

Oral Tradition:



Illustration of a person's mouth with a toothpick inserted.



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Illustration of a person's mouth with a toothpick inserted.



Toothpick Use

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Portrait of a man in a military uniform.



Portrait of a man in a military uniform.

Little is written about the personal hygiene practices of 19th century fur traders. Even less is known about individual dental care, which is generally assumed to have been neglected because of a scarcity of professionally trained dentists and manufactured dental hygiene implements until the late 1800s. In this paper, bone artifacts, thought to represent at least three different types of toothpicks, are examined. They include two channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) spines, two bone trade comb teeth, and four modified fragments of cortical bone of unknown faunal origin, all excavated from Fort Pierre Chouteau (39ST237), a Missouri River fur trading post occupied from 1832 to 1856. This work was conducted under the direction of Mike Fosha of the State Archaeological Research Center and the South Dakota State Historical Society. The artifacts are being analyzed at the University of South Dakotan Historical Archaeology Lab. These eight bone objects are thought to have been fashioned by occupants of the fort as expedient tooth-cleaning instruments. This interpretation is based on physical appearance and archaeological context. Discussion focuses on the great antiquity of human toothpick use, as well as divergent views regarding its social propriety and effectiveness of tooth picking for dental health during the 19th century.



Portrait of a woman in a military uniform.



Portrait of a woman in a military uniform.

Chouteau



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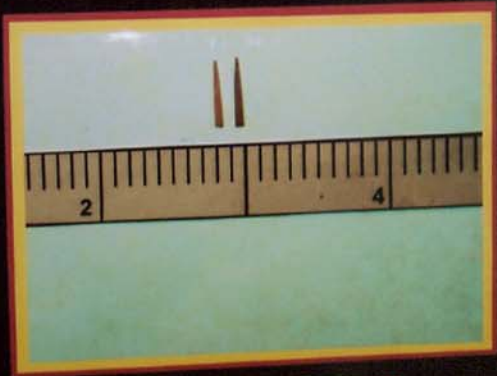


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Modified bone comb teeth (pointed at end)
compared to intact bone comb teeth
(square at end)



Modified bone comb teeth



Improved cortical bone toothpicks





Pierre Chouteau Jr.



General William S. Harney, he commanded a punitive expedition against the Lakota from Fort Pierre, 1855-1856.



Portrait of Indian Chief, Tobacco, painted at Fort Pierre Choteau



Sand Bar, wife of fur trader Francis Chardon painted at Fort Pierre Choteau



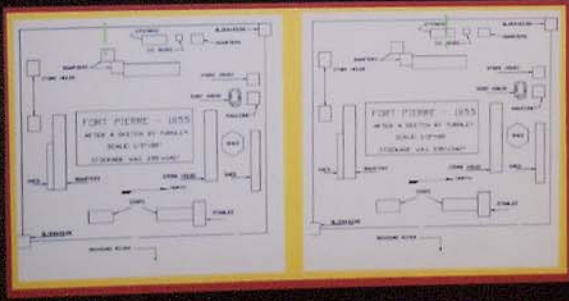
Modified dorsal catfish spine



Modified pectoral catfish spine



Modified pectoral spine (above)
And Unmodified spine (below)



19th century "footprint" drawings of Fort Pierre showing the location of artifacts.



Pictures of Fort Pierre Chouteau

