

LATE WOODLAND OCCUPATIONS OF THE FISHER SITE, WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

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The Fisher Site is situated on the south bank of the Des Plaines River about a mile upstream from where it joins the Kankakee to form the Illinois River. The site originally consisted of twelve burial mounds and a series of probable house pits. Throughout the site there occur burials which show no cultural affiliations, and therefore are not considered in the study.

In 1906 George Langford began his diggings at this site and found it to be of sufficient importance to be of interest to midwestern archaeologists. His work on the site continued intermittently until 1929. He subsequently gave his materials and notes to the University of Chicago, where they have formed the basis of further research and study of the Fisher Site.

In the two larger mounds Langford found definite evidences of stratigraphy. Each mound was divided into three levels, the upper, the middle, and the lower. The upper and middle levels were each separated from the one beneath by a dark seam, which he interpreted to be old ground surfaces. The depth of burial was not significant, but the relative age could be determined by tracing the burial fill to one of the three

levels, and determining if either or both of the black seams had been pierced.

In the lower level Langford found burials without artifacts. He subdivided this level into two parts, on the basis of burial type and fill. Some were carefully flexed burials lying on the left side with grave fill indistinguishable from the surrounding gravel. This fact led him to call them "concealed burials." The other burials in the lower level were "sprawling" in position, lacking orientation or any semblance of planned arrangement. In these the grave fill was very slightly discolored by black soil, and he called them "semi-concealed." In all cases where the "concealed" and the "semi-concealed" burials were found in close association with each other, the former were always beneath.

In the middle level Langford found extended burials with grave goods. Although much of the material is very similar, he was able to separate them into two groups on the basis of pottery differences. One group is marked by a decorated shell-tempered pottery, whereas the other group is marked by a less elaborate grit-tempered pottery decorated with many of the same motifs found on the shell-tempered ware.

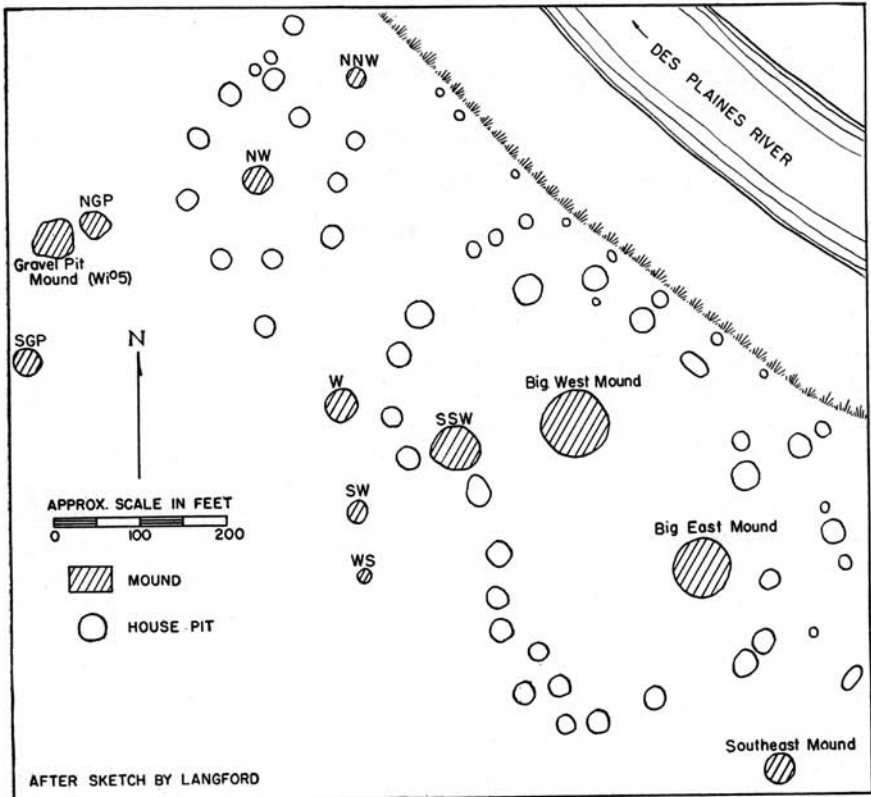


FIG. I.—Relative locations of features of the Fisher Site.

