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## River Basin Surveys Papers, No. 28: The Dance Hall of the Santee Bottoms on the Fort Berthold Reservation, Garrison Reservoir, North Dakota

Donald D. Hartle

Smithsonian Institution

Bureau of American Ethnology

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY  
BULLETIN 185

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## RIVER BASIN SURVEYS PAPERS

FRANK H. H. ROBERTS, JR., *Editor*

### Inter-Agency Archeological Salvage Program

NUMBERS 26-32

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION,  
BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY,  
*Washington, D.C., June 10, 1961.*

SIR: I have the honor to submit the accompanying manuscripts, entitled "Small Sites on and about Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, Garrison Reservoir, North Dakota," by George Metcalf; "Star Village: A Fortified Historic Arikara Site in Mercer County, North Dakota," by George Metcalf; "The Dance Hall of the Santee Bottoms on the Fort Berthold Reservation, Garrison Reservoir, North Dakota," by Donald D. Hartle; "Crow-Flies-High (32MZ1), A Historic Hidatsa Village in the Garrison Reservoir Area, North Dakota," by Carling Malouf; "The Stutsman Focus: An Aboriginal Culture Complex in the Jamestown Reservoir Area, North Dakota," by R. P. Wheeler; "Archeological Manifestations in the Toole County Section of the Tiber Reservoir Basin, Montana," by Carl F. Miller; "Archeological Salvage Investigations in the Lovewell Reservoir Area, Kansas," by Robert W. Neuman, and to recommend that they be published as a bulletin of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

Very respectfully yours,

FRANK H. H. ROBERTS, JR.,  
*Director.*

DR. LEONARD CARMICHAEL,  
*Secretary, Smithsonian Institution.*

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## EXPLANATION OF THE INTER-AGENCY ARCHEOLOGICAL SALVAGE PROGRAM

The Inter-Agency Archeological Salvage Program is a cooperative plan of the Smithsonian Institution; the National Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior; and the Corps of Engineers, Department of the Army. It was formulated, through a series of interbureau agreements, for the purpose of recovering archeological and paleontological remains that would otherwise be lost as a result of the numerous projects for flood control, irrigation, hydroelectric power, and navigation improvements in the river basins of the United States. Various State and local agencies have assisted in the work. To carry out its part of the joint undertaking, the Smithsonian Institution organized the River Basin Surveys as a unit of the Bureau of American Ethnology. The National Park Service has served as liaison between the various agencies and has provided the Smithsonian Institution with all of the necessary information pertaining to the location of proposed dams and other construction and their priorities. It has also had responsibility for budgeting costs of the program, funds for which are provided in the annual appropriations of the Department of the Interior. The operations of the River Basin Surveys, Smithsonian Institution, have been supported by funds transferred to it from the National Park Service. Through agreements with the National Park Service, money has also been made available to State and local agencies to supplement their own resources and aid them in their contributions to the program.

*The River Basin Surveys Papers, of which this is the eighth bulletin, are issued under the scientific editorship of Frank H. H. Roberts, Jr., director of the Bureau of American Ethnology.*

## FOREWORD

The seven reports which comprise the present volume of River Basin Surveys Papers pertain to work which was done in four reservoir areas in the Missouri Basin. Two of the reservoirs are located in North Dakota, one in Montana, and one in Kansas. The North Dakota reservoirs are the Garrison on the main stem of the Missouri River, located some distance above Bismarck, and the Jamestown on the James River above the town of Jamestown in the eastern part of the State. The Montana reservoir is the Tiber, located on the Marias River in the northwestern part of the State, and that in Kansas is the Lovewell on White Rock Creek, a tributary of the Republican River in the north-central part of the State. All four of the projects have been completed, and the areas where the archeological investigations were carried on are now inundated.

