

ARIKARA UNITS OF MEASURE

While conducting ethnologic studies among Arikara in 1923, inquiry was made of some of the most intelligent older women in regard to the standards of measure of various kinds. The information was brought out that for such commodity as shelled corn, beans, sunflower seeds, split a dried tipsin roots (*Psoralea esculenta*), dried choke cherries, dried Juneberries, etc., the unit was the content of the standard size common work-basket or carrying-basket, called *satwa*. The measure content of the standard *satwa* was called *hunansadu*. In reckoning quantities of such commodities those named above they were measured in *hunansadu* and fractions of the *hunansadu*; larger quantities in multiples of the *hunansadu*.

Of dried meat the unit of measure was the package. A meat pack was the content of the parfleche packing case of the standard size of two cubits in length, one cubit in width, and one cubit deep. First, packs of dried meat made one horse-load. The length of the standard packing case was determined by the distance from shoulder to hip on a horse. In loading a horse two packs were hung at each side and one more was placed on the back, making five to the load.

Of measures of length it seems there were the span, the finger-joint, the handbreadth, the cube, the leg, the arm-reach, the double arm-reach, the ear-corn string, and the pace. The span was the measure from the tip of the extended thumb to the tip of the middle finger. The finger-joint was the measure of the first finger-joint bent over in addition to the span, as in measuring for a moccasin; or for some other purposes there might be required an addition of two finger-joints, or of all three, added to the span. Thus the span was first measured off, and in addition successively, the first, second, and third joints of the middle finger bent over to the knuckle. The handbreadth was the measure from the knuckle of the index finger to the knuckle of the little finger. The leg was the measure from the heel to the bend of the knee along the outer side of the leg. The arm-reach was measured from the middle of the chest, the middle of the sternum bone along the extended arm to the tip of the middle finger. The double arm-reach was the distance from the tip of one middle finger to the tip of the other middle finger along the extended arms and across the chest. The double arm-reach was the standard length of a string of dried squash.

The ear-corn string was the distance from the waist down to the foot and under the sole and back to the waist. This was the standard of measure of ear-corn braided in strings. The measure was determined at the time of the husking by the husker as she sat at the corn-pile. She turned back the husks from the corn, but did not detach them from the ear. The ears were braided together in a string by the attached husks. When the husker supposed she had made a string of about the proper length, she took the two ends of the corn-string in her hands, and, sitting at her work, she put her foot against the back of the braided string at the middle and stretched out the string of ears. When it was found to be just the length to stretch under the sole of the foot and back again to the waist, it was finished. This also served to test and make the braid firm. And it was found by experience that this measure was the most convenient length of string and weight of corn which a woman could handle in hanging the strings upon the drying rack or in carrying to or from final storage.