

# Newsletter of the Iowa Archeological Society

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Est. 1951



## Photos from the 1956 field season at the Phipps Site



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PHOTOS FROM THE 2017 FALL MEETING  
COURTESY OF JOHN DOERSHUK AND BRANDEN SCOTT



Basket making demonstrated by Charlene Elyea.



David Benn discussing Native American symbolism.



Colin Betts describing an experimental earth oven.



Atlatl throwing demonstrated by Tucker Lutter (right).



Megan Stroh speaking about northwestern Iowa prehistoric cultures. (The newsletter editor would very much like to have the shirt worn by the person in the foreground.)



Flintknapping demonstrated by Pat Hashman (left) and Mark Anderson (right).

# Read All About It!

## Mill Creek Site Helped Indians Ward Off Foes

Now on display at the Sanford Museum are some of the materials collected from the Mill Creek site by members of the Northwest chapter of the Iowa Archeological Society.

The specimens on exhibition were recovered from the Phipps Mound, officially listed as 13 CK-21, with the use of approved archeological methods, which involves precise "measuring in" of items while still in place in the ground.

Careful records are kept of all observations made at the site while digging. Although the location is called a mound, it is actually a natural terrace. It is believed by archeology students that around 1200 A. D. a group of Indians, now called "Mill Creek,"

took advantage of this elevated area, which afforded some natural defense against enemies.

It is reported that the sides of this terrace were quite steep and it was not until the owners intentionally reduced the slope that plowing of certain portions became possible.

The site, which covers approximately an acre, has been under cultivation since the early settlement of this region and has been intensively worked for about 75 years.

The nearby spring-fed creek, bordered by elms and boxelders,

and the slopes of the valley heavily wooded with oaks and walnuts, were undoubtedly attractive features to the Indians. In addition, the region offered plum thickets, an abundance of wild game and fertile soil.

Included in the Mill Creek items displayed at the museum is a hoe made from a bison shoulder blade, a bone spatula, bone awls and a flaking tool fashioned from an antler.

Also recovered was the eye-end of a bone needle, a tooth made into a bead, arrow points of a notched type and a number of pieces of worked bone whose use is unknown as yet.

Pottery loop-handles and tiny animal heads of pottery from the edge of jars made and used by the Indians were found. There are also two round stone objects, worn smooth by use, and believed to have been a hand-muller for grinding corn and a hammer stone. Pieces of burned clay show grass impressions and may have been parts of bricks.

A. C. Thompson, Spencer,

16 Dec 1952

27 Jan 1953

## Tells of Study Of Indian Lore In This Area

"What the Sanford Museum group is doing in Archeology," was the topic of a discussion by W. D. Frankforter at the regular Rotary Club meeting Monday noon.

Clarence Coon was in charge of the program and introduced the Sanford Museum director.

Frankforter told Rotarians that interest in the subject of archeology is growing in Iowa, as well as much interest evidenced locally. He mentioned the work Nestor Stiles has done in archeology here as a hobby for many years, and spoke of his outstanding collection.

"In a study of Indian lore, the Northwest Iowa society has been working on the John Phipps farm north of Cherokee. Most every plowed field in the valley of the Little Sioux River has turned up archeological specimens," said Frankforter.

Exploration on the Phipps place, located by Mill Creek north of the city, is done in five-foot square areas. A written report is kept on the findings in each square, Frankforter explained.

The many items of Indian culture found at this location have been processed and indexed for reference. "Information is more important," the Sanford director said, "than the individual discoveries." The way of life of the Indian is learned through the items recovered.

It has been discovered that the Mill Creek Indians lived in a gabled home with a storage pit for vegetables in the floor. The houses sat a foot below the ground, and some were as large as 40 by 60 feet. Evidently more than one family lived in a house, Frankforter said.

Don Kent, vice-president, presided at the meeting. Guests were Wallace Ogg of Ames, R. R. Hughes and R. W. Peterson of Sioux City and Milton Johnson of Pocahontas.

Welcomed as new members of Rotary were Jack Cook and G. E. McGlothlen, with instructions given by Archie Nelson.

Des Moines, Iowa

JUL 3 1955

## 700-YEAR-OLD IOWA VILLAGE IS EXCAVATED

### Indian Site Now Is Cherokee Farm.

By George Mills.

(Register Staff Writer.)

CHEROKEE, IA. — A strange crop is being harvested on the 300 acres farmed by Paul Phipps north of here.

Men working with shovels and trowels are carefully digging square holes into a knoll on the south side of wooded Mill Creek.

The rolling Iowa countryside in Cherokee county is beautiful. The men, however, are not interested in the scenery. They are painstakingly unearthing bits of pottery, bones (some of them human), fish scales, clam shells, stone tools, arrowheads and other evidences of life of long ago.

