

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE IOWA
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

June 25, 1940

Herewith is a brief statement of the work of the Iowa Archaeological Survey for the fiscal year 1939-1940, directed by the undersigned as a Research Associate of the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa.

1. The very large amount of archaeological material, more than 20,000 specimens, added to the State collection during the year called for an unusual expenditure of time in the laboratory. The filing of this material, the assignment of serial numbers to each lot, and a partial study and analysis looking toward publication were done by the undersigned; the lettering and numbering of each specimen was done by Mr. James McQuigg, a junior NYA student in Cornell College, who was assigned to me as a laboratory assistant.

2. Correspondence to keep in touch with the many observers throughout the State who report their finds to the office of the survey was somewhat more voluminous than usual. For a number of years this has totaled about four hundred letters annually. Some of the letters received clearly indicate the discovery of important, hitherto unknown, village sites which will need examination in the field. Others indicate the presence of hitherto unknown collections of material that are available for study or perhaps ready for transfer to the State of Iowa. It might be noted here that since the inception of the survey twenty-six private collections of undoubted scientific value have been donated to the State. There is an increasing appreciation of the fact that no other disposition of what was in many

cases an important and cherished life interest gives promise of equal permanence and usefulness. There is also a growing tendency for collectors to keep fuller records and to concentrate solely on local materials.

3. Some seven lectures have been delivered in various places in Iowa. In April a paper on southwestern Iowa archaeology was read at the Indianapolis meeting of the Society for American Archaeology. The magazine of the Society, *American Antiquity*, for January, 1940, pp. 259-261, contains my review of Titterington's *The Cahokia Mound Group and Its Village Site Materials*.

4. Most of the field work for the year, which began on June 5th and closed on November 17th, was concentrated on excavations in two village sites lying ten and twelve miles respectively northwest of the business section of Sioux City. As in 1938, Mr. Ellison Orr of Waukon was field supervisor in charge of the excavations done by a crew of ten WPA workers. Mr. Orr's long experience in handling work crews, his competence as a surveyor and draftsman, and his abilities as an archaeologist all made his continued availability for the season a matter of great good fortune.

The more northerly site excavated, the Broken Kettle, is situated on the bank of Broken Kettle Creek about one mile from the confluence of this creek with the Big Sioux River. The site is small, less than an acre in extent, though the village refuse beneath the barns, sheds, and feed lots of an old farmstead is still eight feet in depth. From the 559 linear feet of trenches excavated here, averaging about six feet in width and all carried down to sterile soil, some twelve thousand potsherds, implements, and ornaments of stone, bone, shell, and antler, and examples of village refuse in the way of animal, fish, and bird bones, spalls of flint and quartzite, mussel shells, charred vegetal remains,

and the like, were collected and shipped in to the laboratory. Notebook entries, photographs, drawings, and plats were made to locate specimens and to make clear their associations.

In contrast with the Broken Kettle, the Kimball site two miles to the south lies in the middle of the open terrace of the Big Sioux River; like the Broken Kettle, except that it is about twice as large, the site is a low mound of village refuse intermixed with soils brought in by the village inhabitants. Work on the Kimball site began on August 28th. Three hundred and fifty-three linear feet of trenches were run, averaging six feet in width. As at Broken Kettle, most of the trenches had to be put down eight feet in order to reach the sterile soil beneath the village refuse. As the post molds of three houses were found at the eight-foot level and as the houses contained small storage pits, the excavations reached in certain places a depth of ten feet. The archaeology of the Kimball site proved to be nearly the same as that of the Broken Kettle, namely, the Big Sioux focus of the Mill Creek prehistoric culture. No evidence whatever was found in either site to connect the builders of these villages with history. We know thus far only that their culture was of the Mississippi, not the Woodland, pattern. The variety of culture traits indicated by the conditions found and the artifacts collected is unusually great, possibly the most complex thus far recorded for the Upper Mississippi Valley. The puzzling fact is presented, for example, of a strange mixture of Middle and Upper Mississippi features. Most of the eight thousand specimens from the Kimball site, together with the twelve thousand from the Broken Kettle, are still to receive detailed study and analysis in the laboratory.

5. Materials added to the Iowa collection during the year, in addition to those obtained by excavation under our

own supervision, included some sixty representative potsherds from the Fire Steel and Twelve Mile sites near Mitchell, South Dakota, and about the same number from the Nece site of Buena Vista County, Iowa. The former were the gift of Mr. W. H. Over, Director of the University Museum, Vermillion, and the latter were excavated and donated by Mr. Frank L. Van Voorhis of Alta. Both collections are additions to our Mill Creek culture materials, the one the Fire Steel and the other the Little Sioux focus.

6. Three trips were made to the field by the writer for the inspection of excavations near Sioux City and for conferences with Mr. Orr; for the study of recently excavated materials at Vermillion, South Dakota; and for an interview with a University of Nebraska party doing excavations near Homer, a few miles southwest of Sioux City. About eighteen days were thus spent, most at our own excavations at the Broken Kettle and Kimball sites.

7. This spring Mr. Orr's reports of field work were received, consisting of one hundred and thirty-seven typewritten pages, besides many maps, plats, drawings, and photographs. An extra copy of the typewritten sheets is being made by the State Historical Society of Iowa, the originals being on paper too heavy to permit the taking of carbon copies.

CHARLES R. KEYES