). Allotments followed in 1871, 1883–1884, and 1900. Did the selection of individual parcels reflect upon pre-existing social or political arrangements? How did the Omahas respond to the conditions of allotment and other “civilization” efforts of the U.S. Government?

This study focuses on two interrelated groups of tribal members specifically identified in historic documents as “progressives.” The first are the “Make-Believe White-Men,” Omahas who resided in an early reservation village patterned after white settlement. The second group are individuals who signed an 1882 petition seeking land titles and allotments. Though numerically small, these politically active groups had a great impact on the shaping of federal policy relating to the Omaha Nation. It was their success or failure at emulating white culture that was interpreted as an example of the attitude of all Omaha people. Furthermore, the Omaha efforts were considered in the subsequent implementation of the 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act, which pushed allotment nationwide. The choices of land-taking by the two “progressive” groups were tracked through the allotments of 1871, 1883–1884, and 1900. The results show a pattern of group cohesion that survived over 50 years. This paper will explore those patterns, as well as the unexpected growth of land leasing which developed with allotments.

The label “progressive” appeared in many documents, with each application of this culturally loaded term being different from the next. The context of its use seemed to imply voluntary movement toward any aspect(s) of white culture and values. The term could be applied to minor concerns such as choosing to wear a piece of “citizen” (i.e. white man) clothing, or in such major issues as discontinuing tribal religious ceremonies and seeking individual land ownership. Indian agents, missionaries, and newspaper reporters often employed the label when speaking of both named and unnamed individuals, as well as identified and unidentified groups. The two groups studied here clearly illustrated aspects of “progressive” behavior as defined above. For clarity, and at the risk of being tedious, they will be identified as “Make-Believe White-Men” and “petition signers” throughout the paper. Others that might have qualified for the “progressive” appellation will be identified whenever possible.

### Setting the Stage

The Omaha, like other speakers of the *Dhegiha'* branch of the Siouan language, trace their origins and traditions from the East (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). By 1714, with their arrival upon the Missouri River and subsequent contact with the Arikara and Pawnee Nations, the Omaha adopted the earth lodge dwelling and began planting local varieties of maize (O'Shea and Ludwickson 1992). Village sites were established along running streams, where the bottom lands provided tillable soil, timber for fuel and building materials. Earth lodges and produce of the garden plot were the property of the women. The practice of the son-in-law providing service to the father-in-law may have resulted in the villages being loosely arranged in a matrilineal fashion (Fortune 1932; Mead 1932).

Omaha society centered around the *Hu'thuga*, a ceremonial circle. During communal summer hunts Omahas camped in this great circle on the open prairie. The ten patrilineal clans were divided between two major subdivisions of the *Hu'thuga*. Occupying half of the circular encampment were the five clans of the *Ho' gashenu*, or Earth People. In the opposite half of the arrangement could be found the five clans of the *I'shta'çu'da*, or Sky People. Governmental, religious, and social practices were regulated by membership within the ten clans and a multitude of sub-clans (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). A number of political arrangements made clans dependent upon one another for the completion of tasks and ceremonies, thus reducing the risk of conflict and fissioning (Mead 1932).

Under the terms of the 1854 treaty the original reservation was located north of the Iowa River. The Omaha rejected this site as unsuitable, and were granted land in the Blackbird Creek drainage basin of present-day Thurston, Burt, Cuming, and Dixon Counties, Nebraska (Royce 1900). This particular land was chosen, in part, because the Omahas had been in the region since the 1700s (Fig. 1). *To'wo'to'gatho'*, Big Village on nearby Omaha Creek, had been the principal Omaha village from 1775 until 1845 (O'Shea and Ludwickson 1992). Victims of cholera and smallpox epidemics were buried on nearby hilltops, as were prominent leaders such as *O'po'to'ga*, Big Elk, and *Wazhi' gaçabe*, Blackbird (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). The Omahas moved from their Bellevue, Nebraska, residence in 1855 (Dorsey 1884) and planned a single village located between the two Blackbird Creeks, where the steep banks provided a certain natural fortification (Missionary Letters, December 9, 1856, as cited in Green 1967). The Presbyterian missionaries

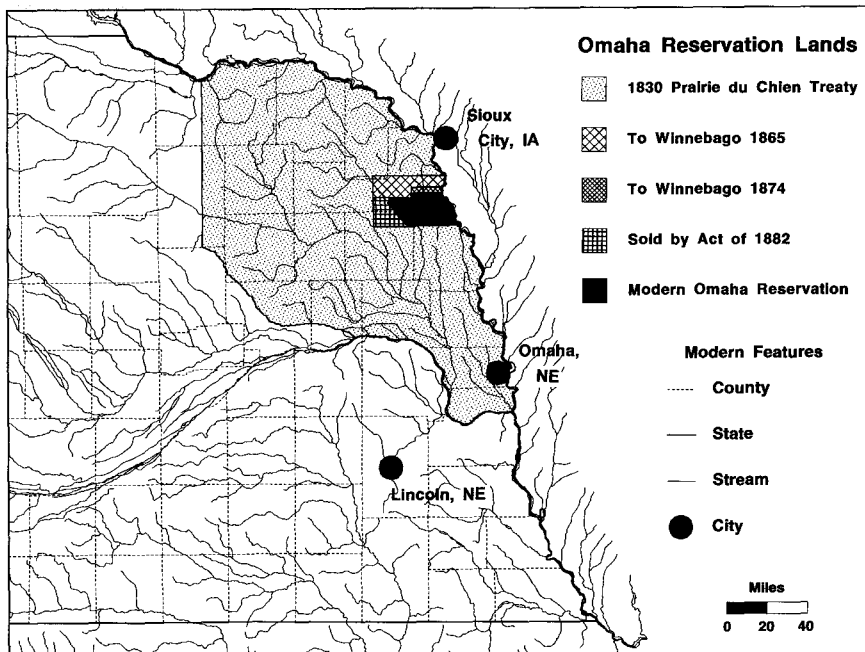


Figure 1. Omaha lands in Nebraska before and after the 1854 treaty. Adapted from Fletcher and La Flesche 1911: Plate 21. Map by Swetland and Archer.

followed from Bellevue in 1857 and occupied a three-story stone structure on the bluffs a few miles north of the village site (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911).

The Omahas actually divided into three villages (Fig. 2). Historian Norma Kidd Green (1975) described the dispersion as customary, with bands grouping earth lodges and tipis near each other. Ethnologist James Owen Dorsey (1884) identified the northernmost village near the Presbyterian Mission as Standing Hawk's village of *Win-dja'ge*, where *I'shta'mo'ce*, Joseph La Flesche resided (La Flesche 1963). The largest village was *Bi-ku-de*, under the leadership of *Gahige* (Dorsey 1884), *Ish'kadabi* (La Flesche 1963), or *Wano'kuge* (Green 1975), and the people designated as "those who dwell in earth lodges" (Fig. 3). They were considered the most conservative, and described as "aboriginal" by whites. The village was located across Blackbird Creek south of agency headquarters (La Flesche 1963). Furthest to the south was *Jan-(th)ca'-te*, near present day Decatur, Nebraska, where Saunsoci (Dorsey 1884), *To'wo'gaxe* (La Flesche 1963), and Henry Fontenelle

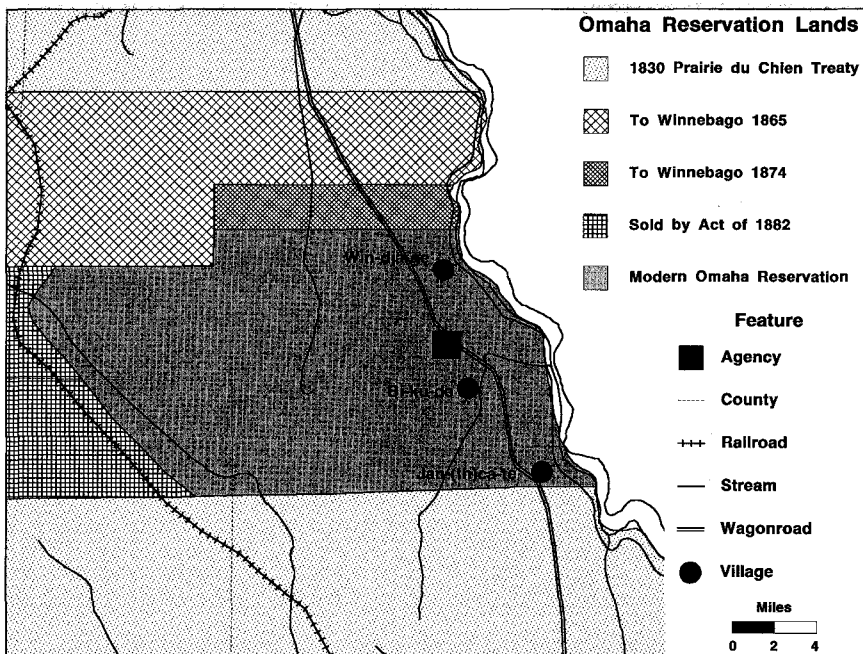


Figure 2. Omaha Reservation and three villages after 1855. Adapted from Dorsey 1884:337. Map by Sweetland and Archer.

(Green 1975) resided. The people were called "Wood-Eaters," because they cut and sold wood. Dorsey (1884) suggested this division of the people had some tribal significance, since the ritual ball game previously played between the tribal moieties was now performed between the villages. Although the divisions may have followed some customary practice, the location and classification of the villages also suggests alignments of the people in regard to white acculturation.