The problems of the upper level are based, for the most part, on the inability of the excavators to ascertain the stratigraphy within this level. The burials are found in many positions, some with and some without artifacts. Langford distinguishes three different cultural horizons within this level. One is marked by a grit-tempered unornamented pottery, quite similar to the grit-tempered ware of the middle level. The second is a Late Woodland horizon marked by stray sherds and stemmed projectile points that are apparently present in the fill, rather than associated with the burials. The third

is an Historic horizon which has no pottery, and is marked by trade materials of European origin, and in some cases, flint projectile points and shell beads of Indian manufacture.

Langford arbitrarily typed the materials from all of the other mounds and the pits on the Fisher Site, using as his pattern the stratigraphy and typology which he found in the two big mounds, as described above. His Gravel Pit Mounds, where he found a concentration of what he called Late Woodland, and his Southeast Mound where he found a concentration of the Historic, were dated as the last occupations of the

site, since they showed similarities to two horizons of the upper level of the large mounds.

In 1946 John W. Griffin studied Langford's material and notes and selected for consideration two types of pottery, one with shell temper and one with grit temper, both with clearly defined Upper Mississippi affiliations. These he subjected to further intensive study and found that they fell into three periods. *Period A* included the decorated shell-tempered ware, *Period B* included the decorated grit-tempered ware, and *Period C* included the undecorated grit-tempered ware. He considered this to be their chronological sequence, which was also Langford's conclusion on the Upper Mississippi material. The complete findings of Griffin's study are found in his master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1946.

In 1940 a joint expedition of the Illinois State Museum, the University of Chicago, and the W.P.A. entered the field under the direction of Gretchen Cutter Sharp. This expedition was particularly interested in the relationships of Late Woodland and Historic materials to the other manifestations on the site. So far the results have been published in only one article (Deuel, 1940). The present paper is concerned with a more intensive study of the same problem.

The Late Woodland manifestation on the Fisher Site is identified with pottery having the following characteristics: Grit temper, cord marking, reddish paste, jar form with rounded bottom, and ranging from low to hard firing. It occurs with and without a collar, with and

without castellations, with and without a definite shoulder, and with and without notched lips. Lip notching was done with either plain or cord wrapped stick. Most examples have round mouths, but some occur with angular openings. The thickness ranges from 3.2 mm to 8.3 mm. No lugs, handles, or other appendages have been found. Decoration seems to be limited to punctates in parallel lines between the neck and shoulder. Langford reports two examples of parallel single cord impressions, but these sherds are not available for study.

In the current study, the sherds found in the Gravel Pit Mound Wi^o5 were analyzed and the Late Woodland pottery arbitrarily divided into six classes.

CLASS I

One reconstructed pot and several sherds are characterized by low firing, angular mouth, flaring rim (slightly thickened below the lip to give the effect of a collar), the general lack of a defined shoulder, and a relatively small size.

CLASS II

One reconstructed pot and several sherds have vertical rims, thickened below the lip to form a collar. This thickening is apparently due to a folding of the rim. It has a clearly defined shoulder and a characteristic change in direction of paddling at the shoulder. Above the shoulder the paddling is vertical, and below it it is diagonal. These pots are generally larger in size than Class I.

CLASS III

The sherds in this group indicate pots small in size, with thin walls,

and without collars. There is considerable variety in all other characteristics.

CLASS IV

One large sherd is separated into this group by its similarity to Tampico pottery in its rim and shoulder form, and it is smaller in size than Class I and Class II.

CLASSES V AND VI

These two classes show variations in decorative treatment. Class V sherds have parallel lines of punctates on the shoulder, while Class VI sherds have horizontal lines of single cord impressions.

