

Archaeology of Western Kentucky

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Wickliffe, Kentucky

That portion of Kentucky called the western part is more often called the "Purchase", due to the fact that this territory was purchased by Jackson one hundred and eighteen years ago from the Chickasaw Indians for \$300,000, including eight counties in Kentucky and twenty counties in Tennessee. General Jackson reached an agreement with Chief Paduke, head of the Chicasaws and after whom the city of Paducah is named, in October, 1818, in the year 1819 January, the contract was ratified by Congress, the same year saw the Chickasaw Indians trek southward and the pioneers pushing into the new territory. The "Jackson Purchase" is completely surrounded on three sides by water, bounded on the east by the Tennessee River, on the west by the Mississippi, on the north by the Ohio River, and on the south by the State of Tennessee. Due to the fact that this entire district has such a great mileage of rivers within and bordering it, to use the words of Funkhouser and Webb, "It was Good Indian Country".

Many of the early reports of Collins and Rafinesque, also the reports of Miller and Weir, list a number of Indian sites in western Kentucky and a number investigated in McCracken and other parts of western Kentucky are well known. Clarence B. Moore reports for 1915-16, Philadelphia Academy of Natural Science, list much work done in actual excavations and also list other sites. It is evident from these reports that much progress has been made in the last few years in method, technique, and study of living conditions of the early groups. Moore in his report of finds in Arkansas states that in one mound they found about six hundred pieces of plain pottery, but did not wish to keep this material and most of it was given away. In studying reports of the early Archaeologists one is forced to come to the conclusion that most of the work was done to secure artifacts and the important part of the story was overlooked as being of very little interest. In recent years the artifacts have ceased to be paramount, the story in the soil is being searched out with the aid of various branches of science, botany, chemistry, zoology, geology and tree-ring study.

The work of Funkhouser and Webb of the University of Kentucky, at Tolu, Crittenden County, on the Ohio River, also work of excavating elsewhere in the state indicates great improvement over the earlier work. The work of Dr. Cole of the University of Chicago, just across the river from Paducah, in Illinois, is a model of method and perfection

from the standpoint of present knowledge and experience. The Kincaid site, where this is known, although in Illinois is showing from the two seasons of work much in common to the cultures in western Kentucky. Probably the best known mounds in the Mississippi Valley are those located at Wickliffe, Kentucky, due no doubt to the fact that the first excavation was unusual and also that the material is left in situ, likewise the great extent of the work done and yet to do. Each season work is carried on in a systematic way, excavating, all the year work is going on in research of some kind. This work is open to the public at all times and has had much to do with acquainting the great masses with Mississippi Valley Archaeology.

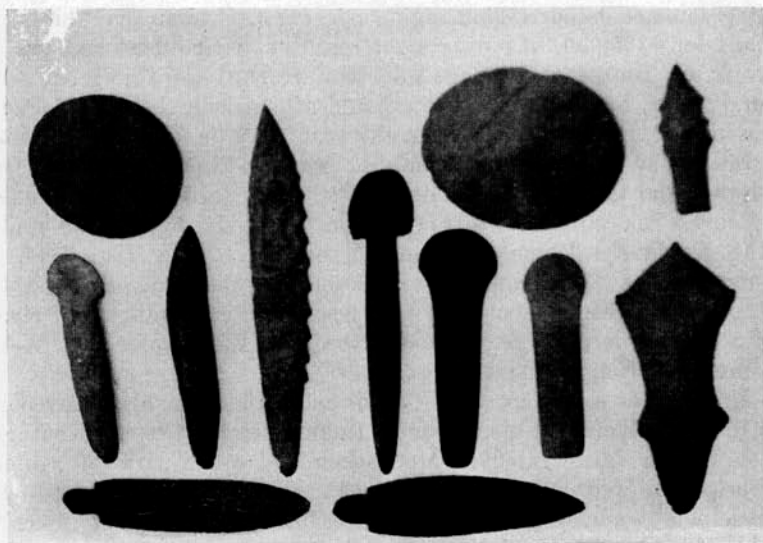


Fig. 1.—RARE AND UNUSUAL FLINT AND STONE CEREMONIALS.

