

THE FISHER MOUND AND VILLAGE SITE

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The Fisher locality is situated near the Will-Grundy County line on the south bank of the Des Plaines River, a mile or so above the mouth of the Illinois. It is an elevated spot on a thick limestone gravel deposit overlooking the river. The aboriginal works consist of two "Big Mounds" 60 feet in diameter and 7 feet high, surrounded by 50 "Pits" or saucer-like depressions, ranging from 15 to 35 feet in diameter, and seven "Small Mounds" 20 to 30 feet in diameter and 1 to 3 feet high. All of the mounds are conical. The 1928 explorations in the "Small Mounds" comprise the third phase of work at Fisher's, the two preceding phases being discoveries in the "Pits" and in the two "Big Mounds." For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the Fisher locality, I will give a brief account of work done there prior to 1928.

In 1912, 17 years ago, I tried to interest certain scientific institutions in Fisher's, but without success. I had made test excavations and found human skeletons but not much else. I had a "hunch" that the site would prove interesting, but more than a "hunch" was needed where a large expenditure of money was involved, and the matter seemed to be ended. Until 1932, the field had never been cultivated. That year heavy tractor plowing began and was repeated in 1923 and 1924. The destruction wrought prompted me to dig, for apparently mounds, pits, and all were doomed to obliteration. Then began the first phase of exploration at Fisher's; excavation of the two "Big Mounds." This was in September, 1924. A Hungarian, Albert Tennik, offered to assist me. We worked under great difficulties and it was our intention to do only a limited amount of digging—just enough to learn the culture of one of the Big Mounds.

Unfortunately, this intention encountered an unforeseen obstacle. We soon found things that impressed us with their novelty and stuck to our job continually finding things that kept us busy up to the present time.

The two Big Mounds contained 294 human burials and were both stratified into three distinct levels which I call Upper, Mid-

dle, and Lower, the separating seams, apparently old surfaces, persisting unbrokenly. Human burials lay one over another, sometimes four high. The chronological succession of graves was determined by planes of origin assisted by the artifacts and postures of the skeletons. The mounds did not represent only one culture but at least three well-defined.

The Upper Level contained burials of brachys and mesos mostly lying upon their sides. Artifacts were few; notched and stemmed arrowpoints of flint and chert and small clay pots smooth-surfaced and undecorated, made of clay and crushed crystalline rock.

Near the top of the Middle Level were burials of brachys and mesos; some upon their backs, others upon their sides. The clay pots were slightly more pretentious than the ones above, having roughened surface and some attempt at decoration. Notched and stemmed arrowpoints had disappeared, their place being taken by small triangles and slender "drills" of chert. Polished stone was represented by ungrooved hatchets or celts. A carved bone culture and a limited shell culture occurred at this level. In the zone beneath covered by an Ash Layer were large numbers of brachys extended upon their backs. The small triangles, "drills," and celts persisted; the shell artifacts were more plentiful; and there were artifacts of copper; but not many things of bone. The clay pots were more elaborate than those from above, the material as a rule being clay mixed with pulverized shell, and elaborately decorated.

It was the discovery of Lower Level burials that kept us digging until now. We found them quite accidentally, for they lay in pure gravel without the usual soil discolorations, nor could any of the graves be traced upward through gravel into the overlying dark soil. These were crouching skeletons without pots or artifacts—mesos and dolichos—and where one overlay another, invariably the meso was above and the dolicho, or long-head, below. Not until December, 1926, did we finish the two Big Mounds.

The second phase of exploration took us to the "Pits." This was in April, 1927, and a party led by Dr. Fay-Cooper Cole collaborated with us. A large and typical pit was No. 19; over 30 feet inside diameter scooped out of gravel to nearly 5 feet below ground level, the material removed being piled in a high thick bank around the rim. In the center were burned stones, ashes, and charcoal. A sloping path led from center to rim. In and around

it were numerous food-holes about 3 feet diameter and 3 to 5 feet deep. Many of the holes contained ashes, charcoal, clamshells, animal bones, and numerous artifacts of bone, stone, and shell. Broken clay pots were particularly abundant. Not a sign of wooden posts or post hole appeared in No. 19 nor in any of the other pits examined. No doubt they represented some unknown form of habitation.

