

Artifacts Typical to Winnebago County

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The Winnebago Indians belonged to the Dakota or Sioux nation. During the period of authentic history they wandered into southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois and Iowa. In 1812 the Winnebagos of Illinois occupied a section, of which this county of Winnebago formed a part. To the south were the Illinois tribes, and the disputed territory between the two shifted north and south as the fortunes of war favored the one or the other. In time the Winnebagos were driven well back within the present limits of Wisconsin and were subsequently regarded as a tribe of that state.¹



Mural of "The Winnebago," Logan Museum, Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin.

The Winnebagos have given a name to a lake, a fort, a village; and a county in Wisconsin and to a village, a township, and a county in Illinois. Among the most interesting features of the area occupied by the Winnebagos are the large number of earth mounds found. That these mounds were made by the Sioux there seems to be little doubt. The effigy mounds seem to have been the work of the Winnebagos exclusively. The three classes of mounds found in Winnebago County are conical, linear and effigy. Effigy mounds are peculiar to a portion of Wisconsin, and are bounded by geographic limits, outside of which they are seldom found. In Mound Park in Rockford is one of the most interesting effigies in Illinois. It is noteworthy on account of its great size and fine proportion and more so because it is the only one of its kind on lower Rock River. It is generally known as "Turtle Mound" but the resemblance to a headless alligator is more striking. The dimensions are: length 150 feet, width, between front legs 50 feet, width between hind legs 39 feet, length of tail 102 feet, height at highest point 6 feet.² The effigy mounds were not burial mounds.

¹"Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Winnebago County," Vol. 2, p. 631.

²"Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1877," p. 245.

It was customary for the Winnebagos to erect near the habitation of each clan an effigy of their clan animal.³ In other words these effigy mounds were, to all intents and purposes, property marks. The conical mounds were used for burial in most cases though some may have been the bases of lodges or lacrosse stations.

Mr. F. J. Osborn of the village of Winnebago has opened five mounds in which there were skeletal remains. In two of the burials they had been buried in a sitting position. Two other burials were bundle burials. The fifth was a full length burial and with the skeleton were found a stone pipe, copper bracelets, powdered hematite and a small piece of worked flint.

Some of the more important artifacts found on old Winnebago sites in Wisconsin are: implements and utensils made of stone, clay, shell, bone, wood, antler, turtle shell, and the claws of animals and birds. Few objects were made of stone. The most important of these was the stone axes.

Unfortunately we have no way of determining, even approximately, the age of artifacts of a pre-Columbian nature. The following survey of artifacts actually found in Winnebago County will represent some specimens of the Winnebago Indians as well as Sioux, Sacs and Foxes, Pottowatomies, Algonquian and perhaps other tribes of which we know little or nothing.

The author is indebted to Mr. F. J. Osborn and Mr. C. G. Scott of Winnebago and Mr. R. B. Gill of Rockford for their valuable information in regard to the surface and burial artifacts collected and recorded from Winnebago County and vicinity from as early as 1895 to the present time.

About 90 per cent of all artifacts found are arrow heads, 75 per cent of which are of the notched base type. The balance are stemmed or triangular. The workmanship ranges from very crude to very fine. Chipped flint spears are rarely over 6 inches in length.

The polished and pecked stone implements are about 95 per cent celts. They are of all sizes and shapes ranging from a few ounces to several pounds in weight. The other 5 per cent are the grooved axes, hammer stones, net sinkers, grooved mauls, gouges or chisels. Only one fluted ax has been found in this region and that in the next county south.

Pipes are not numerous but have been found of the following materials: quartzite, sandstone, slate, catlinitite and clay. They range in size from very small to large.

One bone spear has been found and is now in a museum in Massachusetts. Bone tubes and awls have also been found.

A few hematite plummets as well as a few stone discoidals have been found.

Of the ornaments the pendant is the most common.

Banner stones of slate and water worn pebbles are sometimes found. A few highly polished small truncated cones have been found.

The following foreign materials have been used in artifacts found in Winnebago County; copper, slate, brown calcedony, obsidian, hematite, agatized wood, Flint Ridge, Ohio flint, quartzite, catlinitite and soapstone. One slate celt has been found in Rockford.

A unique two headed bird stone of light colored mottled stone has been recently found as well as a frog effigy of the same material and from the same locality.

With the Indian Highways formed in Winnebago County by the Rock, the Pecatonica and Kishwaukee Rivers it has made a rather interesting country from an archeological viewpoint.

³ "37th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology," 1915-1916, p. 79.