

## Discovering The Hartley Fort

Successful discoveries are not just a matter of chance. Archeologists plan carefully ahead and choose sites with care. There is often a good reason for selecting one site instead of another. It is very expensive to field a crew for five or six weeks at a single site and it is the archeologist's responsibility to see that the money is well spent. By money well spent, the explorations must add measurably to the knowledge about ancient times. Yet, in spite of planning, luck sometimes does play a part.

Excavations at the Hartley site provide a good illustration of archeological luck. Exploration of the site was needed to settle an archeological controversy about prehistoric fortifications. As it turned out, the choice of site proved to be exceedingly fortunate for a great deal more was discovered than expected. An important gap in the scientific evidence was filled. As luck would have it, we discovered this evidence in the first excavation.

The Hartley enclosed site does not look at all spectacular. In appearance, it is simply a low ridge of earth enclosing an acre of land on three sides. The open side overlooks a steep bank where French Creek joins the Upper Iowa River.



The first impression of the site was discouraging. Crossing through the woods with the crew I announced, "Here we are, what do you think of the site?" Disappointment and disbelief could be read on every face. Was this the site? This weedy pasture? The crew had worked hard at Turkey River and very little had been found up to that time. Would the Hartley site prove to be similarly difficult?

By chance this site had not been plowed since the 1870's and not a single potsherd or flint chip lay on the ground surface. To raise the spirits of the crew I pointed to a barely perceptible ridge of earth saying, "The rampart is clearest here." The crew stood remarkably silent at the next remark, "I am not at all sure but I think those small rises of ground in the center are mounds." It did not seem to help matters to say, "Now on this west side I can't trace the enclosure at all."

Although comparatively little had been found at Turkey River, the enclosure was very clear and the mounds were conspicuous. The surface evidence at the Hartley site was not at all certain. Were we making a mistake in excavating at this site? Fortunately the earth screened from the first trench contained a few flint chips, potsherds and artifacts. Interest began to rise. This was the first pottery found during the summer.

After two days I returned to Turkey River leaving Charles Ebel temporarily in charge of the



main crew at the Hartley site. This choice was a good one and he became the mainstay of the expedition. Mr. Ebel had been a carpenter before coming to the University to study history, and he learned mapping rapidly and directed excavations with great neatness and precision. Glen Hartley, son of the owner of the site, was hired on the crew. Although still in high school, he was accustomed to working outside and soon developed into one of the strongest diggers.

The work at the various excavations progressed well during the next ten days turning up minor finds of pottery and artifacts. Solid scientific conclusions could be drawn from the material. After looking at the specimens in a most preliminary way, it was clear that the Hartley enclosure had been built around the year 1200 A.D., give or take a hundred years or so. The pottery indicated a settlement of Late Woodland Indians. Although Excavation 1 was largely completed no evidence of fortifications was found. But when the last mixed earth overlying subsoil was finally cleared away a major discovery was made. The expedition's log has this record:

*July 20, Monday* Excavation 1 showed four large post holes in orange sandy clay spanning the trench in a northerly line. This is the first evidence of an ancient palisade found in Iowa and is of great interest. The palisade line lies just outside the centerline of the main embankment (east). Three excavations are put in along the east-



ern embankment and one along the south, plus extensions (Excavation 1). . . .

*July 21, Tuesday* Work progressed on palisade row in Excavation 1. Other excavations having very great difficulty in locating meaningful post holes. The Excavation 1 post hole pattern is an overlap of two distinct rows which suggest a main gateway. Many photographs taken. . . .

Finding the main gateway and adjacent post holes of the ancient stockade wall proved to be the key to the rest of the excavations. With some difficulty the post line was located in the eastern, southern, and northern ramparts. Although no rampart could be easily traced across the west side overlooking the steep slope down to French Creek, the presence of post holes clearly demonstrated that the stockade completely enclosed the west side of the village.

Locating the evidence of the stockade wall on all four sides of the village was no easy task. The posts themselves had completely decayed and no trace of the actual wood was left in the ground. Nevertheless post molds were present, and these had been formed in the following way. The Indians drove substantial posts, up to eight inches in diameter, into the subsoil. After the Indians erected a long line or wall of stout posts, they carried in basket loads of earth and piled it around the base of the post line. A large pit over one hundred feet across and about six feet deep lies near the southeastern corner of the enclosure. Apparently



the Indians obtained the earth by digging this pit.

It was this earth around the posts that formed a low ridge marking the outlines of the fort. As the wood decayed the topsoil sifted into the holes where the posts had been. By excavating with great care and neatness, it was possible to locate the posts' position. The holes, which were filled with black topsoil, formed a contrast with the surrounding light colored subsoil. While some crew members worked out the fortifications, others uncovered burials and charred corn kernels.

The miniature shell-tempered pot found with the child was a puzzle that required a solution. Typical Woodland pottery has small bits of stone mixed in the clay, providing a temper to the finished pot. If temper is absent the pot breaks when heated. Oneota pottery, which was introduced into Eastern Iowa after the Woodland period, contains bits of fragmentary shell as tempering material in the clay. Why was a shell-tempered Oneota pot in a Woodland culture site? As additional burials were found another shell-tempered pot was found. The answer to this puzzle seemed to be that the late Woodland Indians built the stockade for defense. Long after they abandoned it, Oneota Indians used the site as a place to bury their dead. Demonstrating the correctness of this interpretation took two weeks of excavation.