Four of the projects were in the Garrison Reservoir basin, and three of them are particularly interesting because they pertain to historic Indian locations. As a matter of fact, one of the three could virtually be called modern. Most of the work in the Garrison area was done in sites which were pre-White contact and older or in sites of the early historic period when the Indians were associated with or living adjacent to trading posts or military installations. The information obtained from Indian occupation areas which were contemporaneous with those of White origin but which gave little evidence of direct association throws interesting light on various aboriginal activities.

Mr. Metcalf, in the first paper, describes small sites in and about the Fort Berthold Reservation because it was thought that while most of these sites were too small to merit a full-scale investigation, they nevertheless provided a considerable amount of previously unreported data which should be made available. Some of the sites mentioned by Mr. Metcalf subsequently received additional attention and will be described in other papers. Most of those which he describes, however, will not be discussed elsewhere. His report adds to the general information of the Fort Berthold area. The second paper, by the same author, describes the investigations made at a single site, where a village was started by the Arikara in the spring of 1862 and was occupied only until the latter part of August of the same year, when raids by the Sioux forced its abandonment and the withdrawal of its occupants. Although the life of the community, which is

known as Star Village, was of extremely short duration, it nevertheless provides information about changes which were taking place in house types and village patterns.

The article by Dr. Hartle describing the dance hall of the Santee Bottoms on the Fort Berthold Reservation is, strictly speaking, an architectural study and not archeological in nature. The building was still standing at the time the study was made, and there were numerous Indians living in the vicinity who had participated in ceremonies held in the structure. The building is of particular interest because it was the last example of that type of dance hall built and used in the Fort Berthold area. The place where it stood is now many feet beneath the waters of the Garrison Reservoir. The fourth paper in the Garrison series, that by Dr. Carling Malouf, is, more strictly speaking, an ethnohistorical study, but it was based on excavations in a former village site. The historical incidents which led to the establishment of Crow-Flies-High village and various things which took place there after it was occupied constitute an interesting sidelight on activities in that portion of North Dakota at that particular period. Dr. Malouf was fortunate in being able to obtain from some of the Indians still living in the vicinity and from documentary records items which bring to life activities in a native village at a time when many changes were taking place and the people were under considerable strain. Opportunities to make a study of that nature are not common and Dr. Malouf took full advantage of the situation. The fieldwork which he did was a cooperative project between the National Park Service and Montana State University. The other three projects in the Garrison Reservoir basin were under the direction of the River Basin Surveys, and the field parties were directed by regular staff members of the Missouri Basin Project.

Investigations at the Jamestown Reservoir began in 1946, when a preliminary reconnaissance was made of the area to be flooded by the project. The construction of the dam was delayed and it was not necessary to do further work in the area until the summers of 1952 and 1954 when the excavations reported by Mr. Wheeler were made. As a result of his studies, Mr. Wheeler concluded that the manifestations in the Jamestown basin represented a single aboriginal culture complex which he designated the Stutsman Focus. The material collected indicated seminomadic communities whose subsistence was based on a combination of horticulture, hunting, and food gathering. Also, these communities trapped eagles for ceremonial purposes. The pottery which they made is comparable to that found at various locations in central and southeastern North Dakota which has been ascribed to the Hidatsa Indians, and it is quite possible that the latter may have been responsible for the remains assigned to the Stutsman Focus. Certain items of trade material attributable to European

origin and some late pottery types from other complexes which were present suggest that the Stutsman Focus belongs in the early historic period and may well date from A.D. 1750 or 1770 to 1800. Prior to the investigations by the River Basin Surveys, virtually nothing was known of the archeological manifestations in that immediate area.

