

NOTES ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF JO DAVIESS COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

Jo Daviess County, the most northwesterly in Illinois, lies chiefly in the Driftless Area but to some extent in the glaciated region. The more rugged part of the county is within the driftless area and scarcely a square mile has relief under 100 feet and may exceed 650 feet. The valleys of the present and former streams of the region exhibit a dendritic or leaf-like arrangement with reference to the master-stream, the Mississippi.

The vestiges of the aboriginal occupation of the county have sporadically received the attention of recognized institutions since about 1869. The great number of the mounds and their frequent concentration in fair-sized groups on prominent topographic features resulted in their being investigated early and often by amateur archaeologists—a circumstance which was not always conducive to the best use of these remains in an effort to reconstruct prehistory.

The University of Chicago maintained survey and excavating parties in the county during the summers of 1926 and 1927. The data from these expeditions as well as from previous surveys disclosed the existence of 152 linear, 434 conical, and six effigy mounds—a total of 592. A large earthen circle and an elliptical earthen ring are also known. It is expected that future discoveries will increase the total. The mounds lie principally within the unglaciated portion of the county and along existing or former stream courses. Several habitation sites have been found, chiefly adjacent to or near mounds.

Thirty-one conical, ten linear, and two effigy mounds of record have been excavated. Structurally the conical mounds differed considerably from the linear mounds. The conical, aside from the practically characterless small ones in three of the groups in which excavations were conducted, fairly uniformly presented an excavated area (involving either simple removal of top soil or actual intaglio), clay-ash stratification, fluent, i. e., puddled clay, and ash-beds. In the large conical mounds a vault (of log or stone or in combination), a buried trench, and burnt earth may be expected. The linear mounds with fair constancy revealed an excavated area, an ash-bed, and a mortuary hollow (an intentional depression for human remains and accompanying funerary objects). The two effigy mounds apparently had in common an excavated area and an ash bed. Aside from the foregoing, recorded structural details are scant.

Burials were present in 19 of the conical and 9 of the linear mounds. Multiple burials prevailed in the conical and the reverse in the linear mounds. Cremated and extended burials occurred only in conical and flexed burials only in linear mounds. Fragmentary and bundle burials were not peculiar to either. Burials beneath the floor or throughout the mound, entirely apart from fire- or ash-beds, were peculiar to conical mounds. Linear mounds were almost unique in having burials in the body of the mound associated with ash- or fire-beds.

Simple stone slab-burials without a mound superstructure are known, but are few in number.

The physical type represented by the skeletal remains is as yet unknown despite the fact that more than 60 skeletons have been discovered. The principal reasons for this are: (1) the earlier investigators were interested primarily in "relics" and, accordingly, noted little else than number, position, and size of the skeletons which were uncovered; (2) the very poor state of preservation of many of the remains.

Thus far we have little information regarding cultural succession. The available records for mounds excavated contain no mention of stratigraphic succession. Very little has been done toward excavating habitation sites and that little has yielded no information concerning temporal sequences. The paucity of cultural remains obtained by the University in its excavations and the wide scattering or total loss of most of the material objects retrieved by earlier workers, together with the simplicity of that which is known, enhance the difficulty of determining the identity of cultures and their temporal relations.

It is possible, however, to list from information contained in the literature, from the University survey of collections and sites, and from the results of excavation certain cultures which were or appear to have been in this county. Starting with the known, then proceeding to the earlier and less apparent they are: (1) a late historic Woodland culture (as exemplified by the Sac and Fox); (2) the Effigy Mound culture which Dr. McKern in Wisconsin has linked with the Lake Michigan pottery as being variants of the eastern Algonkian culture (possibly should be regarded as a Lake Michigan aspect of the Late Prehistoric phase of the Woodland basic culture¹); (3) some components of the Middle Mississippi phase of the Mississippi basic culture that have affiliates at Aztalan in Wisconsin, Cahokia (East St. Louis), and Fulton County in Illinois; (4) components of the Great Lakes² phase (sometimes referred to as Illinois variant of the Hopewell culture) of the Woodland basic culture.