In March, 1928, we entered upon our third phase of exploration—the Small Mounds. These had been dug into more or less in times past, and we did not expect to find much. Our work in the Big Mounds and around the Pits had yielded traces of post-European occupation, or a "Surface" Level, as I called it, and one of the Small Mounds, as we knew, contained or had contained articles of the White Man's manufacture. This was the Southeast Mound standing apart from the rest at the southeast portion of the site. This mound proved to be of considerable scientific interest.

In 1906, twenty-two and one-half years ago, when Mr. Dan Fisher, owner of the farm, lived there, he gave permission to Mr. Howard Calmer, a friend of mine, to dig into any one mound he might choose. Mr. Calmer invited me to participate, and so the two of us drove down from Joliet Thanksgiving Day morning. The vehicle which transported us was a one-lunged Cadillac with tonneau door at the back. There was a crank at the side to wind up and make the thing go, the technique of starting and its duration corresponding to the freezing of a gallon of ice cream. We of today who are accustomed to the luxury of flivvers on gravel roads, cannot appreciate the difficulties we encountered traversing those 18 miles of mud. It took us 4 hours to reach the mounds.

The task of selecting the one to work upon fell upon me, for some unknown reason, and I chose the Southeast Mound, having observed tiny beads near the mouth of a gopher hole piercing the mound near center. We dug there and came upon a human skeleton lying extended upon its back. At the throat we found a crescent and pendant which we thought to be silver. Glass beads, a painted wooden stick, and objects of iron, bone, and brass were strewn about the skeleton, which lay on dirt two feet below the surface.

Being chiefly interested in things prehistorical, I took no great interest in our discovery. It was too modern to suit me, and the perils of auto travel were a strong deterrent; therefore, I found many reasons for not accompanying Mr. Calmer on a second trip

to finish what we had begun. Meanwhile, some Joliet enthusiasts, hearing of our find, persuaded Mr. Fisher to let them dig, and they did so in the early summer of 1907. There were three of them, and I give their account abbreviated:

"At a depth of about 4 feet we encountered four human skeletons; 2 females, 1 doubtful and 1 a man. One woman wore a fluted silver bracelet. Near the bodies were a small (iron) kettle 4 inches high and 4 inches diameter with riveted patch, a clam-shell pierced with 5 holes in a row, a long bone pin pierced at one end, and a leaf-shaped arrowpoint (of flint) $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The man's skeleton had received the lion's share of adornment. On the forehead was a band of silver brooches, each 1 inch diameter, and a silver medallion with 5 holes. A thin rectangular silver plate covered each eye socket, smooth on three edges and serrated on the fourth. On the chest was a silver reliquary, and below that a double-barred cross 5 inches long, in each of whose angles was a pendant Roman cross 1 inch long. Near the waist lay another double-barred cross 8 inches long, and on the stomach a glass mirror 5 by 8 inches. One upper arm bore a large silver armlet; the wrist a silver fluted bracelet. Fragments of a shirt or coat, covered with $\frac{1}{2}$ inch diameter silver brooches overlapping each other, appeared around the upper half of the body."

When I saw these various objects some years later, they had all been scrubbed and the "silver" pieces highly polished. I questioned the excavators on several occasions, trying to find how extensively they had dug and was assured that the work had been done thoroughly and completely. The whole mound had been excavated from top to bottom, and nothing was left.

For many years I took these statements for granted, but having learned by experience that the casual digger rarely goes deep enough, in the early spring of 1928 we tried our luck on this much-excavated mound. First, we went through old diggings and widened the area where the 1907 excavators had met with such success and found the lower halves of two skeletons, a man and woman, intact with only the upper portions disturbed, the bones being scattered through the diggings and many of them green-stained. One male humerus had a broad green band around the upper portion of the shaft, and there were jaws and other bones similarly discolored. The two part skeletons undisturbed lay fully extended 18 inches below ground level. Digging beneath them 18 inches more, we came upon an untouched magma of burned human bones and two elliptical blades of mouse-colored flint.