An interesting small mound appeared to be built over a section of the earth ridge forming the south



rampart. Evidently the stockade had been built first and the mound was subsequently added. If this were true, a continuous row of post holes would be found except where they were disturbed by later Oneota burials. On the other hand, if the interpretation were incorrect, it would be possible to confirm this fact by finding post holes in a line crossing and disturbing the burials. This mound was to be the demonstration that two different tribes occupied the site. As the crew members finished their various excavations, they were shifted to the mound.

Working out the burials found elsewhere at the site took several days, for five had been located and they lay in burial pits. It took a good deal of time to neatly clear them for photographs. Professor A. K. Fisher, of the University of Iowa, College of Dentistry, spent a day helping to excavate one of the burials. Marvin Koeper of Baxter, Iowa, spent two days at the excavations. Help from members of the Iowa Archeological Society at this time was appreciated for both time and money were getting short.

Work on the mound proved to be most interesting. The line of post holes which passed straight through the mound was located. The conditions for determining the stratigraphy were going to be excellent. Several great clusters of rocks which were grave markers within the mound itself were exposed. These were mapped and photographed.



When the grave markers were removed and the soil beneath them was cleared away, it could be seen that the post line had been obliterated by two Oneota burials. A third Oneota burial was lying parallel to the ancient post line. Its burial marker of large rock slabs had covered the post holes. This showed beyond a doubt that the fort had completely disappeared by the time the Oneota graves were dug. Exactly the right kind of information had been obtained. It had been a most rewarding summer.

*Significance of the Hartley Excavations*

The Hartley enclosure excavations reveal a new chapter in the life of Iowa's ancient Indians. Previously, it had been clear to archeologists that the Late Woodland Indians were eventually overwhelmed in eastern Iowa about 1300 A.D. by prosperous agricultural tribes termed Oneota who migrated across the Mississippi River. Among these Oneota tribes was one group named the Ioway.

Yet, there had been some speculation as to the actual cause of the Late Woodland Indians' defeat. Were they declining in numbers? Did they simply abandon northeastern Iowa in the face of the threatened invasion? It now appears from this summer's work that the Late Woodland Indians of northeastern Iowa were vigorous and fairly numerous. They had wide trade relationships with surrounding groups such as the Cambria cul-



ture of southern Minnesota which is evidenced by the pottery. They did not give up Iowa without a struggle. Their fortified village covered about an acre in extent. It is doubtful if it was ever taken in combat, because the log stockade had never been burned.

Corn agriculture may have been present, indicating an important food source not previously reported for Late Woodland Indians in Iowa. However, there is a stratigraphic problem which requires laboratory study, for the corn finds may only be associated with Oneota remains at this site.

The actual details of life in the fortified village have yet to be worked out. There are, possibly, remains of houses and these can be uncovered by subsequent field parties. At present enough is known about the material remains to define a new culture in Iowa, the Hartley Focus, named after the landowner and the site.

The period around 1200 A.D. was a time of troubles for the local Indian groups in the upper Midwest. This same summer of 1964, fortified villages were discovered in Wisconsin and Michigan dating from about the same time period as the Hartley site. Great invasions by Mississippian agriculturalists pushed northward and dislocated the local tribesmen who fought back and fortified their villages. We now know that these troubled times around 1200 A.D. extended into Iowa.



## Some Select PALIMPSEST Readings

Compiled by WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Keyes, Charles Reuben, *Antiquities of the Upper Iowa*, PALIMPSEST, 15:321-354, Oct., 1934.

Keyes, Charles Reuben, *Minott's Rock Shelter*, PALIMPSEST, 24:1-40, Jan., 1943.

Keyes, Charles Reuben, *Prehistoric Indians of Iowa*, PALIMPSEST, 32:285-344, Aug., 1951.

Keyes, Charles Reuben, *A Unique Survey (Lewis-Hill)*, PALIMPSEST, 11:214-226, May, 1930.

Logan-Ingmanson, *Effigy Mound National Monument*, PALIMPSEST, 42:145-176, April, 1961.

Wedel, Mildred Mott, *Indian Villages on the Upper Iowa River*, PALIMPSEST, 42:561-592, Dec., 1961.

Jackson-Petersen, *The Black Hawk War*, PALIMPSEST, 43:65-112, Feb., 1962.

Petersen, William J., *The Spirit Lake Massacre*, PALIMPSEST, 43:433-496, Oct., 1962.

Several Authors, *The Indians of Iowa*, PALIMPSEST, 38:33-96, Feb., 1957.



Gallaher-Spencer, *The Tama Powwow*, PALIMPSEST, 38:305-336, Aug., 1957.

Petersen, William J., *The Ioway Indians*, PALIMPSEST, 41:261-292, May, 1960.

Petersen, William J., *The Winnebago Indians*, PALIMPSEST, 41:325-356, July, 1960.

For a comprehensive survey read Dr. Marshall McKusick's new book — *Men of Ancient Iowa* — published by the Iowa State University Press at Ames.

For additional readings on Prehistoric Man and Indians of Iowa consult Petersen's *Iowa History Reference Guide* (1952), pp. 22-31.