Omaha history is full of reports of tribal division and re-unification. Origin and migration accounts tell of Omaha separation from a parent organization of which the Ponca, Kansa, Quapaw, and Osage tribes formed a part. These partings were the result of accident, strife provoked by ambitious chiefs, or events related to following the game (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). Before reaching the Missouri River the Omahas may have lived in several autonomous bands and villages. Wishing to reduce vulnerability to attack by warring neighbors on the Plains, or gain control of the growing fur



Figure 3. Part of Omaha village of *Bi-ku-de*, about 1860, showing a combination of earth lodge and tipi dwellings. (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911:Plate 23, facing p. 99)

trade, the Omahas were motivated by many reasons to unify into a larger unit (O'Shea and Ludwickson 1992). The reorganization resulted in a council of seven chiefs headed by two principal chiefs. Civil and ritual duties were distributed among the clans and families in such a manner as to make their performance dependent upon cooperative efforts. Critical tribal institutions such as the Tribal Pipes, Sacred Shell, *Hede'wachi* (Summer Festival) Ceremony, Sacred Pole, Sacred Tent of War, and White Buffalo Hide developed over the years to bind the people together (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911).

Interdependency did not overcome every problem in the past. *To'wo'pezhi*, "Bad Village," an earth lodge town on Bow Creek in northern Cedar County, Nebraska, was split by marital strife in the early 1700s. The two factions built separate villages for a time, but were reunited after a few years (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). A period of unification and power resulted in the construction of *To'wo'to'gatho'*, Big Village, on Omaha Creek in Dakota County, Nebraska. Internal tensions, disease, and attacks by

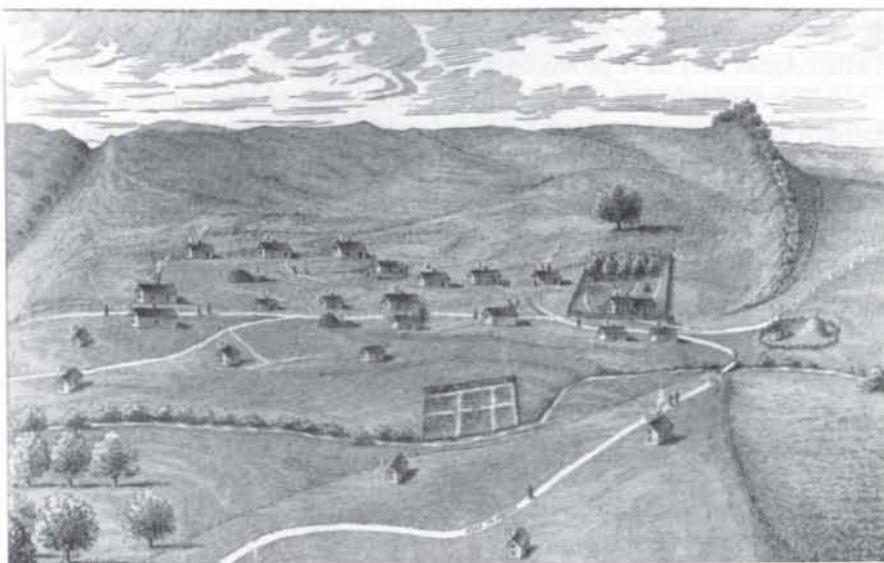


Figure 4. The Village of the "Make-Believe White-Men" (*Win-dja'ge*) after 1855. Pen-and-ink copy by F. W. Miller of a sketch made by *Um'pa* (Elk), a village resident, for the New Orleans Exposition, 1885. (Fletcher 1885a). Photo No. 1394:20-3 courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society.

neighboring tribes forced the abandonment of Big Village several times. The Omahas finally traveled south and built a village near the Otoes on Papillion Creek in 1847. The tribe resided at that location until they sold their lands to the United States in 1854 (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911).

On the new reservation the northernmost village site was selected by *I'shta'mo'ce*, Joseph La Flesche, in 1855. Son of a French trader, La Flesche had been adopted by the respected leader Big Elk, risen through the ranks of chieftainship, and accompanied the 1854 treaty delegation to Washington. His efforts to advance the people toward white society were lauded by some Indian agents in the *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (ARCIA 1861), although his position as trader and leader was challenged by others (Mark 1988). While residing at Bellevue he organized a nucleus of "progressive" men into a group known as the "young men's party." (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). Presumably many of this group accompanied La Flesche to the new reservation village identified by Dorsey (1884) as *Win-dja'-ge* (Fig. 4). Selecting a site near the Presbyterian Mission provided access to



benefits available from white culture, while maintaining a distance from the Indian Agent may have produced a sense of autonomy from federal control.

The northern village was patterned after white settlements. La Flesche initially built an earth lodge home, 40 feet in diameter. Meanwhile, logs were cut and hauled to a sawmill and white carpenters constructed a house and trading post for La Flesche, reportedly the first such frame house constructed by an Indian west of the Missouri (Green 1969). Smaller frame houses were built for the other men of the village. Roads were laid through the center of the village, leading to the agency, steamboat landing, and Mission. La Flesche and his followers fenced a 100 acre tract of bottom land and subdivided it into separate fields for each man in the village. All families sent their children to the Mission School. The conservative Chiefs' Party derisively called this settlement "the village of the 'Make-Believe' White-Man" (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911).

Meanwhile, the bulk of the tribe built earth lodges near Blackbird Creek where they began cultivation. A few mixed bloods took up separate homes and farms (Fletcher 1885a), strung out along Wood Creek north of Decatur, comprising part of the population of the "Wood-Eaters" village (Green 1975). Mixed blood Henry Fontenelle was a prominent member of this group, and shared the lucrative position of trader for the tribe with Joseph La Flesche. Fontenelle spoke English, unlike La Flesche, and was able to transact business directly with white men. His language abilities placed him as unofficial spokesman for his people (Green 1969). In 1859 Superintendent of Indian Affairs A. M. Robinson's annual report described the raising of buildings for the agency blacksmith, miller, farmer, and engineer. Work on a tenement for the agent, as well as the repair of the grist and saw-mill was recommended. The Agent reported cultivation and fencing of land in excess of 150 acres (ARCIA 1859), but it is unclear whether this land is near La Flesche's "progressive" village, the Blackbird Creek "conservative" village, or Fontenelle's "progressive" village.

The Omaha maintained the communal summer buffalo hunt with varying, though generally lessening degrees of success until 1873 (Fletcher 1885a) or 1876 (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). Attacks by the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and various Sioux groups on the western buffalo grounds made successful hunts difficult. Seventeen Omaha were killed in a single attack of this type (ARCIA 1859) and northern tribes continued to steal horses (ARCIA 1865).

Early successes in "civilization" efforts included the cultivation of land, adoption of frame houses, and pursuit of Euro-American education for their

children. These efforts became strained when the Winnebago began to arrive in March, 1864. Destitute refugees of the Minnesota Indian War, their number reached about 1,200 by the end of September. The Winnebagoes petitioned the Omaha to remain and in March 1865 a delegation of Omaha leaders traveled to Washington where they concluded the sale of the northern portion of the reservation to satisfy the request of the refugees (see Fig. 2). This treaty allocated \$50,000 in goods and services to the Omaha, as well as extending the contract for the grist-mill, saw-mill, blacksmith, and farmer. More importantly, Article 4 authorized the division of the remaining Omaha reservation in severalty (Kappler 1904b).

The division of reservation lands into individual parcels was supported by a group of earnest men and women, most working in the missionary field and residing in eastern cities. Through their efforts they made the U.S. Congress listen to their self-righteous cause for assimilation and acculturation reforms. Calling themselves "the Friend of the Indian," they were determined to extend their "Christian civilization" to the Indians. Organizing public debate and petitions, they lobbied lawmakers toward a policy of doing away with the idea of Indian-ness and tribal diplomatic relations. Their aim was to turn individual Indians into patriotic American citizens, indistinguishable from their white brothers and sisters. Although the initial basis for their assimilation program was the reservation system, they expected to eliminate altogether the reservation, tribal customs, and communal life (Prucha 1984).

By 1867 officials completed the needed survey of the reservation and the Commissioner of the General Land Office approved it. Instructions were given to the agent to proceed with the allotment without delay. As stipulated by Article 4, any half or mixed blood Omahas residing with them had a right to an allotment (ARCIA 1867). This push toward assimilation was given incentive by an order to withhold the distribution of the wagons, cattle, harness, and farming implements (purchased with the proceeds from the sale of land to the Winnebago), until the allotment of land in severalty was completed.

In 1869 there were 278 eligible heads of families entitled to tracts of 160 acres each, and 56 unmarried persons, 18 years of age and over, who also were eligible to receive 40 acres. Discontent voiced by the Omahas due to the exclusion of allotments to single women resulted in the Secretary of the Interior extending the privilege to both genders (ARCIA 1869). It is unclear whether the change was initiated by "progressive" or "traditional" Omahas, as the granting of land to single women was reminiscent of village days when females owned garden plots and earth lodges.

The scattering of the people out of the villages onto allotments created the need for a new school system. The Quaker Indian Agent supported the Omaha Council's decision to divert funds away from the support of the Presbyterian Mission school in order to pay for the construction of three day schools (ARCIA 1869). Two years later, when the certificates of allotment were delivered to the Omaha, three schools were in operation. Agent Edward Painter reported the arrival of the certificates as an incentive to labor and industry in the improvement of Indian farms (ARCIA 1871). This elation was tempered by the failure of the Omaha appeal to congress to sell 50,000 acres of their western lands. Agent Painter warned that without funds from this land sale for further improvements, the Omahas "may relapse into former habits of indolence and improvidence" (ARCIA 1871:446).

### The 1871 Allotment

Painter's allotment ledger book provides the earliest land data (Fig 5). Of the nine Omaha leaders who signed the document, three had signed the 1854 treaty. Three signers were clearly part of the "Make-Believe White-Man" group, although Joseph La Flesche was not included. In 1869 Green (1969) noted that the "Young Men's Party" of La Flesche had lost influence, probably due to several factors. Agent Furnas found it difficult to dominate La Flesche in his influential position as trader, despite an accident in 1859 that had resulted in the amputation of one leg below the knee. La Flesche's limited mobility, continued lack of English language proficiency, growing competition from Fontenelle, and the animosity of Furnas, combined to force his relinquishment of the position as trader. This may account for his absence as a signer of the 1871 document.