It did not take us long to clear out all of the 1907 disturbance, for only the central and east portions of the mound had been dug, and not deeply. In the old debris were porcelain beads and green-stained bones, circular buckles, finger rings, ear-rings, and a wrist-band, all of brass; also aboriginal pieces, a pierced shell pendant, bone tube bead, and chert arrowpoint. The east portion of the mound had been excavated to gravel, but no deeper, so we continued downward and came upon three undisturbed skeletons about 3 feet below ground level, lying upon their backs, feet east, heads west. One was a young woman, another an older woman, and the third a man. With the young woman were many small porcelain beads, several brass ornaments, a tin pan, and the remnants of a brass-bound chest with brass lock and two iron keys. In the chest were a pair of scissors, some other iron pieces, a bone implement, and a long wooden pin. The older woman had a green-stained pail and an iron butcher knife. With the man were an iron buckle, 3 brass cones of rolled plate, a bone tube bead, a stone pipe, and two bear canine teeth painted and pierced at the root end. Altogether, we accounted for 25 burials, 15 of which had been undisturbed, and every burial was accompanied by one or more objects of brass or iron besides porcelain beads. The adults, 15 of them, occupied the central area, with 5 infants and 5 older children scattered around the rim portion. Each child had several brass or iron objects, each infant only one; a brass thimble, brass sleigh bell, iron pocket knife, etc. We found no clay pots, animal bones, clamshells, ashes, or charcoal—all common in the diggings of the two Big Mounds. Every adult skull was a brachy, the skeletons being rather small according to White Man's standards.

Some of the skeletons had aboriginal artifacts of bone, stone, or shell, but every one was also accompanied by one or more objects of the White Man's manufacture. It was a purely post-European mound less than 150 years old and not an older earthwork containing intrusive burials. Post-European mounds are not commonly met with; in fact I never heard of one such as we found at Fisher's. Instead of a forlorn hope, we found the Southeast Mound a most agreeable surprise.

We spent the balance of the year, 1928, until fall, excavating the other Small Mounds and found many skeletons, finishing the season with a total of 515 burials in all to date. The Small Mounds were lacking in clay pots and artifacts, although they contained grit-tempered potsherds, the ornate shell-tempered variety

so common in the Pits but entirely lacking in the Middle Level of the two Big Mounds. Except for the post-European mound described, all were pre-European. Several belonged to the Upper Level, and two contained Lower Level graves beneath the concealed gravel burials, appearing unexpectedly as in the two Big Mounds.

One of the Small Mounds yielded three forms of interment hitherto unknown upon the site. These were crouching tied, bundled, and scaffold burials.

At one point between two pits was a circular eminence scarcely one foot high. It could hardly be called a mound, and yet it contained many skeletons, the center being given up to a bone mass representing nearly 40 individuals. The spot was overlain with camp debris and pierced with numerous holes $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter and 4 to 5 feet deep. No doubt these were places for food storage, filled in later with dirt and ashes and some relics of bone and shell. Some of them had disturbed the burials beneath. This was the only small mound containing copper implements and shell-tempered potsherds. Such skulls as we found in the intrusive bone mass were brachys which may be correlated with the Upper Level of the two Big Mounds. The food-holes and many of the deeper skeletons were of earlier origin, probably Middle Level. Deeper down we found several concealed burials of mesos, these being much the same as in the two Big Mounds.

The Fisher locality is unique, and its cultures—two at least—have large and varied representation. The mounds show the burial customs of the people, and the pits give mute evidence of how they lived. Both the mounds and pits have yielded their clay vessels and implements in abundance. The numerous skeletons give information of the people themselves.

The Fisher locality is not showy, nor does it possess showy relics. The ceramic work is one of its most attractive assets. The two Big Mounds yielded over 75 clay pots; the pits an enormous quantity of sherds, many of them large sections sufficient to visualize them entire. More than one culture is represented. The bonework comes next in the number and variety of its pieces. There are beamers, or skin-dressers, cut from deer and elk foot-bones, long pointed pins with shovel-like heads, awls, gouges, perforators, sharpened splinters, cut and perforated toe bones, braid rings, and many other artifacts—all cut from bones of elk and deer.

