

Few remains returned, reburied

by Warren Jarvis
for the Tundra Times

The bones lie patiently in their designated containers, the artifacts once laid to earth with them also catalogued and tagged. Those that have escaped the musty dark of storage have not, however, escaped the curiosity of Western man and are scat-

tered throughout Nebraska's museum and university system.

Six months after the Nebraska Legislature passed a precedent-setting law requiring the return or reburial of human remains and burial goods, few of the remains have actually been returned.

The Nebraska State Historical

How it started. . .
—Page Twelve

Society possesses the majority of remains needing return or reburial under the new law, and of these most are
continued on page twelve

• Law sets precedent

continued from Page One

claimed by the Pawnee. The Historical Society estimates the total number of artifacts covered by the law at about 300 sets of remains and 3,000-4,000 burial objects.

Of these thousands, none has been returned to tribes or the earth, and some people are not at all happy about it. The new law sets a June 1990 deadline for an inventory of items being claimed.

"We've gotten no cooperation at all from the Nebraska State Historical Society, period," said Robert Perego, an attorney for the Pawnee tribe. Perego said the Historical Society has "dragged its feet" and is delaying putting the law into effect as long as possible. Officials of the society are doing this, Perego said, by making access to Historical Society records difficult and denying any meetings with Pawnee representatives.

Jim Hanson, the director of the Historical Society, disagrees.

"The society has a year to inventory, and in June 1990 we're required to provide that inventory to the Pawnee," Hanson said, adding that

while he didn't want to "get into an argument with a lawyer" about the speed of the society's progress, the society would meet the June deadline set by the law.

Hanson said that while Nebraska is providing some funds for the transfer of remains, the society's main thrust at the moment is to photograph and sketch the artifacts rather than commit all of the organization's resources to inventory and classification.

The law states that any remains and burial goods which are claimed by, or can be archeologically associated with, a tribe must be inventoried by June 1990 and returned no later than September 1990.

The law also provides for unclaimed remains to be reburied at the expense of the county where they were found. Remains found in the future will be identified by the Nebraska State Historical Society, returned if claimed by a tribe, and reinterred at county expense if unclaimed.

If the remains found in the future are determined to have special scientific value, they may be studied for one year before returned or reburied.