S. U. I. Team.

The group is excavating a prehistoric Indian village which flourished on the Phipps farm perhaps 700 years ago. The excavators are a team of State University of Iowa students working under the direction of Dr. Reynold Ruppe, a professor in archaeology.

The Indians left the Phipps farm many centuries ago. Nobody knows what happened to them. It isn't even known whether they were relatives of present-day Indians.

Probably 125 to 250 persons lived in the village. For the want of a better name, they are known as the "Mill Creek Indians." They lived well. Even in those days in Iowa, food was plentiful. Said Ruppe:

"This was a people that led rather a comfortable existence. They had a surplus of food. They raised corn, beans, squash. They had plenty of bison, deer, fish and clams. Their pottery was attractive. It is well enough decorated to show that they had

good esthetic sense."

The four students are slowly sinking shafts five feet square into the site of the village. They take out a three-inch layer of earth at a time. A student digging in a hole removes about one foot of earth a day.

The digging pace slows down markedly when a piece of bone, pottery or other item appears. Then the student uses a hand trowel as he carefully unearths the find. Sometimes he brushes the surrounding earth away with a small brush.

Every recovered item is placed in a brown paper sack which is carefully labeled as to the location of the find.

Several days ago, a small pile of human bones was found in one of the pits. The bones apparently had been in a large earthen pot. Ruppe said the bones apparently are of an adolescent.

"The position of the find indicates the individual may have been eaten," Ruppe said. "There are other evidences of cannibalism in other sites of this Mill Creek culture, but we can't say for sure. The bones may have been kept in the pot for some other purpose."

15 Villages.

There are about 15 of these "Mill Creek Indian" village sites in northwest Iowa. Few, however, are so rich in evidences of past life as the Phipps farm village.

Ruppe said bits of Mill Creek life are being found in more than six feet of diggings. He believes the village was occupied for "a long time, maybe 300 or 400 years." That is almost twice as long as the period of modern Iowa history. Julien Dubuque, Iowa's first modern settler, lived in this state beginning in about 1788. That is 167 years ago.

The Mill Creek Indians evidently had enemies. They protected their villages with earthen ramparts.

They lived in large houses, with gabled roofs probably 15 feet high. Ruppe and his students haven't located the site of such a house yet. But they have every reason to think they will, before the excavation work comes to an end in August for the summer.

"This village may have had seven or eight houses," Ruppe said. "They would have been large houses 20 feet by 30 feet or 30 feet by 40 feet."

Mud Houses.

The house walls may have consisted of interwoven branches that were covered with mud.

## Information Dug From Earth To Tell 700 Year Old Story



4 Aug 1955

John Ives, one of the University of Iowa students here for the summer is pictured above working at the "living level" of the Indian village site north of Cherokee. Work is being done at the site to learn more of the people that inhabited the area prior to the coming of the white man. The area where Ives is working

shows various items found as the group dug down with small pincer-like tools. With each item still in its proper place, later these items were recorded on paper as to the location and removed to Sanford Museum.

—Exclusive Courier Photo

# Phipps Site in the News, 1952-1956

By Bill Whittaker

The Phipps Site (13CK21), is one of the best-documented Late Prehistoric Mill Creek villages in Iowa. First formally excavated in 1934 by Ellison Orr, the site was "discovered" anew in 1952, and excavated during three field seasons, 1952-1956, by the Sanford Museum, the Northwest Chapter of the Iowa Archeological Society, and the University of Iowa. Recently uncovered newspaper articles about these excavations show how it became a statewide sensation. Over this time, romanticized dispatches from the field gave way to unfounded speculation about warfare and cannibalism. Although cannibalism made great headlines, the idea was rejected as archaeologists learned that placing the dead in ceramic containers was simply a variation of domestic mortuary customs.

21 July 1955



## SUI Team Unearths Of Early Indian

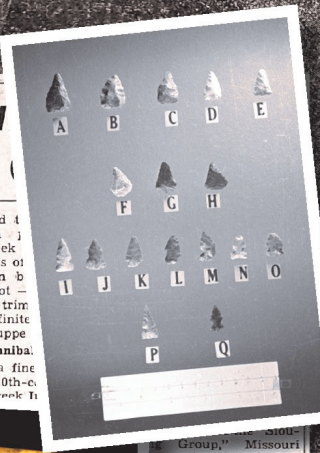
A wealth of historically valuable material, including "definite evidence" of cannibalism among early Indian settlers, has been unearthed by a State University of Iowa archaeological research team working near Cherokee this summer.

The group has unearthed a "living area" with tools, weapons and pottery in place just as the Indians left them several hundred years ago at a village along Mill Creek. The living area was found under the surface of a five definite houses also been found.

**Prof. Ruppe**  
R. J. Ruppe, anthropology professor at the University of Iowa, is directing the excavation. The work is a cooperative project of the university and the Sanford Museum here.

