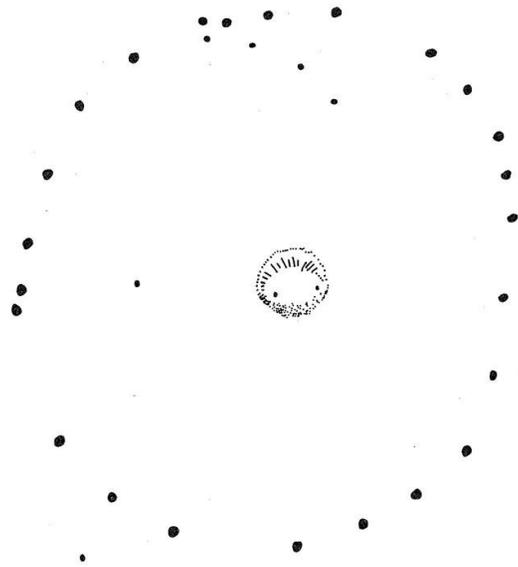
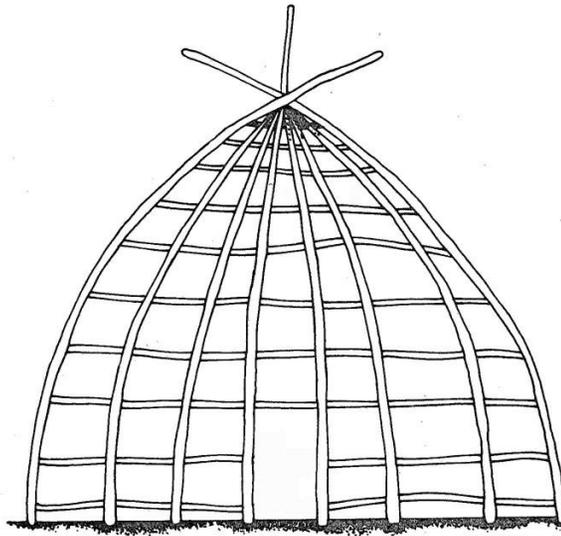


Wichita Grass House



Archeological Features



Pole Framework



Attaching Prairie Grass
to the Pole Framework

Graphic #2 label

Wichita Grass House Posthole Pattern

(For a picture and description of a Wichita grass house see Graphic #3.)

The construction of a Wichita grass house took place in two stages: preparation and construction.

Preparation – In preparation for building a grass house, the Wichita family selected a site and gathered the materials. Everyone helped collect the building materials – posts, poles, grasses, cordage, etc. – but women and children were responsible for most of the actual construction.

Construction – After choosing a site, the builders marked the dimensions of the house by laying a circle of stones on the ground. Following this pattern, poles were driven into the ground in a circle and their tops bent to form a cone-like top. Other poles were then lashed horizontally onto this cone to complete the frame. Starting at the bottom, the builders added layer after layer of bundled prairie grass, fastening them to the frame with more horizontal poles and cordage, a strong cord of rawhide or bark. Women worked in pairs to attach the grass bundles, passing a special tool made from a bison scapula or rib – a grassing needle – threaded with cordage, back and forth through the grass bundles and around the poles.

Archeological Features – Archeologists don't find grass houses, but they do find evidence of these structures that have burned. These are called features. The burned posts leave stains, and occasionally charcoal, in the postholes. Clay or mud that sometimes was used to plaster around the bases of grass houses was transformed into a low-fired ceramic material called daub by burning. Daub is durable and can be found on the ground surface of former village sites. Because grass houses continued to be constructed into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, written and photographic records of them exist.

Image source: *A Place to Call Home*, Archeology Department, Kansas State Historical Society

Puzzles from the Past: Problem Solving Through Archeology Traveling Resource Trunk, Kansas State Historical Society, 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, Kansas 66615-1099, 785-272-8681, kshs.education@ks.gov, www.kshs.org