The investigations in the Tiber Reservoir basin in Montana were not as satisfactory as might be desired. The original surveys were made in the late summer of 1946 and some excavating was done during the summer of 1950. Because of insufficient funds it was not possible to continue that project until the summer of 1955. In the meantime heavy floods had swept down the river and washed away many of the sites which had been designated for further investigation. By the time that Mr. Miller went there in June 1955, practically all that remained was one large site where there had been some digging in 1950. Mr. Miller tested a number of locations in that site where it appeared that archeological evidence might be obtained. On the basis of what he found and the material collected 5 years earlier, it appears that the Tiber area was mainly occupied by intermittent groups of hunters from communities located elsewhere. The major game animal was the bison, and the bones representing that animal indicate a transition between one of the older forms and modern bison, with the implication that there was appreciable antiquity to some of the remains occurring there. Unfortunately there is not sufficient evidence to identify the hunters with some of the groups which were occupying portions of Montana in the surrounding area. However, it would appear from the limited number of potsherds recovered that the later stages of the culture were related to a Woodland variant existing in late prehistoric times.

The presence of archeological manifestations in the Lovewell Reservoir area was known for some time prior to the investigations by the River Basin Surveys. In 1935 George Lamb, an interested local amateur, did some preliminary digging in two of the more important sites. Two years later a party under the sponsorship of the Nebraska State Historical Society, directed by Paul Cooper, carried on excavations at one of the sites. He was assisted by Mr. Lamb. A survey of the entire reservoir basin was made in 1951 by Franklin Fenenga for the River Basin Surveys. Then, in the summer of 1956, a River Basin Surveys party undertook more intensive investigations in the area. Further excavations were made in the village remains previously tested by Mr. Lamb and Mr. Cooper, and digging was carried on at several others which until then were known only by their surface indications. Mr. Neuman, who was in charge of the 1956 work, in addition to digging extensively in three village and one mound site, also collected material from all other known archeological locations in the basin. The results of Mr. Neuman's studies in the field form the

basis for his report which is River Basin Surveys Papers No. 32. In his description and conclusions pertaining to the village and camp manifestations occurring there, he includes the data which were collected by Mr. Lamb and Mr. Cooper. He concludes that the remains in the area represent the Late Ceramic Period of the Central Plains and that the date of occupancy was in the late 17th century. The mound which was excavated falls into a somewhat earlier period and probably dates at about A.D. 1200. The work of Mr. Neuman and his predecessors has provided good general knowledge about the Indian cultures in that part of Kansas.

FRANK H. H. ROBERTS, JR.,  
*Director, River Basin Surveys.*



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**SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION**  
**Bureau of American Ethnology**  
**Bulletin 185**

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**River Basin Surveys Papers, No. 28**  
**The Dance Hall of the Santee Bottoms on the Fort Berthold**  
**Reservation, Garrison Reservoir, North Dakota**

**By DONALD D. HARTLE**



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# THE DANCE HALL OF THE SANTEE BOTTOMS ON THE FORT BERTHOLD RESERVATION, GARRISON RESERVOIR, NORTH DAKOTA <sup>1</sup>

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By DONALD D. HARTLE

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## INTRODUCTION

A unique structure remaining on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation is an old dance hall, a ceremonial building which in some respects appears to have been an outgrowth of the old Mandan and Hidatsa earthlodges (pl. 18, *a*). The dance hall (32ML41) is located in sec. 30, T. 149 N., R. 90 W., McLean County, N. Dak. Prior to cultivation, the bottom land surrounding the dance hall was covered with the typical flora of the area, mainly cottonwood and willow. In the summer of 1954, however, the immediate area was under cultivation.

George Metcalf, at that time assistant archeologist of the Smithsonian Institution Missouri Basin Project staff, now a member of the Division of Archeology, United States National Museum, recorded this site in 1950 while making a reconnaissance of the area to be inundated by the Garrison Reservoir. It was later decided that since the site was one of the many that would be flooded by the Garrison Reservoir in the near future, a complete record of the structure should be made. During the summer of 1952 the writer, archeologist of the Smithsonian Institution River Basin Surveys staff, assisted by Charles Proctor and Robert Williams, students at the University of Oklahoma, temporarily employed by the Missouri Basin Project, visited the site. This party obtained precise measurements and a description of the dance hall. Presumably the structure will be demolished and the timbers salvaged for various purposes prior to inundation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Submitted August 1954.

