

## FIELD METHODS EMPLOYED IN MISSISSIPPI VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGY, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WORK IN ILLINOIS

BY

FAY-COOPER COLE

*University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois*

### ABSTRACT

This paper presented in a brief manner the methods used by the professional archaeologist in recovering the pre-history of the State.

The first step is to know just what has been done and what sites still remain for examination. The survey party arrives in a township and soon learns who among the local people are interested in Indian relics. Usually there are several and their collections are carefully studied, divided into types, and recorded. Such collectors are usually valuable assistants in locating and placing on the map all known Indian mounds, camp and village sites, quarries, and the like. Such a survey reveals the various cultures of the region, their location and extent, and indicates favorable sites for excavation.

If a mound is to be excavated, soil tests are made on all sides and it is then staked into five-foot squares. A long trench is then started on one side and the face of the mound is shaved away with light mattocks until a find is made. All skeletons, pots, and other materials are uncovered but are not disturbed until repairs are made, notes and pictures secured, and their exact position determined by planetable survey. In this manner it is possible to record any trace of stratification in the mound or other evidence of a sequence of cultures.

When a mound is to be tested to determine whether it is an artificial or a natural formation, a narrower trench may be started at the side. If evidences of human origin are encountered the trench may then be widened to include the whole structure. The use of pits and of post-hole testing are to be discouraged as both methods are apt to destroy valuable evidence, and have often failed to tell the true character of the site.

Much the same procedure is practiced in ancient house pits and even in village sites. In the latter, however, large squares are often selected and the earth is removed in six-inch levels. In general the methods outlined in the Guide Leaflet No. 93, published by the National Research Council, are recommended.

By such methods, it has been possible to carry the pre-history of Illinois back step by step for at least two thousand years and possibly for five thousand. At one site near Joliet, it has been demonstrated that at least three different Indian cultures are shown in the mounds and still another below them. On Illinois River three successive cultures have been established on the bluffs while it is shown that ancient peoples with long heads buried their dead in the sands centuries before a mound-building people placed their burial mounds above the same site.

Illinois is now known to be an exceedingly important state archaeologically; it has been long inhabited by Indian tribes of very different cultures, and it possesses some monuments of great interest. This story is now being recovered by the exact procedure of the scientist who seeks all the information a site may possess rather than the few trophies it may contain.