Antlers also were much used, the tips being fabricated for flakers, arrowpoints, game pieces, celts, and various tools. The large incisor teeth of beavers were made into chisels and small beamers. Limb bone shafts of raccoon, wildcats, and dog served as tubular ornaments. Canine teeth of bear and dog were pierced for personal adornment. Bird bones furnished material for tubes, beamers, gouges, and beads. We found bone rods, long needles pierced at one end, curved fish hooks, notched pegs, carved circular wafers, small multi-barbed fish spears, and larger harpoon heads. The two Big Mounds were not lacking in bone culture, but the great bulk of specimens came from the food-holes in and around the pits.

The shell work is primitive, and yet we found several attractive pieces—carved pendants, one of them shaped to represent a fish. Some of the human burials were adorned with shell pendants; one with shell beads. River clams supplied the material, and their shells were to be found everywhere. Some food-holes contained large caches of them. Many had been used as scrapers, and others had been notched and trimmed to serve as spoons. Of marine shells, we found only three small ones, buried with long-heads in concealed graves.

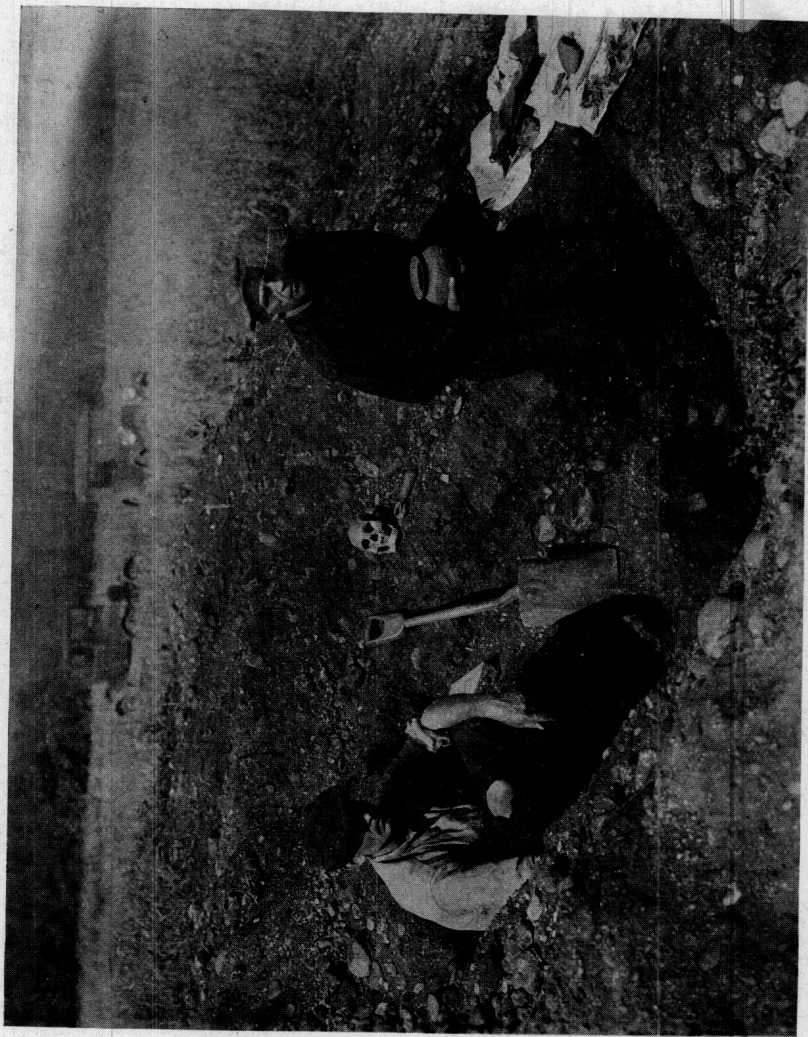
None of the pre-European cultures possessed metal other than copper, and that occurred sparingly, mostly with burials of the Middle Level, as celts, bead necklaces, ear discs, and other pieces.

