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## PREHISTORIC INDIAN MOUNDS OF CENTRAL EASTERN ILLINOIS

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This report records findings made in a survey of the evidence of man's previous occupancy of central eastern Illinois. The survey was made during 1939, 1941, and 1942.

Piatt, Champaign, Vermilion, Douglas, and Coles counties have a combined area of 3,357 square miles, all are occupied in part by glacial moraines, and all have many streams. Large streams in the general area are the Wabash to the east, the Sangamon to the west, the Kaskaskia, the Embarrass, Salt Fork, Middle Fork, and Little Vermilion—all streams that would have supplied clear water, transportation, and food. These counties comprised part of the Illinois prairies, surrounded by the heavy timber that naturally followed the water courses. Even after the white men came, the prairies were well stocked with game, and must have offered similar attractive living conditions to primitive peoples.

A survey of prehistoric Indian mounds in the area was started in 1939. These five counties still contain more than 160

man-made mounds and hundreds of camp sites. Many house rings still reveal the sites of permanent houses, and many of the camp sites still contain artifacts—I have picked up as many as 30 arrowheads from one site. Many stones that show intense heating were probably used in the cooking of food. Pottery of both grit- and shell-temper is to be found on some of the larger sites that were occupied longer. Polished ornaments, grooved axes, celts, knives, and drills all give us some knowledge of how these early people must have lived.

### VERMILION COUNTY

Vermilion County was occupied by Indians when the first white settlers came. Their Piankishaw settlement on the present site of Danville was larger than the present city. But evidence of still more ancient occupation is found in the mounds. On the land now owned by J. S. Seyfert, Blount Township, on the Middle Fork, stand two mounds on the east side of the river. On a high bluff overlooking

a wide expanse of lowland is one of the largest as well as one of the smallest of any of the mounds examined. The largest is 70 feet long, 50 feet wide, and fully 10 feet high. Just 60 yards to the north is the smallest, not more than 12 feet across and 2 feet high. This land has never been cultivated, and the source of the material used in building the mounds is evident in nearby depressions. Neither mound has been explored, and on the larger stands an oak tree some 18 inches in diameter. Not more than half a mile to the southeast on land owned by Harry Henthorn of Veedersburg, Indiana, on the east side of the same river, rises a rather high ridge of gravel. Workmen removing gravel about 40 yards up the slope uncovered 16 pits, 3 feet across and 4-5 feet deep, sunk in four rows, four pits to the row. Each contained a flexed skeleton in a sitting position. The only artifacts found were flint arrowheads in an oval pottery bowl, discovered by accidentally breaking the bowl. This information was given me by Mr. Henthorn shortly after the discovery. This rise in land is the shore of what was once quite a large lake. Three more mounds lie just across the river to the west but as yet they have not been examined. South and east on the bluff of this same lake bed are many mounds all of which were explored many years ago. Many artifacts of beautiful workmanship have been uncovered in this district in late years. In all, Vermilion County has more than 40 mounds which are still in good repair.

#### CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

The land in Champaign County is more level but there is still evidence that man was here many years ago. In sec. 36, Newcomb Township, near a bend of Sangamon River, are five mounds, some say more, in what is known as Brownfield Woods. These were all excavated some years ago and there is little information as to the contents. Just over the township line in Mahomet Township, sec. 1, are three more mounds located on a small creek which flows into the Sangamon. They are locally known as the Nancy Mounds. Several burials were uncovered in taking gravel, but they were not recorded. The central mound, located on a prominent point of ground almost sur-

rounded by this small stream, was excavated by the Champaign County Archaeology Society in May and June of 1939. This mound, oval in shape, is approximately 36 feet wide and 40 feet long with a depth of 5 feet to subsoil. The excavation is interesting because it disclosed three types of burials—flexed, cremated, and extended—and yielded notched, stemmed, and triangular arrow-points, polished slate, and an extensive fire-pit. Six skeletons were found at different levels. There are many large camp sites within a short distance of these mounds, and other mounds are to be found within a radius of a few miles. Additional camp sites are to be found along the streams throughout the county. There was another mound at the extreme south, just north of the county line on Fourmile Creek, but it was dug and has been cultivated for many years and is almost level. It is reported that a large flat stone covered this burial. Champaign County has 25 mounds that remain visible.