Archaeologists suspected cannibalism had been practiced among the Mill Creek Indians. But recent discoveries of a human skull in a cooking-pot - some in a cooking-pot - and a broken and trimmed bowl have definitely confirmed the theory, Ruppe said.

**Ceremonial Cannibalism**  
It may seem like a fine line of distinction to the 20th-century mind, but the theory is



26 June 1956

## Archaeology Students Digging Up House In Ancient Indian Village

CHEROKEE (AP)—Ever dig up a house? It's certainly not a well known occupation, hobby or study.

But students in the State University of Iowa's summer extension course of field research in Iowa Indian archaeology are making a long-term study of just that near here.

All are enrolled in a special course that has brought them here for another summer of excavating skills at the much-acclaimed Mill Creek site north of Cherokee.

The Indian village was first discovered last summer on property owned by Mrs. Inez Phipps.

Dr. R. J. Ruppe, anthropology professor at SUI, declares that at least one ancient Indian house, found at a level of 5½ feet below the surface last year, will be "recovered" during the eight-week course.

The house measurements are estimated to be about 30 x 40 feet. Students in the summer Indian lore study course reached a depth of 91 inches last year and hope to reach the bottom of the Indian mound before September.

The professor and his class spend mornings—six days a week—at the Mill Creek diggings. They retreat during the heat of the day for laboratory research in Sanford Museum here.

Charles O'Neil, Chicago, all graduate students. Undergraduates—Richard Flanders, Waterloo; Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Anderson, Jewell.

The study is again sponsored jointly by the University of Iowa and Sanford Museum with the Gardner Cowles Foundation financing the project. Members of the Northwest Chapter of the Iowa Archeological Society are assisting with the excavating.

Students enrolled are: John Ives, Iowa City; Dale Henning, Decorah; Frank Magid, Chicago;



Aug 1955 \$360

# 2017 FALL FEST AT PRAIRIE TRAILS MUSEUM

## DALE CLARK

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, The Prairie Trails Museum in Corydon held its Fall Fest. Among the many displays and demonstrations were rope making, corn doll husk making, blacksmithing, rug making, and pottery manufacture. There was a cake walk and a band played that afternoon. Dale Clark guided people through a detailed display of Native American material culture from the Paleoindian Period to after European contact. (see photos below) Hands on materials allowed people to grind corn, crack nuts, and drill holes in wood with stone tools. The University of Iowa Mobile Museum containing the Oneota Archaeological Connections exhibit was also present.



Dale Clark (right) talking with Kaleb and Brody Jensen. Also pictured ,Janet Hansen and Eula Henderson.

# WHAT'S THE POINT?

LOWELL BLIKRE  
BEAR CREEK ARCHEOLOGY, INC.  
CRESCO

Discovered: Downtown Cedar Rapids, under about 150 cm of river alluvium with surface pavement above that.

Description: Exceptionally thin and well made. The lateral edges are finely serrated and the blade surfaces are basally thinned. The straight lateral edge has been resharpened. The distal end and one shoulder are broken off and there is a break along the basal edge resulting in the false appearance of a basal notch or pronounced concavity. The morphology of the intact portions of the base indicate that it was concave or recurved. The intact portions of the base and shoulders are grounded. This point is made of a fossiliferous chert.

Send your responses to me at [Lowell@BearCreekArcheology.com](mailto:Lowell@BearCreekArcheology.com). Answers will be listed in the next issue of the newsletter.

I'm still looking for someone to take over this column for the newsletter. If you think you'd be interested in doing so, please contact me.

Also, I am out of articles, so if you have if anything you'd like to share with the membership, send it to me. It's your newsletter and we'd all like to hear from you.



This issue's point. Enlarged to show detail.

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“I think it’ll track west of us.”

One last photo from the 1956 field season at the Phipps Site, depicting the time-honored tradition of archaeologists not having the sense to seek shelter when a storm is coming in. Photos from the OSA archives.

#### MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Please contact the IAS Membership Secretary:

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#### MEMBERSHIP DUES

Voting	
Active	\$25
Household	\$30
Sustaining	\$35
Non-Voting	
Student (under 18)	\$15
Institution	\$35

#### NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

The Iowa Archeological Society is a nonprofit, scientific society legally organized under the corporate laws of Iowa. Members of the Society share a serious interest in the archaeology of Iowa and the Midwest. The Newsletter is published four times a year.

All materials for publication should be sent to the Newsletter Editor:

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When submitting articles, please provide text, captions, tables, and figures separately. All photographs should be at least 300 dpi. Graphics should be high-resolution tiff, jpg, or eps files or be scan-ready paper copies.

#### IAS WEBSITE

<http://archaeology.uiowa.edu/iowa-archeological-society>