Chipped flint and chert artifacts were confined to arrow and "drill" points. Notched and stemmed forms from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 inches long appeared to antedate others from the Middle Level where small and thin triangles prevailed, together with long and slender pieces. It is a modest assemblage, there being no large or showy specimens. This is also true of the pecked and polished stone work. The ungrooved hatchet, or celt, is common. We found fine stone pipes, of simple form, around the pits, but none in the mounds. Anvil, hammer, grinding and pecking stones occurred frequently, but no elaborate pieces such as bird-stones, plum-mets, tubes, gorgets, butterflies, or the like. Bones of animals, birds, turtles, and fishes occurred in great quantity. Occasionally, in the pits, we came upon the skeletons of children partially buried by charred bone, stone, and shell artifacts lying upon them. Sometimes the burned implements were not with skeletons but by themselves. The tribes of Indians which occupied the site from time to time appeared to have a low order of civilization devoid of

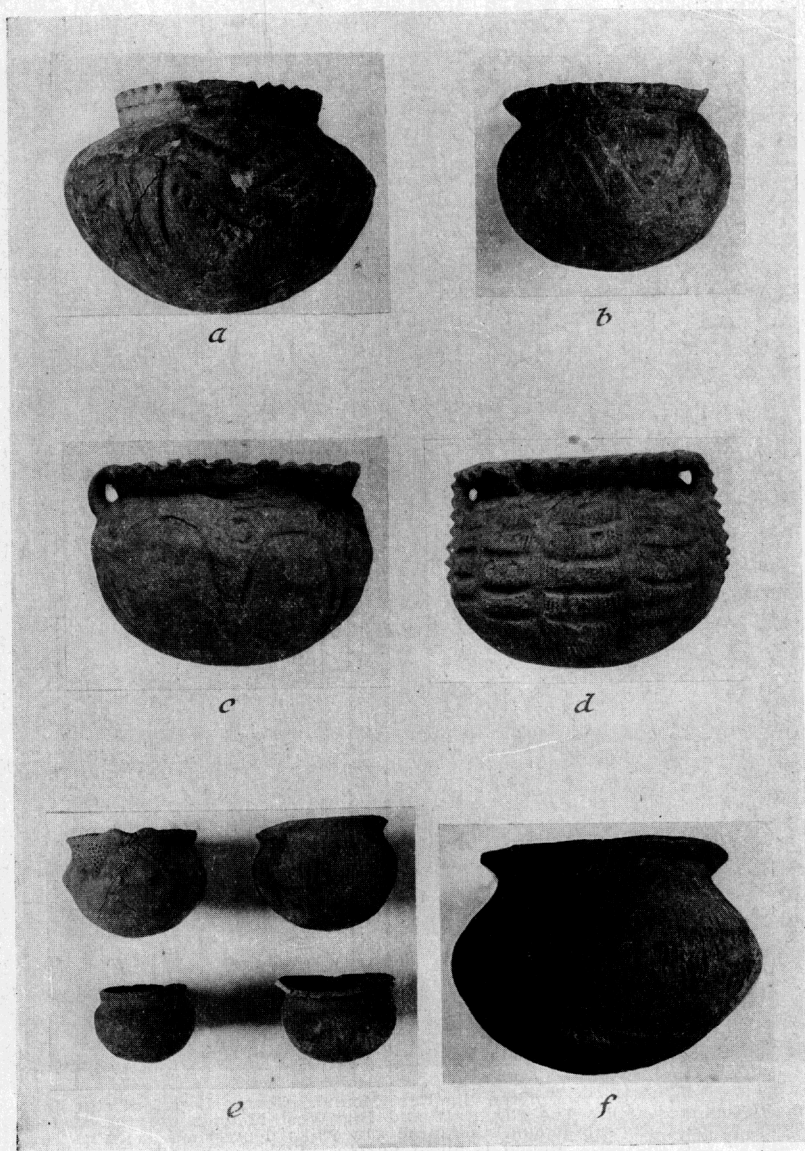
aesthetic sense, and they lacked either opportunity or inclination to do much more than make a living. Simple as they are, the Fisher cultures are full of interest, and the variety and abundance of material in this one restricted locality will be useful for comparing with and defining other cultures. In this respect they may be of assistance in unravelling the human prehistory of northern Illinois. Not only has my work been a great source of diversion and recreation to me, but it has brought me into contact with professionals—fine men and new friends. Although not of the cloth, I can understand them and work in harmony.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

