

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Mystic Caverns
And Their Short-lived
Days of Glory

Page 21

Spring, 2000

Volume 35, Number 1

The Two Worlds of Jane Gibbs
The Gibbs Farm and the Santee Dakota

—Page 4



"Guarding the Corn Fields," a watercolor by Seth Eastman, ca. 1850. This would have been a familiar scene for the young Jane De Bow Gibbs. Corn was a staple for the Dakota people. As a child, she lived near Cloud Man's village at Lake Calhoun in what is now south Minneapolis. Reprinted by permission from Seth Eastman: A Portfolio of North American Indians, Afton Historical Society Press. See article beginning on page 4.

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Message from Editorial Board

Most of this issue of *Ramsey County History* focuses on the Gibbs Farm Museum, which the Ramsey County Historical Society owns in Falcon Heights. Over the past several years, the Society has expanded its interpretation of the Gibbs Farm to encompass both the white culture of the original owners, Jane and Heman Gibbs, and the Native American culture of the young Jane's friends, the Santee Dakota, in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Historian Julie Humann begins her article with an analysis of how Jane and the Dakota came to know and understand each other, beginning in 1835 when as a little girl, she lived near the village of the Dakota chief, Cloud Man, in today's south Minneapolis. A key part of their mutually supportive relationship depended upon the genuine reciprocity that these representatives of the two cultures had for each other.

Writer Janet Cass complements Humann's descriptions of Dakota culture with an examination of Dakota gardening at the farm Jane and her husband, Heman Gibbs, later established. Cass writes of the plant species the Dakota commonly used, their gardening techniques, and the relationship their gardening had to other aspects of their culture. Lastly, she explains how the Dakota garden at the farm's site fits in with the museum's expanded interpretation. The Society welcomes any additional information that readers of this magazine can supply about these aspects of Dakota material culture.

This issue next moves to the world of commercial agriculture practiced by the Gibbs family and other Minnesota farmers from the end of the nineteenth century to the present. Retired University of Minnesota agronomist William R. Hueg, Jr., explains how the University acquired the rich farmland that once belonged to the Gibbs family and other early residents of Rose Township and built a world-renowned agricultural experiment station.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

The Gibbs Farm, Its Neighbor, the University Farm, And How Both of Them Influenced Minnesota's Agricultural History

William F. Hueg, Jr.

When Heman R. Gibbs, a Vermont schoolteacher, took up 160 acres in the newly-created Territory of Minnesota, he little knew that his quarter-section would one day prove to be some of the most valuable acreage in the history of Minnesota agriculture.

Whether Gibbs, the pioneer farmer, could have visualized what Minnesota and the agriculture of the United States would become is pure speculation, but the agricultural tools and implements he and his fellow farmers used to till their crops 150 years ago are still in use in many parts of the world today. A valuable little book, *Farming in Early Minnesota*, hand-lettered and illustrated by its author, the late Edward J. Lettermann, has just been republished by the Ramsey County Historical Society.

(See Books, Etc., page 27, for a review of Lettermann's book *Farming in Early Minnesota*.)

Lettermann, the former curator of Heman Gibbs's old farm home, now the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Museum in Falcon Heights, was an expert on these old implements, some of which are still on exhibit at the museum.

He has illustrated his book with drawings of some of those ancient tools, as well as several maps of the quarter-section of land Gibbs acquired after his arrival in Minnesota. The 160 acres, as shown in the map on page 5 of his book, were in Sections 17 and 20 of the old Rose Township, northwest of St. Paul, but they are better illustrated on page 16 as four contiguous parcels of forty acres each.

My intent in this essay is to review the relationship of Heman Gibbs's farmland to agriculture in Minnesota and the United States and the significant impact of that agriculture on world agriculture.

The Gibbises' and adjacent land has been used for research and education with field crops, such as grains, corn, soybeans, and flax; with horticultural crops, such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, and ornamentals; with all classes of livestock, such as dairy, beef, sheep, horses, chickens, turkeys, geese, and ducks; even with the teaching and research of farm management, farm building, construction, farm machinery, and rural social policy.