Other information included a chronological allotment number, Omaha name, English name, gender, age, subdivision, section, township, range, and total acreage (Painter 1871). Where possible, the clan affiliation of each allottee has been determined. This was accomplished by using a list of contemporary English surnames attributed to particular clans (Wolf 1987) and materials received from Omaha genealogist, Paul E. Brill (1993, 1994). A group of entries, representing allotments along the northern edge of the reservation in what later became part of the Winnebago reservation, were crossed-out of the register.

The first impression from the total allotment picture is one of a painful precision of regularity. Nearly every quarter section was allotted along the full length of the single wagon road. The overall pattern created a wedge shape

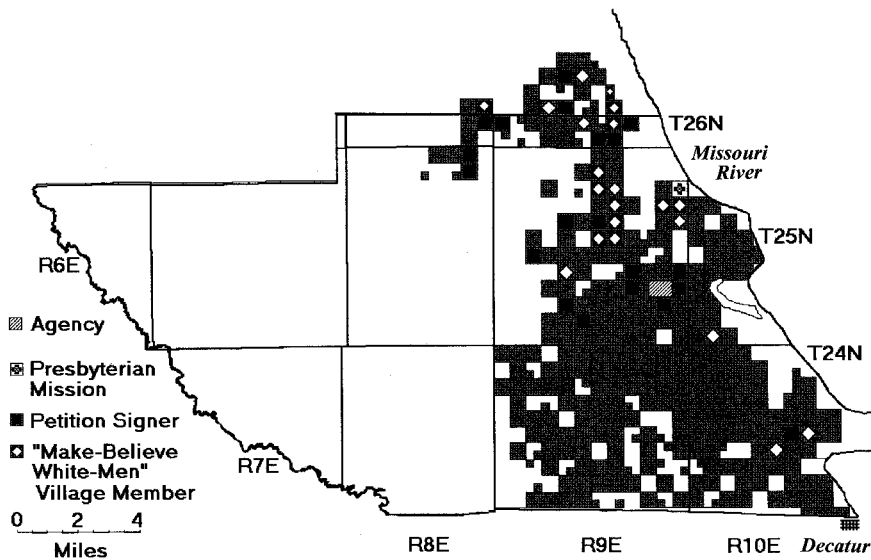


Figure 5. 1871 allotments, pattern of land taking on the Omaha Reservation. Reservation boundaries shown after 1882. Derived from data in Painter 1871.

of individual parcels, wide along the southern reservation boundary, and tapering towards the north. There were eleven allotments along Omaha creek, forming an outlying cluster to the northwest.

The land use capabilities of the allotted area fell into three categories illustrated by Longwell (1961). One-third of the parcels were suited for cultivation requiring little or no erosion controls. Another third were suited for limited cultivation. The final third were suited for permanent vegetation, and included the steeply pitched river bluffs covered with timber (Longwell 1961).

The 23 members of the "Make-Believe White-Men" village have been identified as a cohesive residential group prior to 1871 (Table 1). Families that resided in the northern village, such as Joseph La Flesche and *Waje'pa* (Ezra Freemont), took their allotments west and north of that site (Fig. 5). A

TABLE 1

RESIDENTS IN THE "VILLAGE OF THE MAKE-BELIEVE  
WHITE-MEN" AFTER 1855 (FLETCHER 1885A:6)  
WITH GENEALOGY DATA CORRECTIONS (BRILL 1994).

| Documented name       | Omaha name *   | English name (approx.<br>age in 1871)     |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| 01. Um-pa             | <i>O<sup>o</sup>po<sup>n</sup></i>   | Stephen Wells (40)                        |
| 02. The-me-ka-the     | <i>Çi' mikaçi</i>  | William Sheridan (56)                     |
| 03. Wa-tha-bae-zin-ga | <i>Waça' bezhi<sup>n</sup>ga</i>   | Howard Fox (55)                           |
| 04. Me-ha-ta          | <i>Mixa' to<sup>n</sup></i>  | Henry Morris, a.k.a. Henry<br>Warner (45) |
| 05. Bron-tee          | <i>Btho<sup>n</sup>ti'</i>   | Samuel Wells (39)                         |
| 06. Um-pa-ska         | <i>O<sup>n</sup>'po<sup>n</sup>çka</i>                                       | David Tyndal (41)                         |
| 07. Joseph La Flesche | <i>I<sup>n</sup>shta' mo<sup>n</sup>çe</i>                                   | Joseph La Flesche (47)                    |
| 08. Wa-na-shae-zin-ga | <i>Wano<sup>n</sup>' shezhi<sup>n</sup>ga</i>                                | Thomas Miller? (57)                       |
| 09. Tae-on-ka-ha      | <i>Teu' ko<sup>n</sup>ha</i>   | Arthur Ramsey (37)                        |
| 10. Ca-hae-num-ba     | <i>Kaxe' no<sup>n</sup>ba</i>  | Lewis Morris (50)                         |
| 11. Num-ba tae-wa-the | <i>No<sup>n</sup>ba't' ewathe</i>  | James Springer (27)                       |
| 12. Ta-hae-zin-gae    | <i>Tahe' zhi<sup>n</sup>ga</i> , a.k.a. <i>Xu' ga</i>                        | Asa Lovejoy (35)                          |
| 13. Ne-ma-ha          | <i>Ni' mo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup></i>                                      | Allen Brown (51)                          |
| 14. Du-ba-mon-ne      | <i>Du' bamo<sup>n</sup>thi<sup>n</sup></i>                                   | Harrison McCauley (35)                    |
| 15. Wa-jae-pa         | <i>Waje' pa</i> ,<br>a.k.a. <i>Wa' thishnade</i>                             | Ezra Freemont (30)                        |
| 16. Wa-zin-ga         | <i>Wazhi<sup>n</sup>' ga</i>   | Albert Cline (36)                         |
| 17. Ne-ou-ga-shu-dae  | a.k.a. <i>Si' damo<sup>n</sup>thi<sup>n</sup></i>                            | Edward Stabler (41)                       |
| 18. Wa-ne-ta-wa-ha    | <i>Wani' tawaxa</i> ,<br>a.k.a. <i>No<sup>n</sup>xi' dethi<sup>n</sup>ge</i> | Oliver Lyon (51)                          |
| 19. Ma-he-nin-ga      | <i>Mo<sup>n</sup>' hi<sup>n</sup>thi<sup>n</sup>ge</i>                       | Frederick Tyndal (55)                     |
| 20. Sin-dae-ha-ha     | <i>Çi<sup>n</sup>' dexo<sup>n</sup>xo<sup>n</sup></i>                        | William Hamilton (40)                     |
| 21. Wa-ha-nin-gae     | <i>Waho<sup>n</sup>' thi<sup>n</sup>ge</i>                                   | Allen Walker (46)                         |
| 22. Ma-wa-da-ne       | <i>Mawa' do<sup>n</sup>thi<sup>n</sup></i>                                   | Henry Cline (50)                          |
| 23. Grae-dun-nuz-ze   | <i>Gthedo<sup>n</sup>' no<sup>n</sup>zhi<sup>n</sup></i>                     | Eli S. Parker (56)                        |

\*From Fletcher and La Flesche 1911

total of 18 of 21 (85.7%) identified "Make-Believe White-Men" village members appeared in a tight cluster west and north of the Mission. One individual selected land near the Blackbird Creek village and two chose parcels north of Fontenelle's "Wood-Eaters" village. These may represent

unavoidable family complications, or serious defections from the La Flesche cadre. Omaha people associated with the functions of the Agency, including the Interpreter Louis Saunsoci, selected parcels near that location. The mixed blood Fontenelle, as well as the Leaming and Torney families had allotments in the vicinity of the southern village of “Wood-Eaters,” consistent with the description of the members of that settlement (Fletcher 1885a; La Flesche 1963). By default, allottees near Blackbird Creek probably were drawn from nearby middle village dwellers.

Of the 19 individuals that lost their allotments due to the 1874 Winnebago land sale, 5 were identified as members of the La Flesche village. Single individuals were from 5 clans and 2 persons from a sixth clan. Five Omaha women from undetermined clans who were married to non-Omahas received allotments. The single largest displaced group were 7 members of the Elk clan, representing over 60% of that clan’s allottees in 1871. In the case of the Omahas, many of the households contained an extended family representing multiple clans.

#### **Decade of Disillusionment: 1872–1882**

In light of the completion of allotments, Agent Painter reported that the long-time practice of going on the bison hunt was to be abandoned (ARCIA 1872). His suggestion that the taking of allotments was the cause for giving up the hunt is probably reversed. It is more likely that the decimation of the bison herds and other fur-bearing game meant a severe blow to the meat, hide, and cash sources of the tribe. Participation in the allotment process, as an avenue toward survival, would have grown out of the inability to pursue pre-European lifestyles. New school-houses and dwellings continued to be constructed, despite the agent’s perceived delay of any other advances towards “civilization” (Fig. 6). Congressional approval to sell 50,000 acres of western reservation lands in 1872 had few takers, and resulted in only \$702.20 in revenues (ARCIA 1873). However, the Winnebagoes successfully lobbied for an additional piece of Omaha land (see Fig. 2). Amounting to over 12,000 acres along their mutual boundary, the act of 1874 awarded \$82,000.00 towards the “civilization” process (Kappler 1904a). Some of the manifestations of this effort could be seen in the building of an infirmary and the petitioning for an industrial school (ARCIA 1875, 1877).