#### PIATT COUNTY

In Piatt County along Sangamon River are 37 mounds, located singly, in twos, and in groups. The Clark Mounds north of Monticello number 21, although at least one more has been destroyed. These have been pitted, but they are so large that little damage has been done. On the Allerton estate near what is known as Hog Shut bridge is another group on the east side of the river; it contains nine oval mounds and one elongated mound some 15 feet wide by 60 feet long. Blue Ridge Township has two, and near Atwood a group has been reported but not yet checked.

#### DOUGLAS COUNTY

Localities along the Kaskaskia and the Embarrass and in Douglas County reveal 42 mounds, literally hundreds of camp sites, a group of house rings, and Indian legends of buried gold. South of Parkville in Douglas County, across Fourmile Creek and within 700 yards of the mound site in Champaign County, is an elongated oval mound some 50 feet long, 25 feet wide, and about 4 feet high. This mound has been pitted. The owner still has hopes of riches so we neither dug

nor measured. On the Miller farm south and west is a group of eight mounds on the west side of Kaskaskia River. One was trenched throughout the length and width but showed nothing but small pieces of charcoal, pot sherds, and one small notched base arrow. No work was done on the remaining mounds.

North of Ficklin at the Kaskaskia school are a number of house rings, and many artifacts have been found in this location. Still farther north is a rather large horseshoe-shaped mound. Several mounds are reported near Chesterville. Near Villa Grove High School, on the banks of the Embarrass, are three large mounds. One has been partly dug, but the other two are still as the builders left them, for the land is in pasture and to all knowledge has never been plowed. Three miles south of Villa Grove, as the river crosses the highway, to the south and east lies a group of four mounds, two of which show pitting but not much damage.

At Camargo to the south are the mounds known as the Camargo group. They are five in number and this group was chosen for excavation by the Champaign County Society. The mounds are laid out almost northeast by southwest. Mound number one lies near the edge of the bluff and the river and was opened in the fall of 1939 and spring of 1940. It measures 58 feet east-west and 43 feet north-south with a depth of 38 inches to subsoil. One complete skeleton, two skulls, and three bundle burials were found. With the extended skeleton at a depth of 37 inches was a platform pipe of very soft material and a sharply pointed four-sided copper awl  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches long. Slightly above the two skulls at depths of 18 and 22 inches was found the two halves of a slate gorget which matched perfectly. It contained four drillings on one half and three on the other. The bundle burials consisted of the large bones of the arms and legs. All were in quite solid condition and outlines could be followed easily. Other artifacts were boiling stones, pot sherds, and three small arrows. Two areas show where extensive fires had been used, and

charcoal was found in small quantities throughout the excavation.

Mound number two, south and west of mound one, was excavated in 1938. It measured 65 feet east-west, 45 feet north-south. Ten feet from the north edge the first of five skeletons was found. They lay side by side within 10 feet, and two bundle burials took another four feet. The rest of the mound was unoccupied. The unusual shape of the mound suggests that the original mound and burials were made and that the rest was added later. With the skeletons were two copper axes, a large stone, elbow pipe, and a copper spear of ceremonial appearance.

Mound number three had been pitted by someone over-anxious while the society was absent, and all that could be determined was a layer of three or four inches of charcoal above the burial place. A few particles of bones and a small black flint notched arrow was found in the dirt that had been removed.

Mound number four was trenched. At a depth of 18 inches lay a layer of charcoal below which we encountered one of the most unusual of all finds—7 inches of almost solid ash, containing human bones that were too soft to excavate so that only diameters and lengths could be measured. The deposit extended 11 feet north and south and continued beyond the length of the trench, which was 15 feet east-west. No artifacts were found.

Mound number five of this group showed no remains whatever.

Several more mounds are to be found on the Embarrass to the south.

#### COLES COUNTY

In Coles County nineteen mounds have been located and probably many more will be found when work can be resumed.

In conclusion of this report, the writer has reached the belief that the majority of facts found in this survey points to the existence of two ancient cultures, separated by a lapse of time, in central eastern Illinois.