

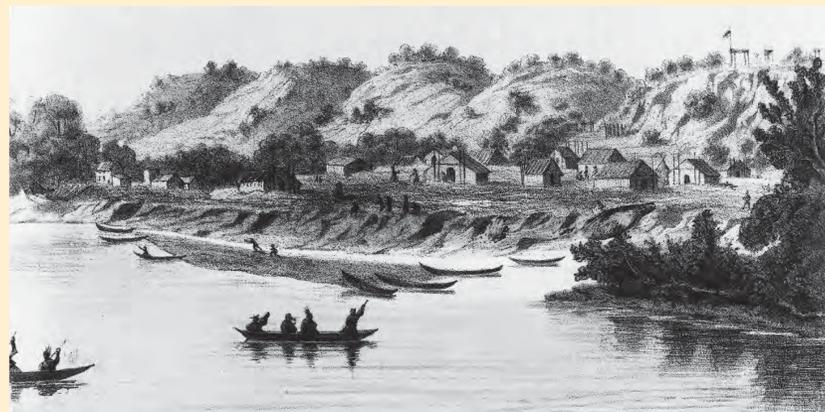
# Kaposia: Dakota Village on the Mississippi River



Up to 400 Mdewakanton Dakota Indians lived in the seasonal village of Kaposia during the early 1800's. Also known as Little Crow's village, it was situated on the banks of the Mississippi River in the vicinity of present-day St. Paul. To Kaposia's residents, the river and its surrounding land held both practical and spiritual importance.

## Kaposia

Kaposia was first located on the east bank of the Mississippi River on a low terrace below the bluff. It was established after 1750 by a group of Mdewakanton Dakota whose succession of chiefs were each known as Little Crow. The name Kaposia is said to refer to the "light ones" living there who traveled swiftly and often. The village was relocated to the west side of the river as the result of the Treaty of 1837.



Lithograph above: "Little Crow's Village," about 1848. Artist: Henry Lewis, from *Das Illustrierte Mississippthal*, courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.



Watercolor drawing above: "Dacotah Village," by Seth Eastman. While often identified as depicting Kaposia, the actual village portrayed is uncertain. Courtesy W. Duncan MacMillan.

## Village Life Along "Haha Wakpa"

The Mississippi River, known as "Haha Wakpa" (river of the falls) to the Dakota, provided Kaposia residents with water for drinking and bathing, plant and animal foods, rich soil for gardens, and a "highway" for transportation. Bottomland gardens provided corn, beans, tomatoes, squashes and melons, while the river itself provided fish, muskrat and beaver. The river transportation system connected these "big canoe people" and their sources of sustenance.

The Mdewakantons resided in Kaposia mainly during the warmer months of the year, and village life responded to the seasons. The breakup of ice and running of sap marked the return to the village in spring, when sugar-making parties were formed. Hunting parties sought game such as rabbits, fowl, deer, and buffalo. Seeds, roots, berries and other plants were collected in season, the most important being wild rice. Foods were dried for preservation. Dancing, music and games such as the challenging sport of lacrosse were regular parts of life. The "corn feast dance" celebrated the fall harvest. After the first hard frost the band would separate into smaller groups of one to four families, with most seeking out sheltered creek valleys for the winter.



Photo at right: Taoyateduta, known also as Little Crow, led the Kaposia band during a time of increasing contact with European immigrants and enormous changes for Dakota people. He was photographed by Julian Vannerson and Samuel Cohner in 1858 in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institute.

## Summer Lodges

About a dozen permanent bark houses provided summer shelter at Kaposia. These structures were built of a frame that may have been white pine or elm, and covered with elm bark. While of various sizes, most dwellings could house more than two dozen people. Outside the entrances large platforms were constructed for food drying, storage, and sleeping on hot summer nights. Inside, platforms covered by skins or rush mats were used for sitting and sleeping. Mobile tipis covered with buffalo hides were also used as shelters at Kaposia.

## What Became of Kaposia?

The Treaty of Mendota required the Kaposia Mdewakantons to move from the Mississippi River to reservation land along the Minnesota River, which they did in the spring of 1854. Kaposia descendants are now found principally at Santee, NE, Flandreau, SD, Shakopee, MN, and Prairie Island, MN, and include dispersed Wahpekute Dakota.



Locations of Kaposia along Mississippi River

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