During the next three years, the Omaha witnessed the forced removal of their Ponca relatives to Indian Territory. Rumors surrounding their own removal from Nebraska abounded (ARCIA 1878). The movement of Omaha



Figure 6. Noah Walker allotment home on the Omaha Reservation, circa 1911, showing Euro-American style house, outbuildings, and fences juxtaposed with an Omaha tipi. Photo No. I394:4-7 courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society.

Agent Howard White to Winnebago, to supervise the recently combined Winnebago-Omaha Agency (ARCIA 1879), must have given rise to feelings of abandonment. The fear of losing their reservation was fed by the discovery that the Certificates of Allotments in their possession did not provide actual title to the land.

In 1881 ethnologist Alice Fletcher arrived from the Peabody Museum to study tribal organization, social customs, tribal rites, traditions, and songs. She carried organization skills acquired from the Association for the Advancement of Women, experience in public lecturing on topics of archaeology and ethnology, and the viewpoint that white European society was the high point of social evolution (Mark 1988). With the encouragement of the La Flesche family, she drafted a petition to Congress seeking titles for the Omaha land. Of the 53 petition signers, 12 had been members of the "Make-Believe White-Men" village (see appendix). None were immediately identified as members of the Blackbird Creek village or Fontenelle's Wood Creek village, although one individual had an 1871 allotment north of the latter site. The document included descriptions of improvements made on each person's land, and each signer included a statement in favor of receiving titles, of becoming a citizen, or otherwise pursuing "white" culture (Fletcher 1882).

The petition resulted in a bill for allotting lands to the Omahas and for the issuance of trust patents to them (La Flesche 1923). Fletcher spent three months in Washington in the spring of 1882 lobbying for the passage of that bill (Mark 1988).

On August 7, 1882 the President approved the Omaha Severalty Act that would allow for the long-delayed sale of 50,000 acres west of the Sioux City and Nebraska Railroad line near Logan Creek (see Fig. 2). Included were provisions for the systematic allotment of land, recognition of the previous (1871-era) claims, and the issuance of patents to individuals. The balance of unallotted lands east of the railroad would be held by the tribe for allotment to new-borns. A 25 year trust period protected the individual and communal lands. Additional provisions placed the Omaha under the laws of the State of Nebraska for civil and criminal affairs (Kappler 1904a).

With regards to the individual apportionment, the following guidelines were set:

- to each head of a family, one quarter of a section;
- to each single person over 18 years of age, one-eighth of a section;
- to each orphan child under 18 years of age, one-eighth of a section;
- to each person under 18 years of age, one-sixteenth of a section.

An allowance was made for the selection of any eligible land east or west of the railroad (ARCIA 1882).

Alice Fletcher soon received authority to conduct the allotment and, when she returned to Nebraska in 1883, she found the people scattered in the valley of the bluffs along the Missouri river, farming small plots that often flooded (Fletcher 1885b). Her interpretation of what needed to be done included giving Indians individual allotments, citizenship and the protection of law, schools, and the opportunity to become assimilated into white “civilization” (Mark 1988). Towards this end she encouraged the Omaha to take allotments along the western edge of the reservation. The proximity to the railroad that followed Logan Creek was expected to give Omaha farmers access to markets. White neighbors in the nearby town of Bancroft would provide role models (Mark 1988). Fletcher chided those Omahas who complained about insufficient trees and water in the west, reminding them that the one would grow, and wells for the other could be dug. Fletcher persuaded fifty families, including Joseph La Flesche, to take allotments in this region (Fletcher 1892).



Francis La Flesche, son of Joseph La Flesche, assisted Fletcher in her allotment work. Born in 1857, Francis, a product of the changing times, had accompanied the tribe on its last buffalo hunts, witnessed many of the traditional ceremonies, and attended the Mission school where he learned to speak English. While in his early twenties he accompanied Ponca Chief Standing Bear, newspaperman Thomas Tibbles, and his sister Susette La Flesche on a tour of eastern cities speaking on behalf of the dispossessed Ponca Nation (Wilson 1974). He assisted Dorsey in early linguistic work on the Omaha reservation (Mark 1988) and in 1881 La Flesche accepted an appointment as a clerk in the office of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (La Flesche 1963), and received permission to act as Fletcher's interpreter and assistant.

### **The 1883–1884 Allotment**

Differing significantly from the 1871 pattern, the 1882–1883 allotment reveals a greater dispersion away from the 3 villages (Fig. 7). Included with the 50 families that took allotments along Logan Creek were 12 parcels that crossed the Sioux City and Nebraska Railroad line on the west side of Logan Creek; land slated for sale as surplus. The 53 petition signers were tracked through the allotment. Of the men who were working their own land prior to 1882, 12 (23%) kept their parcels, and 17 (32%) changed parcels. Five of those changes were due to the 1874 sale of land to the Winnebagoes. Of the remaining 24 signers, 50% claimed to be working their own parcels of land prior to 1882. Since their allotments were taken after the 1871 register was produced, their beginning location could not be tracked. A majority of this latter group noted they worked on some one else's claim as well as their own, but their numbers were not included with the 17 men who changed parcels. Seven chose parcels in the vicinity of Fontenelle's "Wood-Eaters" village, although there is no proof of significant desertion from the La Flesche group in favor of Fontenelle.

By 1871 23 identified members of the "Make-Believe White-Men" village received land allotments primarily clustered to the north and west of the Presbyterian Mission (Fig 5). Five men retained their same parcel. Ten individuals (66%) changed their parcel in 1882. Three of the ten individuals who changed parcels had been dislocated by the sale of lands to the Winnebagoes. Of the remaining eight men whose movements could not be determined by the data at hand, two had been displaced by the sale of lands to the Winnebagoes and did not appear in the 1882 register.

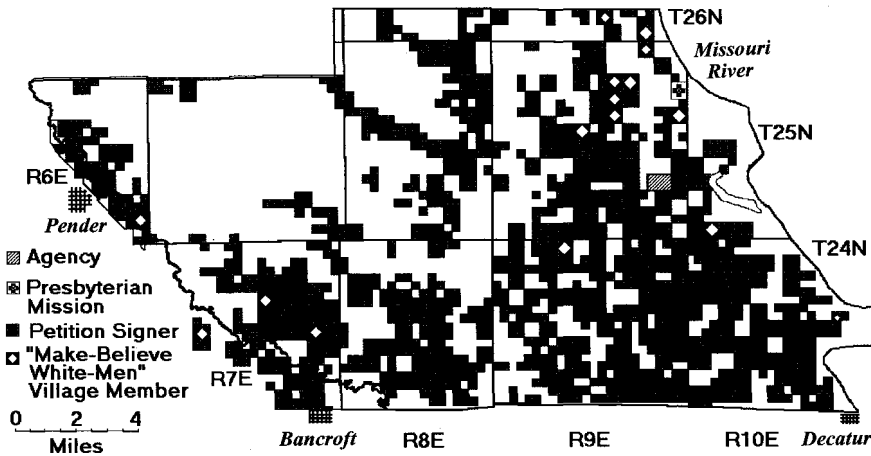


Figure 7. 1882 allotments, pattern of land taking on the Omaha Reservation. Reservation boundaries shown after 1882. Derived from data in Fletcher 1884.

How do we account for the choice of remaining on a parcel or moving, especially if improvements have been made to the property? Forced displacement due to the sale of land to the Winnebagoes accounted for five parcels. The two members of the "Make-Believe White-Men" village residing in earth lodges in the 1860s also moved. Since a well-maintained earth lodge would last about one generation (Douglas 1931), the option of relocation may have appeared more desirable than making repairs to deteriorating living quarters. As with the members of the petition signing group, those individuals who chose to remain on their 1871 allotments were not significantly older or younger than those who chose to move.

Oral histories from contemporary Omaha elders provided additional possible reasons for the configuration of western movement. Several elders recounted the dislike for choosing western parcels of land due to the abundance of snakes encountered on the prairies. A single account maintained that the mixed blood Omahas out-competed with the full bloods to acquire allotments near Pender and Bancroft (Brill 1994). A detailed genealogical study would be needed to confirm the latter assertion.

Members of the "Make-Believe White-Men" group that signed the 1882 petition and then moved to the Logan Creek area included Ezra Freemont,

Henry Cline, Arthur Ramsey, and Joseph La Flesche. They and other members of the La Flesche family were part of a group of Omahas willing to reside with white neighbors near Bancroft and Pender. It led to Fletcher's description of these families as being the most prosperous, if not, at least, the more "progressive" (Fletcher 1892). Whereas members of the other "progressive" group centered around Fontenelle's village could not be clearly identified, no attempt was made to track their movements through the allotments. Therefore, it is possible that some of the southern "Wood-Eaters" also made the move west and could be counted among Fletcher's "progressive" families.

While Fletcher reported that the monetary value of the different locations were of no incentive to selection by the Omaha (Fletcher 1885b), it was obvious that the influential La Flesche family placed a great value on Fletcher's opinion of where to live (Mark 1988). Rosalie La Flesche Farley, Joseph's daughter, claimed "that no one had more influence than her [Fletcher]" (Fletcher Papers, R. Farley to A. Fletcher, August 24, 1882). One-fourth of the Omahas took allotments along the western railroad line, lands favored by Fletcher.

It is clear the power of Fletcher's personal character and her access to white resources brought many Omahas to the western allotments. With an interest in Omaha traditional culture on the one hand, the ear of federal officials on the other hand, and a forceful determination that her cause was just, Fletcher was able to cast a bright light on the reservation that over-awed existing power centers. Many of the "progressive" Omahas responded to this energy.