Within the city limits of Wickliffe, on a high bluff over looking the meeting point of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers is the remains of what once was the most important center for trade, commerce and religion in this district. On this natural fortification, which commands both rivers, are located nine mounds and kitchen midden to the depth of several feet over more than twenty-five acres. Work has been in progress more than three years and it is estimated that it will take four or five years to complete this investigation.

At the present time we are working on Mound D which will be known as the infant burial mound as we have to date found fifty-two infants; four adults were found at higher levels and only one half of the mound has been uncovered to date. The universal five-foot square method is being used with floor plan showing location and material, and vertical cross-section showing the stratigraphy. This mound has differed

in that it is made of kitchen midden no doubt scraped from the surface near by, built in stages to a height of about seven feet and a length of 170 feet. The other three mounds excavated to date are composed of almost sterile soil, each basket load of earth showing but little bone or broken pottery. Sherds from one 15-foot cross-section of Mound D filled several very large boxes which were sent to Dr. Guthe, U. S. Repository for Broken Pottery, and an even larger amount from an other section was sent to the University of Chicago for study in Dr. Cole's work. Great quantities of bone material of animals and fish have been recovered.

This will enable us to give a very graphic picture of the kinds and amounts of food consumed over the period of the construction of this mound. The sherd count per foot is showing some very interesting facts for comparison.

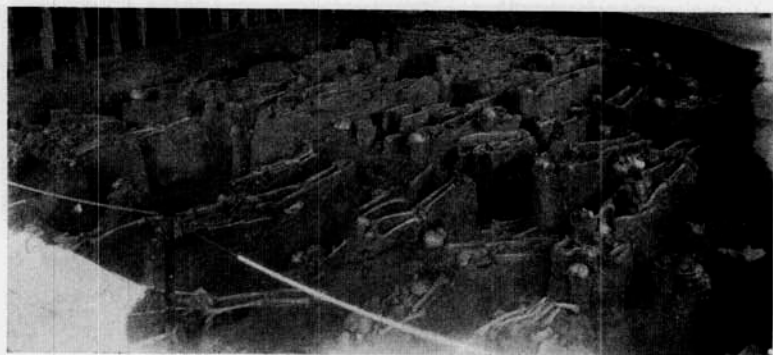


Fig. 2.—GROUP ADULT BURIAL WITH POTTERY, SHELL, AND OTHER ARTIFACTS.

Each mound opened to date has differed from the others. Mound A shows two burned buildings at two levels with dirt apparently thrown on the buildings while they were in the process of being burned after they had collapsed. Three altars, hard burned, connected, were uncovered in the upper building with offerings near by. The cane and charred material is well preserved. Tree-ring work was conducted by Dr. Hawley during one season but is not complete. This mound is called the Temple Mound because its contents are religious or ceremonial.

Mound B proved to be interesting as at the base we found the complete outline of a building indicated by post-molds, doorway, and loose earth just outside of the line of post-holes indicating a drainage ditch. Three circular fire places were located at the floor level, two of which were only four inches apart, and the third thirty inches away from the other two. Nine pieces of pottery, two bone turkey callers, and a bushel of very small undeveloped corn cobs that had been reduced to charcoal

were encountered in the first test. Very few artifacts were found elsewhere. This mound is called the Council House Mound as the building is twenty-one by twenty-five feet in size and would indicate a shaman's or Chief's building or a building where council was held.

Mound C has been excavated to one tenth of its contents from measurements and test holes. One hundred fifty-three burials with pottery, bone implements, copper ornaments, flake mica, lead and hematite fashioned into various shapes are in place as uncovered. Some very interesting burials were disclosed. One no doubt represented the leather worker, as with the burial were a number of bone implements of various sizes and types used for working leather. In an other place we found the pottery maker, for at the head of this female were six pottery trowels, a small piece of coal shaped to a fine edge, and a gravel also of the same general shape. In one group we have male, female, and a small infant, no doubt a family group. In another place is a twin burial, and in another an old woman who had lost all of her teeth prior to her death. In all a very interesting group of burials.