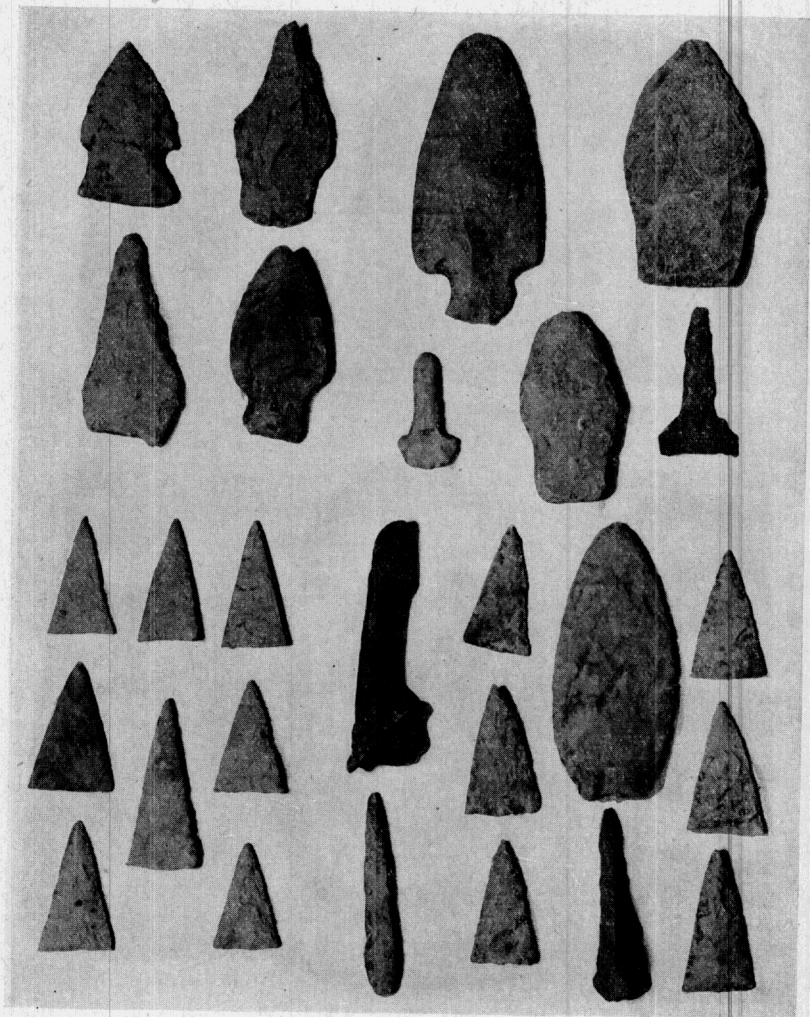
The following plates have previously appeared in the *American Anthropologist*, Volume 29, July-September, 1927.