<sup>2</sup> The National Park Service in 1952 prepared reports and measured drawings of 12 historic sites to be lost by flooding in the Missouri River Basin. This was in connection with the work of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The Santee Bottoms dance hall was included in the group, the reports and measured drawings of which are on file in the Director's office in Washington, D.C.

## HISTORY

Most of the details regarding the history of the dance hall were obtained from Robert W. Rietz, Fort Berthold Agency, in correspondence with Robert L. Stephenson, Acting Chief, Missouri Basin Project. Other historical details were obtained from George Metcalf of the Missouri Basin Project and from Arthur Mandan of the Fort Berthold Reservation. The dance hall was constructed in 1918 under the direction of John Doran, one-time watchman at Elbowoods, N. Dak., who was also a local contractor in the Town of Garrison, N. Dak. Although this hall was constructed entirely of wood and was a modern building in some respects, it had many characteristics of the prehistoric and historic earthlodges excavated in the area by the Missouri Basin Project.

The Indians who built the hall were a proximity group of Mandan and Hidatsa living south and west of the Missouri River, who had broken away from a local Mandan-Hidatsa group, led by Old Dog of Elbowoods. It is generally claimed that members of all three tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) were represented in the original group which was called the "Santee Dancing Society"; however, the names of participating Arikara, if any, are not known. Two Hidatsa, Bird-Lying-Down (on whose allotment the hall was constructed) and White Body, were leaders of the group. They promoted the building of the hall and, later, the formation of a separate group which developed its own hereditary positions. Opinions differ with a wide range of reasons for the split into separate groups. Some people feel that there was a political basis in which the two groups backed two different United States Senators, each of whom promised to act in their interests. Other people claim that there were "too many leaders." Rietz (personal communication) believes that the split "seems to have come about because of the distances involved and the locally developed ambitions of district leaders, following the spread of the people over an increasing area at that time."

Although the structure was called a dance hall, it served for any type of community activity and was used by any person or group of persons in that vicinity. Customarily the same "announcer" served for all affairs. Actually the announcer was a modified position of a ceremonial leader. This hall was last used in 1946, although, when visited in July 1953 by Robert L. Stephenson, it was still in good condition.

## DESCRIPTION

Briefly, the structure had 4 center posts, 13 sides, a double door, a cupola, and a flagpole (pl. 18, *a*).

*Center posts.*—The four center posts (fig. 17, *c* and *d*) were each composed of four boards nailed together and overlapping each other







at the corners (fig. 18, *e*). The boards were each 0.13 foot in thickness and 0.46 foot in width. These measurements were taken from the inside of the posts which were each 0.6 foot square. In figure 17, *d*, the center posts are indicated by A, B, C, and D. The distance from A to B was 16.9 feet; from B to C 16.95 feet; from C to D 16.8 feet; and from D to A 16.95 feet.

*Walls.*—There were 13 sides or walls to the structure. In figure 17, *d*, each is numbered clockwise beginning at the door. The interior measurement of each side (in feet) was as follows: 15.6, 14.3, 14.6, 14.3, 15.7, 15.0, 13.1, 13.7, 14.8, 15.0, 15.5, 14.0, and 15.0 respectively. The height of each of the 13 corner posts for these walls is indicated in figure 17, *d*. The walls were constructed of horizontally placed logs (fig. 18, *a* and *c*). These logs numbered either seven or eight in each wall as follows: 7, 8, 8, 8, 7, 8, 7, 7, 7, 8, 8, 8, and 8. The approximate width of each of the wall logs was 0.7 foot. The wall logs were all of cottonwood except for a very few which appeared to be willow. The chinking between the horizontal wall logs was mud with a little grass used as a binder. In a few places smaller logs were used as fillers for the large spaces between the main logs. All wall corners were nailed in place, and the top and bottom of each was flattened at the corners so that they fitted tightly (fig. 18, *c*). Two 2 × 4's were placed horizontally at the tip of each wall on the top of the highest wall log (fig. 18, *d*). The roof rested directly upon these two 2 × 4's. Small, vertically placed 2 × 4's and logs were placed where necessary at the top of the wall logs to make a level base for the roof.

