



Plains Earthlodges: Ethnographic and Archaeological Perspectives

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A survey of Native American earthlodge research from across the Great Plains.

Early explorers initially believed the earthlodge homes of Plains village peoples were made entirely of earth. Actually, however, earthlodges are timber-frame structures, with the frame covered by successive layers of willows, grass, and earth, and with a tunnel-like entryway and a smoke hole in the center of the roof. The products of nearly a millennium of engineering development, historic period lodges were massively built. With diameters up to 60 feet across, they comprise the largest and most complex artifacts built on the Plains until the 20th century. Sheltering nuclear or extended families and their possessions—beds, stored food and clothing, weapons, sweatlodges, and even livestock—they shaped Plains villagers' lives both physically and symbolically.

This collection of papers explores current research in the ethnography and archaeology of Plains earthlodges, considering a variety of Plains tribes, including the Mandan, Hidatsa, Cheyenne, and their late prehistoric period predecessors. Acknowledged experts in the field discuss topics including lodge construction, architecture, maintenance, deterioration, and lifespan; the ritual practices performed in them; their associations with craft traditions, medicine lodges, and the Sun Dance; their gender symbolism; and their geophysical signatures.

With technological advances allowing an ever greater recognition of archaeological evidence in situ, future earthlodge research will yield even more information on their owners and residents. This volume provides a much-needed baseline for such research as well as comparative data for the occurrence of earthlodges in other sections of North America.

Contributors:

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