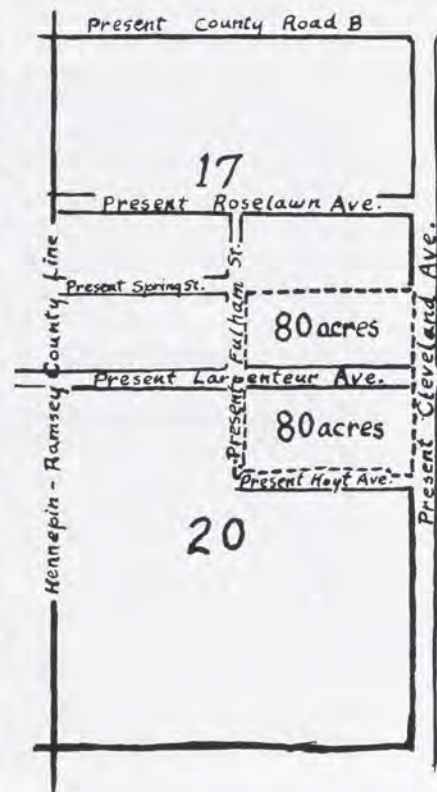
There will be those readers who know more about this significant piece of Minnesota history. My knowledge of the Gibbs farm and the nearby University of

Minnesota's St. Paul campus goes back to 1957 when I joined the faculty of Agronomy and Plant Genetics at the University as an extension agronomist. This day-to-day knowledge was enhanced in 1962 when I was appointed assistant director and then director of the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station. By reading the many reports and documentation of previous research, and the land exchanges with the heirs of Jane and Heman Gibbs and other early residents of land that is now an integral part of the University Farm, it was easy to become interested in this important history.

On June 2, 1882, the university purchased 155 acres from the Bass family, followed by another ninety-two acres from the Langford family in March 1883. The purchase price came from the sale of an earlier experimental farm east of the Minneapolis campus, from Oak Street to Prospect Park on both sides of University Avenue. The price of that site when purchased was \$8,500 for approximately 120 acres, but this land proved unsuitable for experimentation and was sold in 1882 for \$128,000. That money was used for the Langford and Bass land purchases, construction of a farm house and superintendent's office, and an extremely large but not very functional barn. The barn was completed in time to store the 1885 harvest; two silos were completed in September 1886.

On March 7, 1885 the Minnesota Legislature established the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station by an enabling act which read:

Section 1. It shall be the duty of the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota as soon as practicable after the passage of this act, to establish at said University an Agricultural Experiment Station for the purpose of promoting agriculture in its various



The 160 acres Heman Gibbs acquired in 1849 under a land warrant from Henry Cosnitz, who served with the First Pennsylvania Regiment during the Mexican War.

branches by scientific investigations and experiments, which station will be under the control and supervision of said Board of Regents, and of which the professor of agriculture shall be general superintendent.

At approximately the same time, the School of Agriculture was established at this location. During its tenure, which ended with the graduation class of 1960, hundreds of Minnesota agricultural and community leaders claimed the school as their alma mater. An organization, SAUM (School of Agriculture University of Minnesota), still holds its annual meeting on the campus the last weekend in April. It is interesting to note that, within the University, the campus and the University Farm area are known as the St. Paul Campus, although it is located completely within the boundaries of Falcon Heights.

Over time the University acquired the original quarter-section (160 acres) of the Gibbs farm. In 1949 the present site of the Gibbs Farm Museum was deeded to the Ramsey County Historical Society, and more recently six more acres have been added. This land has had several uses over the years, including as experimental plot land, pastures for beef and sheep research, the University Golf Course, and more recently intramural athletic fields and the Women's Soccer program.

At the close of World War II, to accommodate married students, a Quonset Village was developed, which was replaced by an expanded University Grove, a housing community for tenured faculty and administrative staff of the University. The individual properties are leased by the University to the homeowners who construct houses of their interest and design. A faculty retirement center has been built at 1666 Coffman, which has condominium units owned by retired faculty and staff. Both of these housing facilities are built on land that was once part of the Gibbs farm. The old Gibbs schoolhouse on the corner of Cleveland and Larpenteur is used as a storage building, and in the Christmas season the Forestry Club of the College of Natural Resources sells trees as a fund raising activity at this location. Many well remember the intercampus streetcar which went