Joseph La Flesche had built the 1855 "Make-Believe White-Men" village near the Presbyterian Mission because it represented the most consistent resource of the day. The government had been slow in providing promised equipment, so the Mission's sawmill cut timber for the La Flesche village (Wilson 1974). However, subsequent allegations of misconduct of the missionaries with some of the young female students or staff (La Flesche Family Papers, F. La Flesche to R. Farley, December 16 1886), and the reallocation of tribal funds away from the mission (ARCIA 1869) caused a decline in its influence. Fletcher's ability to resolve the 1871 land title problem with the 1882 petition and allotment allayed Omaha fears of relocation to Indian Territory. The support of the energetic La Flesche family, and those Omahas willing, or able, to relocate away from the original "Make-Believe White-Men" village served to reinforce Fletcher's position. By the end of the allotment in 1884 she had become a heroine among the influential "Friends of the Indian" group in the east (Mark 1988).

In an historical sketch published ten years after the 1871 allotment, Agent George Wilkinson stated that "in the breaking up of the old village the people still clung to the timber, and made their farms in the little valleys that border the streams, and few of those who took out certificates for 160 acres found all those acres arable land." (ARCIA 1883:105). This description also fits the allotment of the 1880s. There was a noticeable string-like appearance of parcels along Omaha, Middle, and Blackbird Creeks as they stretched towards the west. Township 25 North, Range 7 East, except for eight allotments along a minor drainage in the southeast corner, remained unacceptably dry, barren, and unallotted. Longwell (1961) recorded these western lands, between the Logan and Omaha Creeks, as falling into two categories; half of this upland was suitable for cultivation with intensive erosion control practices and the rest for limited cultivation.

The 1883–1884 allotment was approached in a systematic fashion. A high number of allotments to children, some as young as two months (Fletcher 1884), resulted in an increase in smaller parcels. Many of these tracts of land were chosen to be contiguous, with brothers and sisters occupying adjoining tracts. Whereas the addition of spouse data helped to increase overall clan identifications, the land-taking patterns remained mixed. Allottees seemed to abut land belonging to their own clan kinsmen as often as taking land next to that of their spouse's kinsmen. In a few instances, the allottee held a parcel that touched land belonging to both sides of the family. Longwell (1961) noted that since a person was not required to take an allotment in a single tract a single person's holdings could be scattered around the reservation. Casually glancing at the map may not make this point evident. Nonetheless, in the process of rendering the data a few such splits were encountered.

Joan Mark (1988:93) calculated "that one-fourth of the Omahas actively supported the allotment program, one-third actively opposed it, and the rest, although not in favor of the new plan, were persuaded to go along with it." Certain "progressive" elements of the Omaha Nation can be identified because they produced written records, letters, and petitions. As well, some of these individuals were favorably mentioned by name in reports and letters from Indian agents, missionaries, and Fletcher. On the other hand, Omahas who opposed allotment and assimilation were often lumped together as an amorphous "other." Fletcher reported that about one-third of the tribe resisted allotment. They were led by twelve unnamed traditionalist families banded together as "the Council Fire." They were rounded up by Indian police and forced to take allotments (Mark 1988). It may be that the final one-third of the

entries in Fletcher's allotment book represents followers of "the Council Fire," but that point remains undetermined.

### **Dispersal: 1884–1910**

Agent Wilkinson reported the completion of allotments in 1884 with 75,931 acres disbursed to 1,194 individuals, representing 954 parcels, with 55,000 acres remaining to be patented to the tribe. As the number of allottees exceeded the official 1884 agency census by 27 persons, it appears that the division of communal reservation land into individual tracts was thorough (ARCIA 1884). He further reported that the "progressive" faction had sought allotments near the white settlements along the southern and western reservation boundary. With the expected sale of unallotted lands east of the railroad in Township 24, Range 7 East, Omahas in that vicinity would soon be surrounded by white neighbors (ARCIA 1884).

The wrangling for prompt annuity payments, as well as collecting the proceeds from the land sales, continued. An act of March 3, 1885 extended the time that purchasers of the unallotted Omaha lands had before making their first payments. The act of 1885 also provided for the sale of unallotted land remaining in Township 24 North, Range 7 East and 50 acres in Township 25 North, Range 6 East (ARCIA 1885). Eventually, subsequent acts would extend the payment time into the next decade (ARCIA 1895), leaving the Omahas strapped for operating capital on their new allotments.

Despite monetary headaches, the Omaha endured. The Mission school carried on as a school for girls and the government school was in successful operation at the Agency. Promising young Omaha scholars were sent to off-reservation schools such as Carlisle, Hampton, Houghton, and Genoa. However, some returning graduates were finding it difficult to be accepted back into the traditional community (Tibbles 1957; Mark 1988). Surrounded by these educational endeavors and basking in the promise of financial security, the Omahas felt competent to attend to their own affairs. At their request all of the agency employees were discharged and they were allowed to control their own destiny. Agent Wilkinson applauded their move towards independence, describing the Omahas as "a determined and progressive people, and in a very hopeful condition" (ARCIA 1884:118).

In 1886 when Agent Charles Potter returned to the Omaha for the purpose of distributing the land patents he found them in a restless and divided state. They had discovered that the 1882 act, which provided for the allotments and land sale, also made them subject to the civil and criminal laws of

the State of Nebraska. The Omaha asserted that at the time of allotment no such meaning as State allegiance had ever been interpreted to them, and therefore declined to accept the patents.

A delegation visited Washington to request an immediate single payment of the \$90,000 due them under the 1854 treaty instead of nine annual payments. During the interim of delegation negotiations, Omaha farms went uncultivated. The leaders returned from Washington expecting to receive one-half of the \$90,000, but Congress refused to make the appropriation (ARCIA 1886).

This was a dichotomous period in Omaha history. On the positive side the mission and industrial boarding-schools were filled to capacity without compulsory process, more homes were constructed on the allotments, new land was broken, and all of the old land was under cultivation (ARCIA 1887). On the negative side, the disenfranchised Agent Jesse Warner, reporting from his office in Winnebago, recorded that the morals of the Omaha were deteriorating. As proof, he alluded to reports of increased bigamy and petit larceny (ARCIA 1888).

The idea of leasing the unallotted tribal lands held in 25 year trust was debated among the La Flesche followers. Francis La Flesche urged his father to get the men who work together to write a petition to the Boston committee against leasing to whites. He feared it would provide a foothold for whites to gain control of the land. Without the power to elect county officials, the Omahas would be at a disadvantage to receive fair treatment at the hands of the whites (La Flesche Family Papers, F. La Flesche to R. Farley, 1887). His position would have come from first-hand knowledge of conditions in Bancroft. Platted in 1881, it's growth had been stimulated by the business derived from nearby "Make-Believe White-Men" and petition signers. It became known as the best "Indian town" with bankers and merchants thriving on the Indian trade. However, it was the home of many "Indian Skinners"—white men who took advantage of Indian ignorance and inexperience in every possible transaction (Green 1969). It was in that vein that the politically active Thomas Tibbles, now married to Susette La Flesche, favored leasing Omaha lands to whites, and headed a growing faction seeking that goal (La Flesche Family Papers, F. La Flesche to R. Farley, 1887).

Interest in the continued "civilization" of the Omahas convinced Congress to appropriate the last seven annual installments of \$10,000 each, under the 1854 treaty, to be paid in two annual installments of \$35,000 (ARCIA 1889). The proposed method of payment was to include hiring an outside person to make the distribution to the Omahas, while receiving a 5% fee. In

Washington, DC, Francis La Flesche encouraged his father to organize a clandestine letter-writing campaign to Congress requesting that the government assume the cost of the distribution, with the interest money being paid in cash per capita. His logic was that the money rightfully belonged to the Omahas, hence the Omahas should have the enjoyment of expending the funds, not the Secretary of the Interior (La Flesche Family Papers, F. La Flesche to R. Farley, 1888). The government proposed payment of the second installment would be made only to those who made "wise use" of the money obtained from the first payment (ARCIA 1889).

In light of the optimism following the 1882 allotment, the Omahas pursued two "progressive" initiatives. The first was to arrange a system of tribal self-government to replace the traditional Council system generally scorned by federal policymakers. Supported by the La Flesche followers, the reservation was to be divided into three districts, each with three trustees, a constable, roadmaster, and commissioner. The three commissioners were to be elected and form the governing body. The plan could not withstand the schemes and contrary advice of white neighbors. Nor could it sway the Indian Office into changing their general rules and procedures to accommodate this special self-government initiative (Green 1969).

The failure of the self-government proposal was marked by the division of the Omaha Council into two factions. Five of the councilors (Two Crows, *Dubamo'thi'*, *Çi'dexo'xo'*, White Horse, and *Chaçathi'ge*) supported the self-government plan (Mark 1988). Of this group, three had been members of the "Make-Believe White-Men" village (Table 1) and also signed the 1882 petition (appendix). The other five councilors (Prairie Chicken, Little Cow, *Waho'thi'ge*, *Wasagaha*, and *Kaiska* [*Kaischka* Morris]) opposed self-government and anything related to the La Flesche family (Mark 1988). In 1886 Agent Potter was clearly perplexed by such divisions. He reported that "factional opinions and requests purporting to be the public sentiment of the tribe reached the Department through unofficial channels" (ARCIA 1886:186). Potter was so disgusted with the indolence and lack of government he suggested "that time will demonstrate that the Department and the public have been deceived in reference to the true condition of the Omahas" (ARCIA 1886:187). Omaha politics would have confused him more, when four years later, two of the councilors opposed to the La Flesche family would do an about-face and sign the five-year lease in favor of Rosalie La Flesche Farley (Table 2).

The second "progressive" initiative led to more profound changes on the Omaha reservation. It involved leasing the large tracts of unallotted tribal

lands for grazing to white farmers, a plan proposed and supported by Fletcher (Green 1969; Mark 1988). The majority of unallotted lands were leased as common pastures divided between Rosalie La Flesche Farley (with her husband, Edward) and Henry Fontenelle. The arrangement continued the long and divisive competition between these two families (La Flesche Family Papers, F. La Flesche to E. Farley, August 27, 1886; R. Farley to F. La Flesche, May 25, 1893). The Farleys built fences around their leased pasture on borrowed money the first season and began to contract cattle. The whole venture was thrown into turmoil when federal policy makers claimed Indians could not lease land for grazing without federal approval. The U.S. Attorney General interpreted this to mean by an Act of Congress. Although the Farley lease was continued under special consideration by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (Green 1969), it fueled heated debates about leasing both in Washington and on the reservation.