There were 415 Woodland sherds found in Wi⁵. Because of the great homogeneity of the Woodland body sherds, and their close resemblance to the body sherds of the Langford Corded (*Period B*), this classification is based upon the variations found in the rim and shoulder treatment of 73 rimsherds, 51 from Wi⁵, and 22 from the Village Area. These six classes constitute the pottery of the Des Plaines Complex, which is a variant of the Tampico Phase.

There are two evidences on the site that this Late Woodland pottery may be present at an earlier time than has heretofore been suspected. Langford indicated in a cross section that the upper level of the larger mounds was a grey-brown earth, but that the middle level was a brown earth. The stratigraphy of Wi⁵ is apparently similar to that of the two larger mounds—upper and middle levels divided by a black seam. Examples of the Late Woodland pottery have been found definitely beneath the black seam in Wi⁵, in a brown earth

stratum. In a test trench pit, both types of soil were present, but the Woodland sherds were in the brown earth which lay at the bottom of the pit. This would seem to indicate contemporaneous existence with Langford's middle level, based on the similarity of the soil.

Another indication of a probable earlier time level for this Late Woodland pottery is burial East Mound 21. This burial is in the big East Mound, and had associated with it a pot similar to those of Class III. Langford describes this burial as follows: "This excavation gave a fine wall section showing the black seam undisturbed three feet below the mound surface. One and one-half feet below that was a thin dark seam over a five inch ash and dirt layer, and then another seam. The grave had been dug through the ash layer and the lower seam, but the upper seam was intact." This places it definitely in the middle, or brown earth stratum of the big East Mound, and indicates the coexistence of this Late Woodland type pottery with John Griffin's *Period A* pottery (shell-tempered Upper Mississippi) and his *Period B* pottery (decorated grit-tempered Upper Mississippi) because they all occur in the same soil stratum.

The major portion of the Late Woodland pottery found on the site is found in Wi⁵. It seems to appear as mound fill, and is not associated with the burials in the mound. One pot, which has been reconstructed, was found scattered over an area fifteen feet by twenty feet, and above and below the black seam, where it had evidently been carried by intrusive digging. Other sherds are

similarly scattered over a wide area, both horizontally and vertically. Any reconstruction usually contained pieces from more than one square and level. The fact that sherds are found in the fill closely associated with undisturbed burials indicated that this pottery antedates the burials, and probably the mound itself.

Associated with the burials in this mound are artifacts, including bone harpoon points, and other bone and stone objects, whose cultural affiliation is at present unknown but they show similarities to Owasco.

Let us now consider the cultural affiliations, in the Illinois area, of the Late Woodland pottery at this site. Collared pottery with an angular mouth similar to Class I is found at the Corbin Site, at the Salt Well Site, at the Old Hotel Plaza Site, all in the Starved Rock area. Ethel Schoenbeck has reported a sherd similar to this type from the Clear Lake Site in Tazewell County (Schoenbeck, 1946, p. 389) and Barrett also reports them as present in the Azatlan material in Wisconsin (Barrett, 1933, pp. 319-20).

The pottery with the round mouth and vertical rim (Class III) is similar to that found in the Gooden Mound in Fulton County (Cole and Deuel, 1937, p. 116), at the Mills Village Site in Joe Daviess County (Bennett, 1945, plate 30), and in the Azatlan material from Wisconsin (Barrett, 1933, pp. 308-10). Similar materials found at the Boulder Site in Clinton County are classed by Elaine Bluhm as belonging to the Dillinger Focus (Bluhm, 1948).

In summary we may say that the Late Woodland manifestation at the Fisher Site seems to be a post-Hope-

wellian development. The Late Woodland of this particular type has to date been found only in the Illinois Area. It has definite relationships to both the Dillinger Focus and the Maples Mills Focus. The pottery shows a definite influence from the Monks Mound Aspect of the Middle Mississippi Phase. It has in turn influenced the Langford pottery, where its peculiar styles of grit tempering, cord marking, folded rim, and lip notching may be traced as survivals.

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