*Floor.*—Regular flooring had been used but was later patched with small, odd bits of lumber and tin. The regular flooring was 0.43 foot in width and 0.07 foot in thickness, resting upon a foundation of 2 × 4's. The smaller lumber used for patching was 0.28 foot in width and 0.07 foot in thickness. These small pieces were nailed to the regular flooring, leaving a slight rise in the floor in some places. The 2 × 4's forming the floor foundation were on 1.6 feet centers. Floor measurements taken from the outside corner of the center posts to the wall corners were as follows:

<i>Feet</i>	<i>Feet</i>
Post A to corner of 1 and 2=20.1	Post B to corner of 7 and 8=23.3
Post D to corner of 1 and 2=27.7	Post C to corner of 9 and 10=17.4
Post A to corner of 3 and 4=30.3	Post D to corner of 9 and 10=29.3
Post B to corner of 3 and 4=27.3	Post D to corner of 11 and 12=19.3
Post B to corner of 5 and 6=17.5	Post C to corner of 11 and 12=29.5
Post C to corner of 5 and 6=34.0	Post D to corner of 13 and 1=22.7
Post C to corner of 7 and 8=21.9	Post A to corner of 13 and 1=26.6

*Door.*—Wall No. 1 originally had a double door, but one section was later filled in with logs (fig. 18, *a*, and pl. 18, *b*). The inside measurements of the door frame were as follows: Top width=3.65 feet, bot-