Local whites, such as Pender hotel owner William Peebles, agitated among some of the Omahas to break up the Farley monopoly as well as begin leasing the allotted lands, even though such leases were unlawful. In 1890 three Omahas (*Wajepa*, Henry Blackbird, and Thomas McCauley) traveled to Washington to question the leasing issues. Peebles acquired an affidavit to travel with the delegation, reportedly signed by Fire Chief, White Horse, Two Crows, Prairie Chicken, *Wajepa*, and *Çi" dexo"xo"* (La Flesche Family Papers, Peebles affidavit December 26, 1890). Some Omahas were suspicious that Peebles and Henry Fontenelle accompanied the delegation in order to acquire lands for themselves. The Council called Rosalie La Flesche Farley to finalize her lease of the majority of the unallotted lands prior to Peebles' return. The Council appointed a group of men to make the lease on behalf of the tribe. It was hoped that this committee would be free of outside influence, especially from the whites in Pender. The Farley lease was for five years, to be renewed annually, and set at 15 cents per acre per year, beginning January 1, 1891. The rate was raised to 25 cents per acre per year in 1892 (La Flesche Family Papers, R. Farley to F. La Flesche, May 14, 1893). The 20 committee signatures on the lease (Table 2) included three signers of Peebles' affidavit, and, inexplicably, the names of two of the delegates that were supposed to be in Washington (La Flesche Family Papers, R. Farley to F. La Flesche 1890).

The business of leasing the unallotted and tribal lands for grazing was continued by the committee appointed by the tribe for that purpose. Although the committee was not sanctioned by the Department of the Interior or agent, and without authority of law, Agent Ashley reported it handled affairs in a business-like manner. Nonetheless, the agent was ordered to take charge of



TABLE 2

DECEMBER 31, 1890, INDENTURE BETWEEN ROSALIE FARLEY  
AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OMAHA TRIBE  
(LA FLESCHÉ FAMILY PAPERS 1890)  
WITH GENEALOGY DATA CORRECTIONS (BRILL 1994)

| Documented name      | <i>Omaha name*</i>       | English name                           |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 01. Big Elk          | <i>O'po'to'ga</i>        | John Big Elk                           |
| 02. Little Chief     | <i>Zhi'ga' gahige</i>    | Oliver Furnas Turner                   |
| 03. Sin-de-hah-hah   | <i>Çi' dexo'xo'</i>      | William Hamilton                       |
| 04. Wa-ha-nin-gae    | <i>Waho'thi'ge</i>       | Allen Walker                           |
| 05. White Horse      | <i>Sho' geçka</i>        | Ellis Blackbird                        |
| 06. Prairie Chicken  | <i>Shu' zhi'ga</i>       | Horace Cline                           |
| 07. Du-ba-mon-ne     | <i>Dubamo'thi'</i>       | Harrison McCauley                      |
| 08. Little Cook      | <i>U'ho'zhi'ga</i>       | Charles Woodhull                       |
| 09. Chazethega       | <i>Cha'çethi'ge</i>      | Jesse Freemont                         |
| 10. H. Chase         | No Omaha Name            | Hiram Chase                            |
| 11. Noah La Flesche  | <i>Ni' kagahi</i>        | Noah Leaming<br>a.k.a. Noah La Flesche |
| 12. Henry Blackbird  | <i>Ko' zeho'ga</i>       |  |
| 13. Phillip Stabler  | <i>Ni' daho'</i>         |  |
| 14. Cyrus Phillips   | <i>Shage' dubazhi'ga</i> |  |
| 15. Thomas McCauley  | <i>Tade'ta</i>           |  |
| 16. Nebraska         | <i>Nibtha'çka</i>        | Alfred Nebraska Hallowell              |
| 17. Gilbert Morris   | <i>Kaxe'giu'</i>         |  |
| 18. Simeon Hallowell | <i>Ti' gaxa</i>          |  |
| 19. Mahanatha        | <i>Mawa'da'thi'?</i>     | Henry Cline?                           |
| 20. John Pilcher     | No Omaha Name            |  |

\*Fletcher and La Flesche 1911

the leasing of tribal lands under the provision of the law of February 28, 1891 (ARCIA 1892) even though the Omahas technically no longer supported or received services from the Agent. Once again the Omahas were pre-empted from making their own decisions.

It was understood that the agent could lease the unallotted lands to members of the tribe for five years, or until an allotment. Peebles agitated to have the Farley lease set aside, misleading the Omahas by claiming any

further allotments would be withheld for five years unless the lease was broken. Fontenelle and others promoted a circular calling for the end of the Farley lease, although councilmen who's signatures appeared on the document later denied signing it (La Flesche Family Papers, R. Farley to F. La Flesche, May 14, 1893). Meanwhile, Thomas Tibbles continued to lobby against the provisions of the 1882 act prohibiting the leasing of allotted lands. His methods included attacking Fletcher's work with the Omahas, which alienated him from many of the La Flesche family (Mark 1988).

In the spring of 1893 Peebles reportedly called Fontenelle and some members of the Omaha Council to Pender in an effort to have them set aside the Farley lease. Using alcohol, money, coercion, and double talk, he was able to instigate a lawsuit by the Omaha tribe against the Farleys. Rosalie described the ensuing trial and defeat to her brother Francis, observing that the Judge was against her from the beginning due to political considerations in favor of the Penderites. Some of the councilmen who testified against her later claimed to be under financial commitments to the Pender faction (La Flesche Family Papers, R. Farley to F. La Flesche, May 14, 1893; January 2, 1894).

Rosalie brought a counter suit against squatters on their leased land, claiming the Pender men were backing this conspiracy to break the Farleys. Included in the suit were Peebles, two local whites, and six "squatters." Most of the squatters were mixed-bloods claiming rights as Omahas (Green 1969). They had settled upon a large tract of the unallotted lands, and their case caused bad feeling among the Omahas (ARCIA 1891). Ill-feelings persisted when the mixed-blood's claims for tribal membership were denied by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and eventually the U.S. District Court granted an injunction against the squatters for the term of the Farley lease (ARCIA 1892; Green 1969).

Captain William Beck, United States Army, was assigned as the new agent to the Winnebago and Omaha in 1893. He remarked that the Omaha assumed an independent attitude, regarding him (Beck) as one who interferes with their transactions rather than one to whom they should look to for guidance. He concluded that they used too much liquor, leased their lands, and generally were out-manuevered in their transactions with the white element with whom they dealt (ARCIA 1893). Nonetheless, Beck made a strong attempt to come to grips with the leasing situation which swindled the Indians of his agency.

Early in the summer of 1893 Beck reported a great many illegal lessees and sublessees in occupancy of the lands exceeding 50,000 acres at the Winnebago and Omaha Agency. The Flournoy Live Stock and Real Estate

Company was considered the primary transgressor on the Winnebago reservation. Smaller companies and individuals were involved on the Omaha reservation. Whites were leasing directly from Indians at the rate of 15 to 50 cents per acre per annum and then subleasing from 25 cents to \$2.50 per acre per annum. Profits for the whites were enormous. Beck warned all who held leases directly from the Indians without the sanction and approval of the Department of Interior that their leases were null and void. In January 1894 the Flournoy Company and others filed multiple injunctions against Beck for interfering with their possession of the lands, totalling 37,000 acres. Their initial legal victories were overturned in higher courts, and attempts at compromise with Beck failed. In May 1895 Beck received authority to employ 50 additional Indian police to aid in the removal of trespassers. By June, the War Department directed the shipment of 70 Springfield rifles and ammunition for the Indian police force. Attempts at evicting the illegal lessees were met with further court injunctions, and news that the men from Pender were purchasing weapons to arm 100 deputies against Beck's police. Before the situation exploded, members of Congress suggested a compromise which allowed sublessees of the Flournoy Company to harvest and remove their present crops, followed by an immediate investigation of the agency (ARCIA 1895).

The agent's efforts had some impact among the Omahas. In 1894 a large proportion of the allotted lands were being leased by the Indians directly to the whites without consulting the agent (ARCIA 1894). The situation was reversed the following year when nearly all of the Omahas leased their lands under the Department's new regulations. Some Omaha were alleged to have developed a method of seizing unallotted lands, leasing them to whites, and pocketing the proceeds (ARCIA 1895).

Rosalie Farley was able to negotiate a new lease, beginning March 1, 1896. The five-year contract covered 12,002 acres at an annual rental of \$6,001.09 for the first three years and \$9,001.03 per year for the remaining two years (ARCIA 1897). Of the 28 one-year farming and grazing leases issued that season, Rosalie held an additional 9,630 acres. In contrast 25 of the 28 (89%) leases were for tracts under 1,000 acres, most being less than 80 acres each (ARCIA 1897). The one-year Farley lease was not renewed in 1897 (ARCIA 1898).

The unsettled government question was combined with jurisdiction problems due to a clause in the Dawes General Allotment Act, approved in February of 1887, which granted U.S. citizenship to all Omahas with allotments (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). Shortly thereafter, the State of Ne-

braska organized the reservation into Thurston County and began taxing the personal property of the Omahas the same as all other citizens (ARCIA 1889). Meanwhile, money due the Omahas from the sale of lands under the 1882 allotment act was not forthcoming. In 1894 the time for the first payment was extended until December 1, 1897 (ARCIA 1894). Agent Beck formally presented the matter to the Council, and they voted against the proposed extension and asked that the purchasers be required to make payments sooner. This action by the Omahas was, however, rendered inconsequential by a clause in the Indian appropriation act for the current fiscal year which automatically included an extension on first payments (ARCIA 1895). At the same time, another portion of the reservation was relinquished when the Eastern Nebraska and Gulf Railway Company was granted a right-of-way bisecting the Omaha and Winnebago reservations from north to south (ARCIA 1894). Nothing developed with this easement until the construction of the Sioux City and Western Railroad thirteen years later.

