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## Graphic #5 label

### Pottery Sherd Analysis

Pottery fragments are markers that help archeologists identify the human groups that inhabited archeological sites. So important is pottery to archeological interpretation that prehistoric time periods in Kansas are designated Pre-Ceramic, then Early, Middle, and Late Ceramic. Pottery was introduced in the Central Plains during the transition from the Pre-Ceramic to the Early Ceramic period, around A.D. 1. The four groups of sherds in the photograph were assembled from the collection of the Kansas State Historical Society. From an analysis of these collections, archeologists would conclude that they represent at least four completely distinct groups of people living at different times over a period of almost 2,000 years.

The observations and measurements that archeologists make when processing and analyzing pottery collections are used in classifying the collections. Some of the questions they ask are: Was the sherd once part of a jar, a jug, or a bowl? Was it made locally from available materials or did it come from somewhere else? What did the patterned lines and other decorations mean? Was the maker experimenting or following a cultural tradition? Is the sherd similar to pottery produced at other sites? How was the original container used? Did its use change over time? How did the vessel break?

In classifying these sherds archeologists considered the clay and temper (particles added to hold the clay together) used, the size and shape of the vessel, the skill exhibited in the construction of the pottery, and the type and placement of decoration.

Group 1 (the oldest) represents the Early Ceramic period (A.D. 1-1000). This pottery is tempered with calcite. The vessels are thick, wide-mouthed jars with conical bases; straight, unthickened rims; and flat, undecorated lips. Exterior surfaces are cordmarked but undecorated. The craftspeople who made these pots were the least skilled of all four groups of crafts people represented by these four groups of sherds.

Group 2 represents the Middle Ceramic period (A.D. 1000-1500). This pottery is tempered with coarse sand or grog (broken sherds). Vessels are globular with cordmarked or smoothed exterior surfaces. One variety has collared rims with parallel or oblique incised lines, mostly on the collar. Another variety has straight or curved rims with diagonal tool impressions on the lip. Decoration is rare, being limited to indentations on handles and diagonal incising on lips.

Group 3 represents the Late Ceramic period (A.D. 1500-1800). This pottery is shell or grit tempered. Vessel forms include bowls and tall jars with loop handles, high flaring or straight rims, flat bottoms, and smooth surfaces.

Group 4 (the most recent) represents the period after A.D. 1800. It is granite or sand tempered. Some vessels are globular jars with high collars, decorated with lines cut into the clay surface.