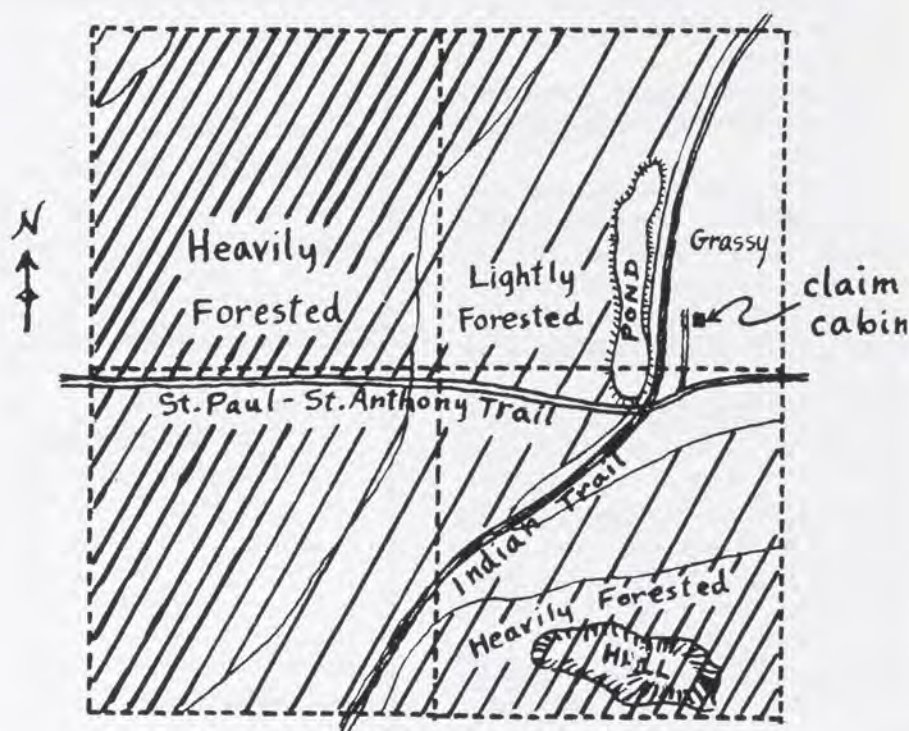
under Cleveland Avenue and ran westerly at the base of the hill once known as Mount Gibbs on the south end of the property.

Perhaps the most valuable piece of agricultural land in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest lies to the east of the former Gibbs property. These are the experimental plot lands for the many former and present studies in plant research: agronomy, plant genetics, plant pathology, entomology, soils, and horticulture. Preliminary studies are conducted here before being moved to the network of branch experiment stations at Crookston, Morris, Grand Rapids, Waseca, Lamberton, and, at one time, Duluth, for evaluation on a regional basis. The economic value from improved yields and production practices has resulted in greater returns and efficiency in crop production. Space will not allow mention of all such research so a few examples have been selected.

In 1903 a disease nursery was established on an area east of Cleveland Avenue and south of Larpenteur, and is still

in use today. Many of the research studies there have resulted in improved disease-resistant varieties and lines to further genetic progress. In 1921 Drs. Freeman and Stakman and their colleagues observed that plant parasitic fungi, especially stem rust of wheat and other cereal grains, had a physiologic specialization that impacted plant health and thus growth. These organisms crossed as rapidly or more so than the resistant varieties being developed. Understanding this phenomenon made it possible for plant pathologists and plant breeders to work together to develop lines and varieties of wheat and oats with great tolerance for these diseases. Because of the importance of Hard Red Spring wheat to the agriculture of western Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Canada, this knowledge was extremely important to assure abundant crops each year, resulting in a more stable and predictable agriculture. This work continues today as new varieties are needed to meet current disease conditions.