Fletcher returned to visit the Omaha reservation in the summer of 1897. She found that the old ways were gone, but the Omahas found the new way unsatisfactory. Disgust with local missionaries had led to a decline in attending "Christian" services. There was a revival of some old Indian rites, although in altered conditions. Demoralized, the people were left to struggle with alcohol and credit offered by local whites (Mark 1988). Leasing of lands gained momentum, with 119 farming and grazing leases recorded for the year 1897. The prices ranged from 25 cents per acre for grazing lands to \$2.50 per acre for the best farming lands. Average farm land brought \$1 per acre, while unbroken land was valued at 75 cents per acre per annum (ARCIA 1897). The agent reported that an increase in leasing saw a subsequent decline in individual Omaha efforts. Nearly all had houses, planted small plots of corn, and raised some vegetables, but this level of resources was reported as barely sufficient to keep a family through the winter. The number of leases increased to 206 the next year (ARCIA 1898). The amount of work related to leasing caused the Agent to re-open an office on the Omaha reservation. He traveled one day a week to transact leases and pay out their individual monies. This was reported as being gratifying to the Omahas, as it saved them much travel to the Winnebago office (ARCIA 1899).

A provision to allot the land remaining from the 1882 act was made by the act of March 3, 1893. Dissatisfaction was voiced by some at the provision of the law which excluded children born after March 3, 1893 (ARCIA 1899). An amendment to the act granted to wives 80 acres of land in their own right and the same amount to children (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911). Francis La

Flesche alerted his family to the revisions, fearing there would “not be enough land,” and urged them to “go ahead quickly and file” (La Flesche Family Papers, F. La Flesche to R. Farley, January 23, 1898). It wasn’t until 1899 that Special Agent John K. Rankin was ordered to complete the allotment (ARCIA 1899), and the provisions of the act were carried out in 1900 (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911).

In 1899 Agent Mercer remarked that “when the work of allotting the lands covered under the March 3, 1893 act is completed, it will remove the cause of much discontent which is existing among the Omahas” (ARCIA 1899:233). Francis La Flesche had voiced a similar sentiment the year before. His view was that final allotments would do away with the cause for squabbles and bring all land matters into the courts. Everyone would have to look out for themselves, a trait, he was sure, the rest of his family had acquired (La Flesche Family Papers, F. La Flesche to R. Farley 1898).

### Cumulative Allotments

The final data represents the status of allotments covered under the March 3, 1893, act pursued in 1900 and recorded by Fletcher and La Flesche at the time of publication of *The Omaha Tribe* in 1911. Their report featured a fold-out map of the reservation accompanied by 12 pages of names with numbers keyed to individual parcels of land (Fig. 8). The dispersion pattern was nearly complete. The only unallotted area (besides the eroding Missouri River margin) remained in Township 24 North, Range 7 East. Poor soil or drainage may explain this. All or part of 8 allotted parcels lay west of the Sioux City and Nebraska Railroad. With the near-complete coverage of the reservation, there is no discernible pattern of land-taking bordering the streams. Even the previously unacceptable region of Township 25 North, Range 7 East had been allotted. In 1907 the federal government permitted the sale of land for the towns of Rosalie and Walthill, which appeared on their map (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911).

As with the 1883–1884 era, a substantial number of allotments were made to children. Because of the prior allotments to heads of families along the eastern side of the reservation, the smaller sized children’s allotments were most numerous in the west. The practice of choosing lands contiguous to kinsmen continued.

Following an 1894 act of Congress, the Presbyterian Mission lands along the bluffs were exchanged for a more westerly site (Kappler 1904a). Whether this custom of exchanging land was extended to individuals is

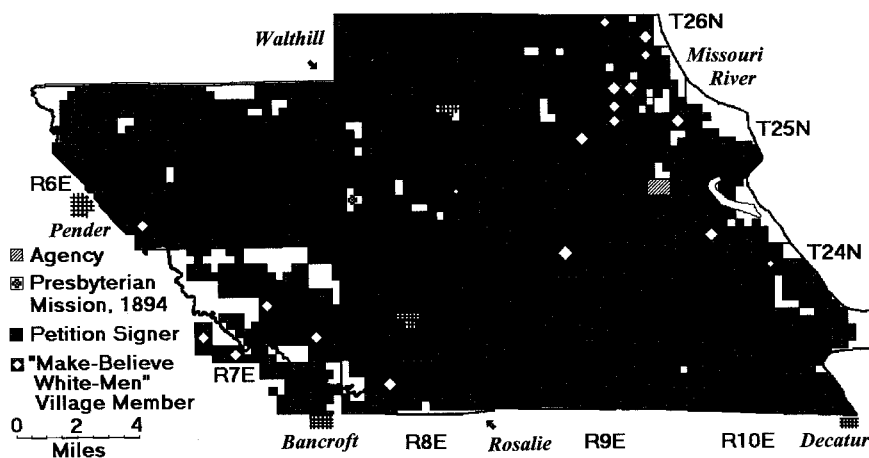


Figure 8. 1893 allotments, pattern of land taking on the Omaha Reservation accumulative to 1910. Reservation boundaries shown after 1882. Derived from data in Fletcher and La Flesche 1911:643–54 and Plate 65.

unknown. While preparing the 1910 data, several persons with earlier allotments were found to have acquired completely different tracts. The practice of a person selecting multiple holdings throughout the reservation was also more pronounced.

### Conclusion

Much interest was taken in the Omaha Nation by missionaries, government officials, "Friends of the Indian," scientists, and the Omahas themselves, in testing their capabilities to take care of themselves. They were part of a process of "civilization" and assimilation that was highlighted by allotment of land in severalty. Omaha efforts predated the 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act by 5 (1882) to 16 (1871) years, placing them in uncharted waters of federal Indian policy. Some Omahas participated voluntarily in allotment as an avenue towards acculturation, whereas others resisted since it attacked the foundation of traditional culture. Most probably realized allotment was the only survival alternative in the face of dwindling bison

herds, encroaching white settlement, and threats of relocation to Indian Territory.

There were many factors behind the question of "why" the Omahas sought, agreed, or acquiesced to allotments. Some of these factors would have had little bearing on "which" parcel of land an individual selected. Simply participating in the process gave the Omahas the appearance of moving towards the government's brand of civilization. On the other hand, pre-existing political alignments helped to shape where people chose to live, which resulted in the division of the Omaha Nation into three distinct villages after 1855. The pattern of land-taking in the 1871 allotment mirrored such alignments, at least in the case of identified "progressive" Omahas. The "Make-Believe White-Men" clearly preferred parcels of land near their village residences.

Alice Fletcher's aggressive promotion of the Logan Creek lands in 1882 had an impact upon where an individual chose to take an allotment. The proximity to railroads and agricultural markets were presented as motivations for moving to the western ranges. The "civilizing" effect of white neighbors was also promoted as a desirable condition. Joseph La Flesche and many "Make-Believe White-Men" and petition signers took notice of these opportunities and relocated away from the eastern villages. It is obvious from the series of maps that the Omaha were successfully dispersed, at least momentarily, from the eastern villages.

The western movement had a profound effect upon the Omahas. The physical distance created between members frustrated the maintenance of traditional ceremonies and governmental functions. They were expected to become individual farmers on the tough, unbroken prairie. Governmental delays in collecting money due from the sale of reservation lands left the Omahas without capital to purchase equipment and stock for developing their new farms. The "progressives" responded by leasing lands to neighboring white farmers, letting the whites make the improvements which the Omahas were unequipped to make, and paying rent as well (Mark 1988).

In 1885 Agent Wilkinson had suggested that "if every Indian family had a thrifty white family within half a mile of them the daily object-lessons would solve the Indian problem quicker than all the theoretic plans of all those philanthropists who worship the Indian at a distance" (ARCIA 1885:135). The reality was that the Omahas were surrounded by opportunistic whites that used extra-legal means to debase and defraud them. Individuals such as Peebles and Tibbles agitated pre-existing tribal factions for personal gain. White manipulation of the Omaha Council served to distract and undermine

Omaha leaders from their more crucial task of consensus building within the reservation community. Equally disturbing, in 1886 Fletcher reveled in the disintegration of the tribe. She felt the "progressive" element would succeed, while the "shiftless" element that persisted in dancing, feasting, and other old-time pursuits would disappear (Mark 1988).

After 1891 the profits from leasing lands to white farmers became an incentive to taking allotments. Data is lacking which explicitly confirms such a motive. However, the near doubling of the number of leases between 1897 and 1898 suggests an increasing quest for rental incomes (ARCIA 1897, 1898). The money derived from leasing, together with the time freed from maintaining a full-scale farming operation, permitted the preservation of some traditional organizations. The dancing and feasting did not fade away as foretold by Fletcher. Some old, and several new, sacred and secular organizations flourished on the reservation at the turn of the century. It is indicative of Omaha innovation within a traditional framework that the first structure built to provide space for ritual (i.e. "traditional") activities was erected on the Standing Hawk allotment, the land owner being a member of the "Make-Believe White-Men" village (Swetland 1994).

The land-taking pattern evidenced in the 1910 data shows many western parcels arranged in a contiguous manner. The predisposition for Omahas associated with a clan or political group to select much of their land with regards to that affiliation could account for this phenomenon. Such blocks of land would have been more desirable to a prospective lessee, both in terms of obtaining sufficient acreage for farming or grazing, as well as the ease in negotiating lease terms through a single family or group.