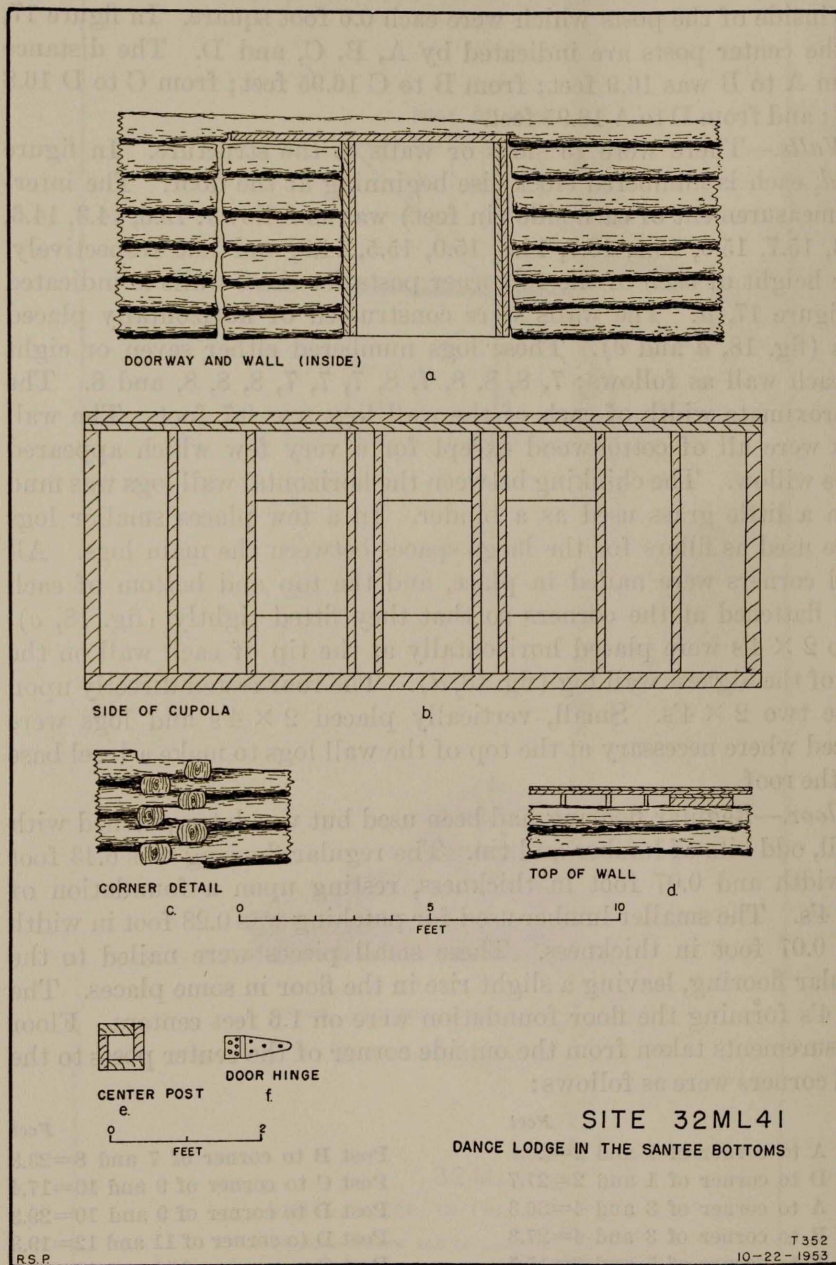


FIGURE 18.—Measured drawings of construction details of the dance hall in the Santee Bottoms.

tom width=3.75 feet, height at right side=5.2 feet, height at left side=5.15 feet. The door frame was lined with a casing of two  $2 \times 4$ 's at each side and one  $2 \times 4$  across the top. The latter extended over the log-filled portion of the door as well as over the later doorway. The door, which opened outward, was 5.65 feet in height and 3.6 feet in width. Regular large commercial iron door hinges were used to hang the door (fig. 18, *f*). A single log had been cut to conform to the contours of the door casing and was placed horizontally across the entire span of wall No. 1, including both sections of the doorway. The log-filled portion of the doorway was 5.15 feet high and 2.9 feet wide. The door sill was a log and a small  $2 \times 6$ .

*Roof.*—The roof supports (fig. 17, *c*) were  $2 \times 6$ 's running from the top of each wall panel to the base of the cupola. The ends of these supports rested upon horizontally placed  $4 \times 4$ 's at the base of the cupola, which in turn rested upon the four center posts. Inside each panel from the wall to the cupola base these supports number 6, 6, 6, 7, 6, 7, 6, 6, 8, 7, 6, 7, and 7 respectively. Some of these supports did not continue all the way to the base of the cupola but were toenailed to adjacent, larger supports which did. Above the supports, the roof boards were  $1 \times 6$ 's,  $1 \times 8$ 's, and  $1 \times 12$ 's, laid flat. Long shingles were nailed to the topside of these roof boards.

*Cupola.*—The cupola was built in a rectangle directly above the four center posts and rested upon the above-mentioned horizontal  $4 \times 4$ 's. The area of the cupola was thus the same as that encompassed by the four center posts. Each of the four center posts had two side braces just below the cupola. These braces started at 6.4 feet above the floor and extended toward the center of the cupola base. The braces were each 8.2 feet in length and were square, being 0.28 foot in width and thickness. There was a lantern holder on each of the braces making a total of eight.

The cupola itself was four-sided with three windows on each side (fig. 17, *c*). The corners of the cupola were of  $4 \times 4$ 's, at the top of each of which were two horizontal  $2 \times 4$ 's (fig. 18, *b*). All four sides were similar. Besides the four corner posts there were eight vertical  $2 \times 4$ 's in each side. Three windows were centered in each side, each window measuring 3.0 feet in height and 2.4 feet in width; however, the windows were roughly cut into the walls and were not exact in measurement. There was a  $2 \times 4$  sill at the base of each window to hold the sash. The distance between the center window and the two outer windows in each wall was 0.5 foot. The height of the cupola from base to eaves was 6.27 feet.