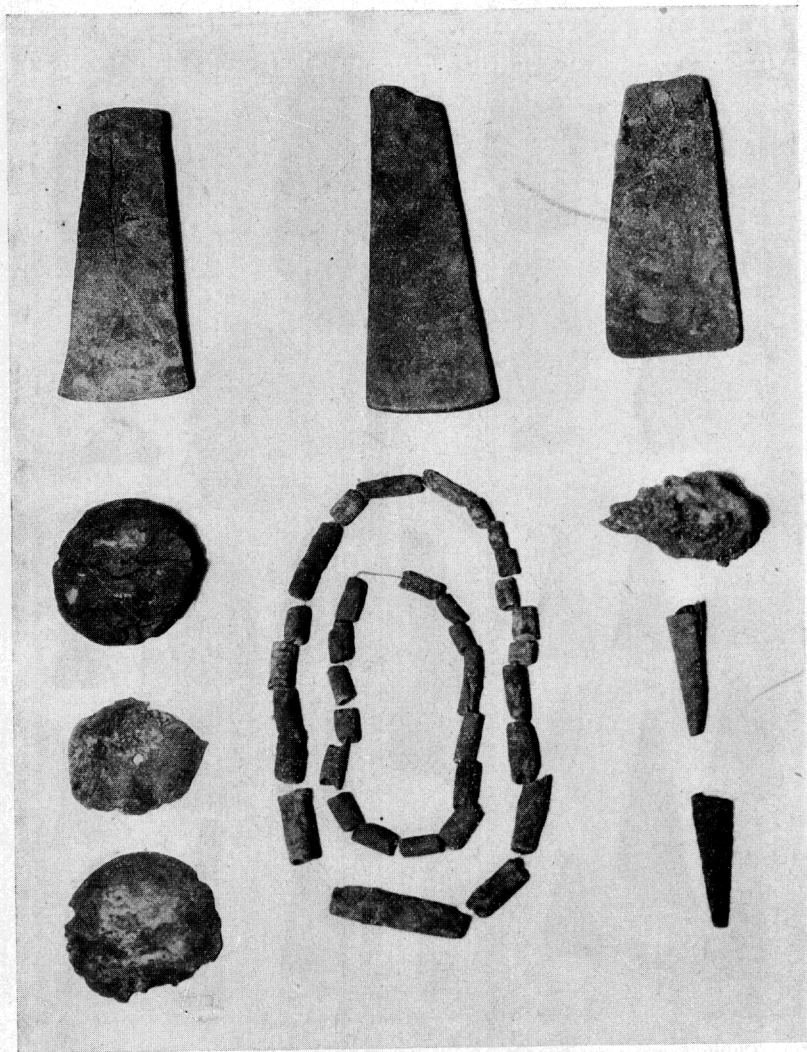
Excavation at the rim of the Big East Mound. George Langford standing; Albert Teunik seated. The Big East and Big West Mounds are the nucleus around which the small mound and large saucerlike depressions or "Pits" are grouped. The Big East Mound is about 60 feet in diameter and 6 feet high; the Big West Mound slightly larger. Both were packed with human burials frequently accompanied by clay pots or implements of stone, bone, copper, and shell.



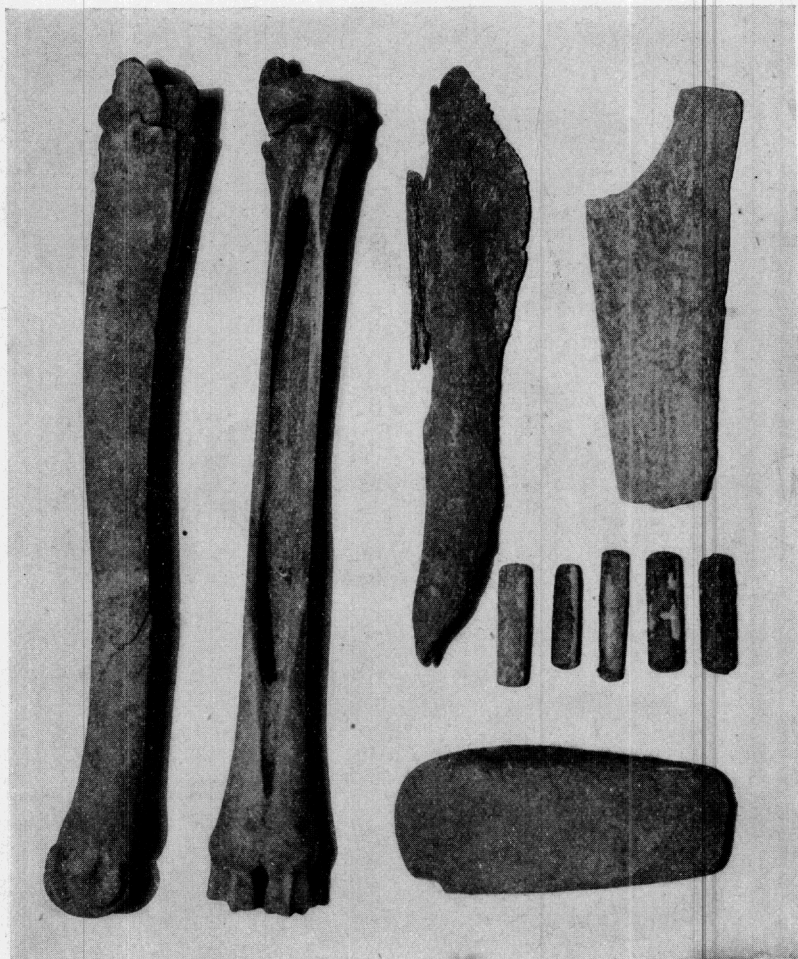
Clay pots from the Two Big Mounds. (About one-fourth actual size.)
 FIGS. *a-d* inclusive are made of shell-tempered clay and bear "antler-point" decoration. FIG. *a*, with its broad loop handles and dot-and-diagonal decoration, is typical of the Middle Level pottery. FIG. *f*, made of rock-tempered clay, is more recent, as are the four small pots grouped under FIG. *e*.