Dr. Norman Borlaug, 1970 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was one of the stu-



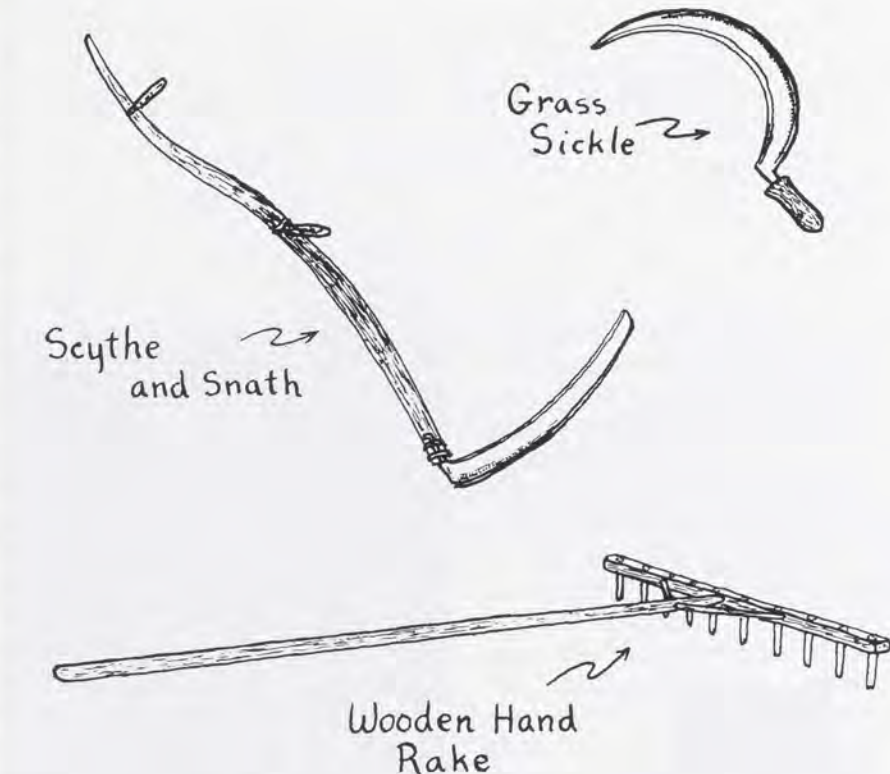
The Gibbs land, alternately heavily and lightly forested, and crossed by two trails. An Indian trail ran between Chief Cloud Man's Lake Calhoun village and the rice lakes to the north. A wagon road linked St. Paul with St. Anthony, now East Minneapolis. Both maps used with this article were drawn by Edward J. Lettermann for his book, *Farming in Early Minnesota*.

dents of Dr. E.C. Stakman, a plant pathologist, and Dr. H.K. Hayes, a plant breeder. Borlaug and his colleagues, working at the several international research centers, are credited with the "Green Revolution." Their work has brought to Mexico, India, and other developing nations, wheat, corn, and rice varieties which carry resistance to many former disease epidemics. As in the United States and Canada, these improvements have led to a more dependable and nutritious food supply.

Today we read a great deal about genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. These crops are a more sophisticated development by plant scientists using principles learned from DNA and genome studies. There is controversy over these seeds which carry specific tolerance against corn borers, herbicide tolerance in soybeans, and boll weevil resistance in cotton. Traditional methods of plant breeding continue, but these new technical developments will assure that in the foreseeable future agriculture will be able to meet the food and fiber needs of an expanding world population. As in the past, there is uneasiness and concern over these developments in crop production, but with a better informed public this progress will continue and its importance understood by consumers as a benefit of research. The University has been one of the leaders in this pioneer research.

Research with corn and soybeans has been a mainstay of public plant improvement programs. A result are varieties adapted to wider climatic and soil conditions. Hybrid corn is still one of the greatest genetic developments in plant science. The principles have been extended with great results to poultry and livestock. At one time the majority of parent lines used in commercial corn hybrids were developed by public research, but most of this has been taken over by commercial organizations that produce and sell the seed. Public plant research concentrates more on disease and insect resistance, tolerance to herbicides and environmental factors, such as salt and acidity factors. Increasing efforts also go to improving nutritional values of crop plants.

Soybean research at Minnesota has



Early agricultural implements still used in many parts of the world today. (A snath is the handle of the scythe.) Sketch by Edward J. Lettermann for Farming in Early Minnesota.

been significant with the development of outstanding varieties well adapted to the region. More than fifty chrysanthemum varieties have been developed. Animal and poultry research in genetics, nutrition, and management have been critical to efficient livestock production. In addition to field locations, a great deal of research is done in the barns, greenhouses (growth structures), and laboratories in most of the academic buildings on the St. Paul campus. Some of these facilities are visible from the nearby Gibbs Farm Museum.