The roof of the cupola (fig. 17, *a* and *b*) was pyramidal and 3.5 feet in height at center. The roofing stringers were  $2 \times 4$ 's with one main beam from each corner to the apex and four additional beams toenailed to them. These beams were covered with  $1 \times 8$ 's and  $1 \times 12$ 's,

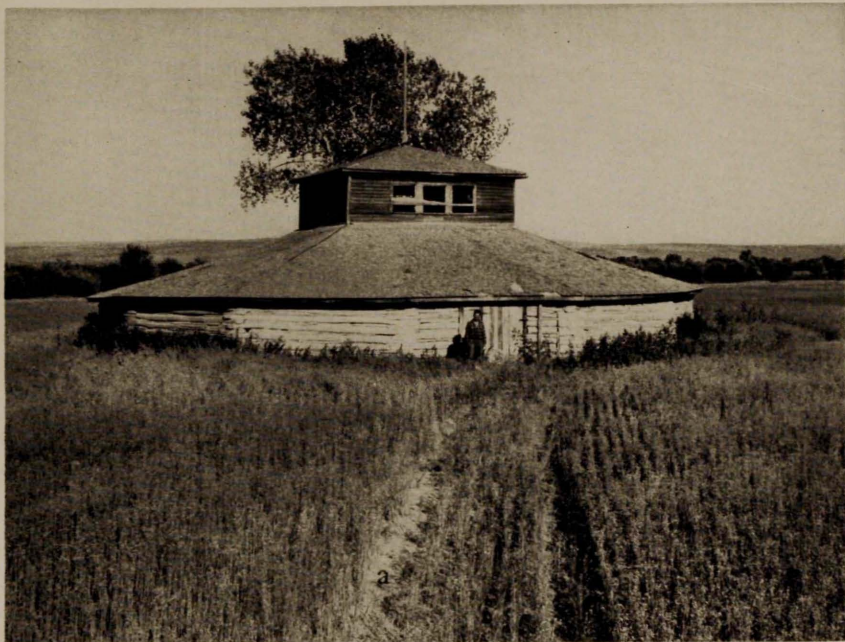
and the roof was shingled above these boards in the same manner as the lower part of the dance hall roof. Two single 1×6's formed a cross at the level of the cupola base. The height from the dance hall floor to base of the cupola (to top of the 4×4) was 12.55 feet. The height from the dance hall floor to the top of the cupola wall was 18.9 feet. The eaves of both the cupola and the main structure extended approximately 2 feet beyond the sides of the structure. A 1×6 placed horizontally, with the wide dimension vertical, is nailed along the edge of the eaves (pl. 18).

*Miscellaneous.*—Three stoves were used in the dance hall, as indicated by the presence of three flues. Two were on the south side and one on the north side. A wooden flagpole, approximately 12 feet high, extended vertically from the apex of the cupola roof (fig. 17, *c*). This flagpole was rectangular at the base, but 1.5 feet above the base the corners were trimmed, and from that point to the top the pole was octagonal. The base of the flagpole was wrapped with tin.

### GENERAL COMMENT

This dance hall was perhaps the last remaining structure of its kind in the Northern Great Plains. The historical data pertaining to it portray a small phase of the ceremonial and social life of a specific group of Indians—Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa—during the early 20th century. It is a very small but illuminating portion of the history of a frequently migrating people who are now in the midst of a new migration, that of moving from their present homes on the Fort Berthold Reservation. Preservation of a record of the historical background and architectural details of this structure seemed imperative.

Comparative analysis of the details of this structure, in use from 1918 to 1946, reveals similarities to the earlier ceremonial structures built by these Indians. There is even some indication of an evolutionary sequence from the early rectangular ceremonial earthlodge to the circular one and finally to the present log structure described here. One is reminded, in such a sequence, of the development of the kiva in the American Southwest. This is not meant to imply any connection between the two areas; it only points out a somewhat parallel development of a ceremonial structure as exemplified by the Santee Bottoms dance hall and its forerunners.



*a*, View of the dance hall in the Santee Bottoms. *b*, Detail of wall, roof, and door of the dance hall in the Santee Bottoms.