Following the patrilineally-based clan lineage, taking an individual allotment may have been viewed as a dispersal away from the villages. As such, it could have been approached similar to the pre-reservation routine of scattering into patrilineal fall and winter hunting camps. Further study along genealogical lines could determine how many of the allotments were chosen in the matrilineal village style. The fact that Omahas successfully argued for the inclusion of single females in all allotments harkens back to the village days when women owned garden plots and earth lodges. It was an assertion of Omaha values into the exotic concept of land in severalty.

One final observation can be made—the Omaha were and remain an innovative and resilient group. They survived recurrent epidemics, government bureaucrats, and missionary zealots. The Omaha people have managed to maneuver through the flood of white "civilization" prophesied by Big Elk in 1853. The alien idea of individual land ownership, meant to replace



traditional organizations and values, was altered by leasing to provide the money needed to survive as a Nation. After the initial dispersion out of the communal villages, later allotments to minor children and wives were seldom occupied. Instead, the Omaha creatively split their holdings into western and eastern lands. Many choose to reside in the regions of the 1855 villages, where traditional sacred and secular activities remained strongest. Most came to configure their households much like in the earth lodge days (McEvoy 1963). With this approach the Omahas have been able to confront continued assimilation pressures from a position of traditional strength. The Omahas have survived because they are able to convert new ideas into a traditional framework. They remain the only pre-Nebraska residents not swept from their homelands by Big Elk's great flood.

#### Acknowledgments

*Aho, Umo'ho' Ewithai wo'githe. Iye wi, aki'waho' Du'ba thano'xii thagthi, aki'waho'.* Greetings to all you Omaha relatives. I apologize, as some of you are elders sitting there. This paper branched out of a study of the relation between nineteenth-century allotment land-taking patterns and Omaha clan membership. All original information was drawn from documents available in public institutions. The names of the individuals and families involved were rendered as accurately as possible. I regret having to mention the names of our deceased relatives as it is contrary to our traditions. Some individuals were historically portrayed in a negative manner, the result of circumstances beyond my control. *Izhazhe wiwita Uthixide*, so I am following the directions of my elder relatives and "Looking Around" as best I can. Thank you.

Sincere thanks go to Paul E. Brill for many hours of genealogy research and two anonymous reviewers for suggesting the focus on political alignments. Map-making assistance provided by Clark Archer, Brad Bays, and David Wishart. Photograph and archival services rendered by the National Anthropological Archives — Smithsonian Institution and Nebraska State Historical Society. Conclusions drawn from the data are mine, along with any faults in this paper.

#### Note

1. Wherever possible, the Omaha language transcribed here follows the Fletcher and La Flesche 1911 published orthography. Accent marks have been retained to aid pronunciation.

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# APPENDIX

## JANUARY 11, 1882, PETITION SIGNERS (FLETCHER 1882) WITH GENEALOGY DATA CORRECTIONS (BRILL 1994).

| No. Documented name  | Omaha name *  | English name (approx. age in 1881)         |
|----------------------|---|--|
| 01. Kah-a-num-ba     | <i>Kaxe'no<sup>a</sup>ba</i>                                | Lewis Morris (60)                          |
| 02. Do-uba-moni      | <i>Du'bamo<sup>a</sup>thi<sup>a</sup></i>                   | Harrison McCauley (45)                     |
| 03. Segro-nunga      | <i>Sigthu'no<sup>a</sup>ge</i> , a.k.a. <i>Xitha'gahige</i> | George Grant (47)                          |
| 04. Ta-oh-ka-hah     | <i>Teu'ko<sup>a</sup>ha</i>                                 | Arthur Ramsey (47)                         |
| 05. Wajepa           | <i>Waje'pa</i> , a.k.a. <i>Wa'thishnade</i>                 | Ezra Freemont (40)                         |
| 06. Joseph Merrick   | <i>Gio<sup>a</sup>'zethi<sup>a</sup>ge</i>                  | a.k.a. Moses Merrick (33)                  |
| 07. Pawnee-numph-zhe | <i>Pa'thi<sup>a</sup>no<sup>a</sup>pazhi</i>                | Jordan Stabler (50)                        |
| 08. Pah-bee-souta    | <i>Paçi'duba</i>  | Johnathan Rush (60)                        |
| 09. Ma-etbing-ge     | <i>Mo<sup>a</sup>'hi<sup>a</sup>thi<sup>a</sup>ge</i>       | Frederick Tyndal (65)                      |
| 10. Wa-na-zha-hinga  | <i>Wano<sup>a</sup>'shezhi<sup>a</sup>ga</i>                | Thomas Miller? (67)                        |
| 11. Wae-zhe-umta     | <i>Wazhi<sup>a</sup>'o<sup>a</sup>ba</i>                    | Alvin Cox (59)                             |
| 12. Me-hah-ta        | <i>Mixa'to<sup>a</sup></i>                                  | Henry Morris, a.k.a. Henry Warner (55)     |
| 13. Ma-he-wa-the     | <i>Mo<sup>a</sup>'xe'wathe</i>                              | Richard Robinson (45)                      |
| 14. Wa-loo-te-ta     | <i>Wathu'tada</i>   | Samuel Irving, a.k.a. Abraham Lincoln (32) |
| 15. Mumta-Do-uta     | <i>No<sup>a</sup>'ba'duba</i>                               | Levi John Webster (36)                     |
| 16. Wa-ho-sha-go     | a.k.a. <i>No<sup>a</sup>'ba't'ewathe</i>                    | James Springer (37)                        |
| 17. Um-pa-tim-ga     | <i>O<sup>a</sup>'po'to<sup>a</sup>ga</i>                    | John Big Elk (45)                          |

| No. Documented name        | Omaha name *                                 | English name (approx. age in 1881)        |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| 18. Ma-wah-dah-ne          | <i>Mawa'do'thi</i>                           | Henry Cline (60)                          |
| 19. Frederick Merrick      | <i>Siko'xega</i>                             | (28)                                      |
| 20. Matthew Tyndal         | <i>Hi'daha</i>                               | (37)                                      |
| 21. Tah-ha-zhinga          | <i>Take'zhi'ga</i> , a.k.a. <i>Xu'ga</i>     | Asa Lovejoy (45)                          |
| 22. Noah Samis             | <i>Ni'kagahi</i>                             | Noah Leaming, a.k.a. Noah La Flesche (25) |
| 23. Joseph Lepuoburch      | <i>I'shta'mo'ce</i>                          | Joseph La Flesche (57)                    |
| 24. Edward Esau            | <i>Ho'do'mo'thi</i>                          | (40)                                      |
| 25. Na-zair-duzze          | <i>No'zo'dazhi</i>                           | Dwight Sherman                            |
| 26. Louis Saunsoci         | <i>Thu'i</i>                                 | (60)                                      |
| 27. Ma-ste-an-zee          | <i>Mo'shti'o'ca</i>                          | Simpson Stabler (30)                      |
| 28. Phillip Sheridan       | <i>Tenu'gawazhi</i>                          | (30)                                      |
| 29. Blackbird Sheridan     | <i>Mo'gthi'xta</i>                           | (26)                                      |
| 30. William Provost        | No Omaha name                                | William Provo? (26)                       |
| 31. He-ba-zhor             | <i>Heba'zhu</i>                              | Oliver Mitchell (23)                      |
| 32. Wah-sin-sin-de         | <i>Wa'ci'ci'de</i>                           | Samson Gilpin (23)                        |
| 33. Num-ba-moni            | <i>No'ba'mo'thi</i>                          | Charles Webster (35)                      |
| 34. Shu-shinga             | <i>Shu'zhi'ga</i> , a.k.a. <i>No'pewathe</i> | Horace Cline (50)                         |
| 35. John Pilcher           | No Omaha name                                | (50)                                      |
| 36. Fred Cayon             | No Omaha name                                | (41)                                      |
| 37. Sin-de-hah-hah         | <i>Çi'dexo'xo</i>                            | William Hamilton (50)                     |
| 38. J. M. Spuyer           | <i>Mo'geto'ga</i>                            | John Springer (41)                        |
| 39. Hun-gah-te             | <i>Ho'ga'xti</i>                             | Thomas Robinson? (34)                     |
| 40. William Tyndal         | <i>Take'zho'ka</i>                           | (32)                                      |
| 41. Tah-waugh-gar-a-ghinga | <i>To'wo'gaxe'zhi'ga</i>                     | Cyrus Blackbird (55)                      |
| 42. Uriah Merrick          | <i>To'wo'pazhi</i>                           | (19)                                      |
| 43. Ma-ga-tah              | <i>Mo'a'gata</i>                             | Joseph Cox (21)                           |
| 44. Wah-gah-a-sha          | <i>Wagi'asha</i>                             | Luke Cox (19)                             |
| 45. Ega-hun-ga-sha         | <i>I'gthu'ho'gasha</i>                       | David Wells (18)                          |
| 46. Gah-e-va-zhe           | <i>Gai'bazhi</i>                             | Walter Morris (26)                        |
| 47. Ta-hoo-tom-be          | <i>Te'huto'bi</i>                            | Charles Robinson (28)                     |
| 48. Thomas McCauley        | <i>Tade'ta</i>                               | (33)                                      |
| 49. En-la-bee              | a.k.a. <i>I'ke'to'ga</i>                     | George Miller (26)                        |
| 50. David Stbler           | No Omaha name                                | David Stabler (27)                        |
| 51. Nebraska               | <i>Nibtha'cka</i>                            | Alfred Nebraska<br>Hallowell (24)         |
| 52. Frank Saunsoci         | No Omaha name                                | (25)                                      |
| 53. Anslee White           | <i>Hi'ci'zhi'ga</i>                          | Ansley D. White (33)                      |

\*Fletcher and La Flesche 1911