An important dimension of the research program is the education and training of scientists for public and private research organizations. Many of the studies also provide unbiased evaluation of products and practices offered to farmers every day.

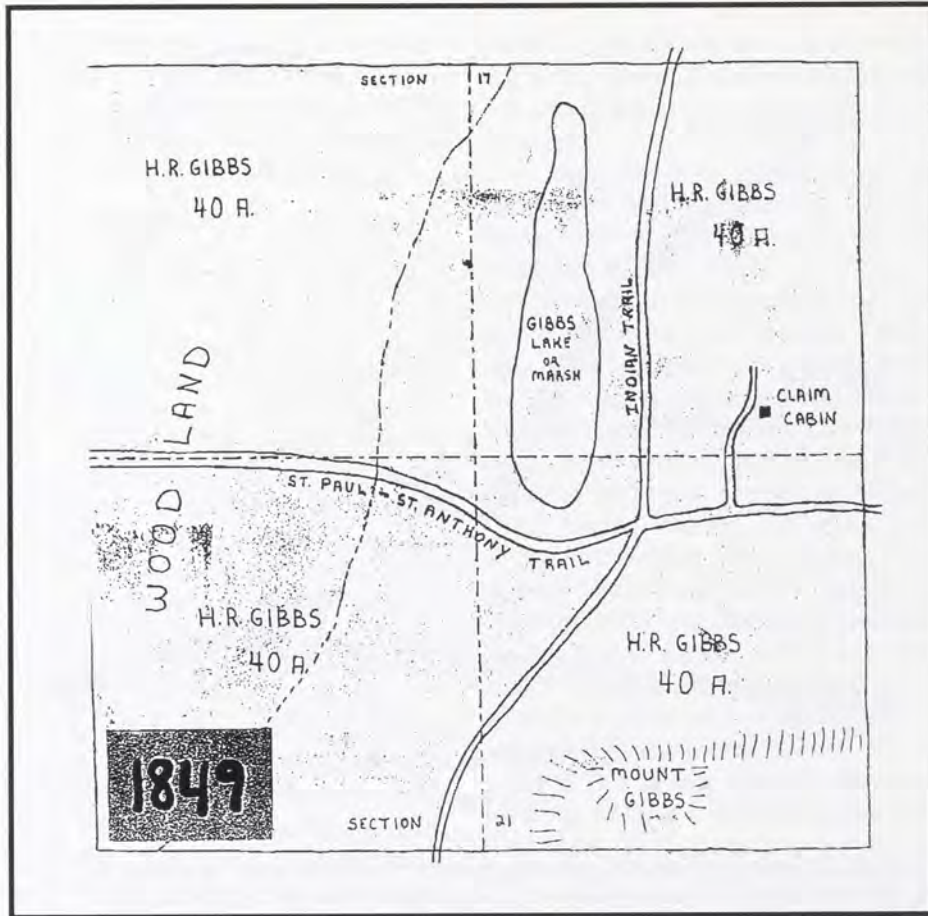
It is my hope that readers will better understand how much this open land adjacent to the Gibbs Farm Museum has contributed to Minnesota, the country and the world.

William F. Hueg, Jr. is an emeritus professor, Agronomy and Plant Genetics, at the University of Minnesota. He retired as Deputy Vice President for Agriculture, and Dean of the Institute of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics in 1984. In June 1998 he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences at the University of Minnesota. He and his wife Hella have owned Rolling Hills Farm at Hammond, Wisconsin, a pure-bred Holstein herd and crop farm, since 1983. They live in Mendota Heights.

William F. Hueg, Jr., had a long association with the Ramsey County Historical Society and its Gibbs Farm Museum during the years he was director of the University of Minnesota's Agricultural Extension Service.