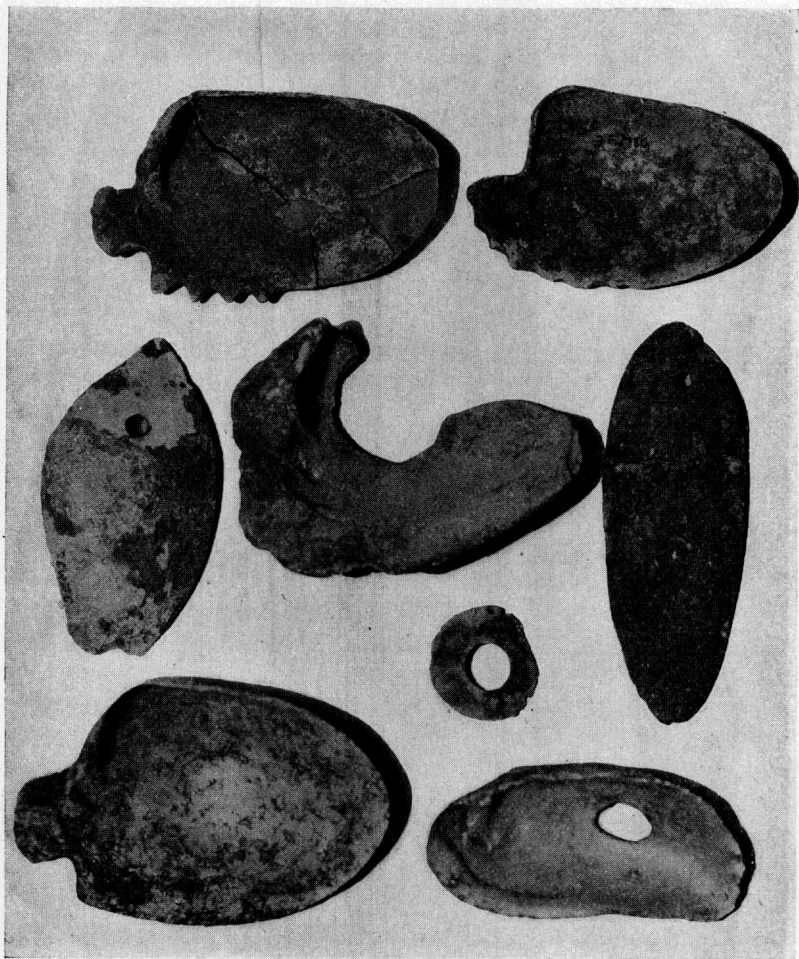
Chipped stone implements from the Two Big Mounds. (About three-fourths actual size.) The upper nine notched and stemmed forms are from the Upper Level; those below, from the Middle Level. In the center is a human metacarpal bone of the hand with a small triangular arrowpoint embedded in the base.



Copper from the Two Big Mounds. (About three-fourths actual size.) Celts or hatchets, ear discs, bead necklaces, and plate cones. The copper nugget shown at right was with a human burial.



Bone implements. (About two-thirds actual size.) The two long pieces are "beamers" or skin-dressing tools made from the metatarsal bones of a deer. They and the other two utilized bone objects at top of plate accompanied a human burial. The stone tablet and five bone cylinders were buried with a woman. Other skeletons of women were accompanied by similar combinations of stone tablets and bone cylinders. The "Pits" yielded an abundant and varied bone culture.



Shell implements. (About three-eighths actual size.) The two figures at the top and the one at the lower left corner are shell spoons. Nearly every clap pot contained one. Three neck pendants and two utilized pieces are also shown in the picture.