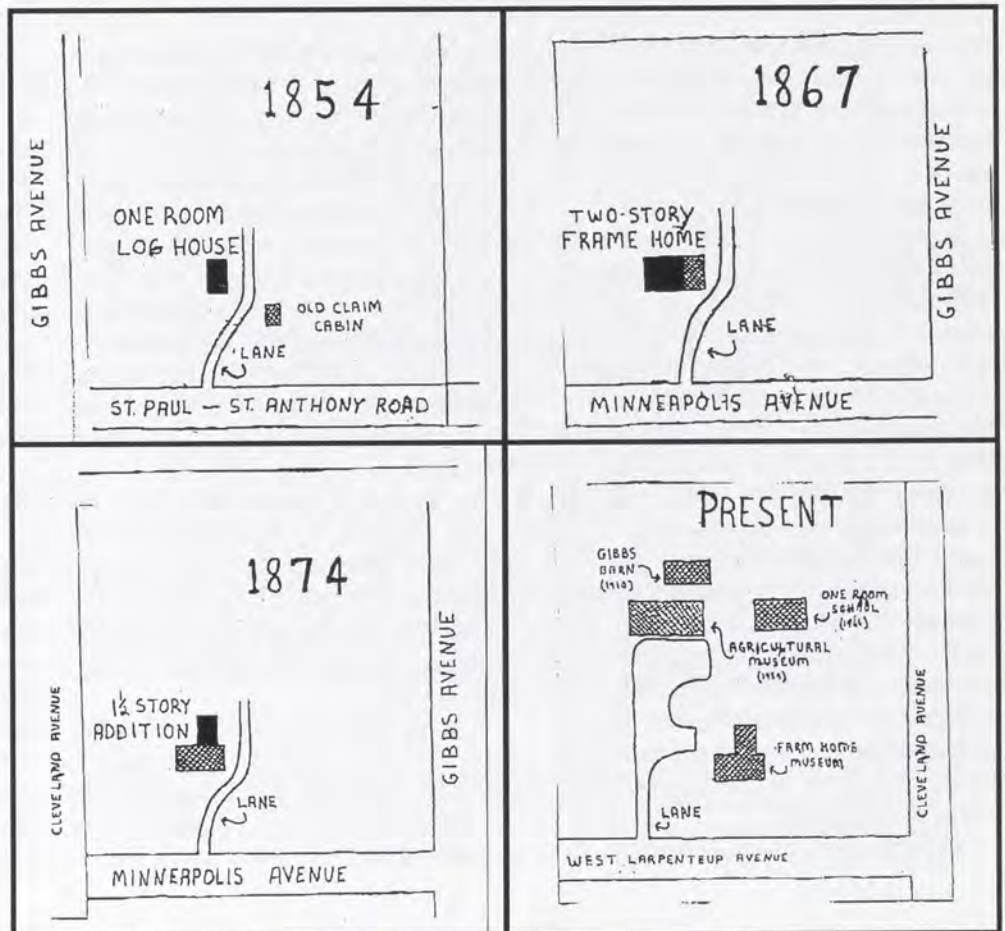
(See the following page for maps showing the evolution of the Gibbs farm.)

The Land Heman Gibbs Acquired in 1849 and How It Changed



These maps drawn in the 1960s by Edward J. Lettermann for an exhibit at the Gibbs Farm Museum reveal the changes in the Gibbs farm home in more than a century. The marsh and the woodland have long since been overtaken by housing and the University Golf Course, and the "north forty" has shrunk to the seven acres now owned by the Ramsey County Historical Society. Mount Gibbs has disappeared. The St. Paul-St. Anthony Trail is now Larpenteur Avenue, but vestiges of the Indian Trail could be seen as recently as the 1960s.

Like many of Ramsey County's pioneer settlers, Jane and Heman Gibbs adapted their farm acres to the changing needs of their family. Gibbs sold some of his land and began to raise vegetables to sell in St. Paul. As his family grew, they abandoned the claim cabin for a one-room log house that, seven years later, became a two-story frame home. In 1874 Gibbs added onto the house. The map labeled "Present" was drawn around 1962 and shows the Gibbs home site as the museum it has become.





"Sioux Indians," an 1851 watercolor by Johann Baptist Wengler, Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum, Linz, Austria. Wengler painted this at a time of transition for the Dakota people. The dress of the man suggests a ceremonial costume and the lance probably was for parade use, but the women's dress reflects their gradual adoption of the clothing of the white community. Photo by F. Gangl and reproduced by permission of the museum. See article beginning on page 4

R.C.H.S.
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