

Hopewellian Indians in Iowa

The Middle Woodland period of Indian occupation of Iowa has not been studied in as great detail as some of the earlier and later periods and therefore is not as well known. Although there has been testing and salvage digging in recent years, most of the work was done in eastern Iowa before the turn of the century. In those days it was the custom for a party to get together, visit a mound group and dig one or two on a weekend. The work was often hurried and the record of the findings minimal.

Most of the early work was done under the sponsorship of the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences. The two men responsible for most of the archaeological work were Mr. W. H. Pratt and the Reverend Jacob Gass. Mr. Pratt was a self-educated man who taught penmanship in the public schools. He was very interested in natural science and was a founder of the Academy. He served as its first secretary and was its curator from 1875 until 1890. Although he had no training as an archaeologist he was systematic and a careful observer and recorded his findings.

The Rev. Gass was a Lutheran minister who lived in Davenport for a time and was a member

of the Academy. He, too, had no formal training in archaeology. He excavated a number of mounds on both sides of the Mississippi River. His reports of that work are not as detailed and give the impression that he was not as painstaking as Mr. Pratt. He is best known, perhaps, because of his association with the elephant pipes and other fraudulent artifacts described by McKusick.

The reports of Pratt, Gass and others were published by the Davenport Academy and the notes and many of the artifacts obtained are still on file at the Davenport Public Museum. More recent studies have been conducted in the Effigy Mounds National Monument in northeastern Iowa, along the Mississippi near Clinton and in southeastern Iowa.

Surveys and testing show that there was some Middle Woodland occupation throughout much of the state. The Indians apparently lived in small villages and in the rock shelters near Maquoketa and in Allamakee County. The heaviest concentration of sites is in the eastern part of the state along the Mississippi and in northeastern Iowa. The distribution suggests that the rivers draining into the Mississippi were the major routes of communication as the Hopewellian cult moved westward.

As there is not much detail on the village and campsites, we can only suggest that the Indians may have lived in groups of small houses much as

those in adjacent parts of Illinois and Wisconsin and that they hunted and fished and collected shellfish in addition to cultivating some crops for subsistence. The ceramics, decorated with linear dentate stamping, suggest that the earliest Middle Woodland occupation here moved in from Illinois in the middle of the occupation, perhaps 1 A.D.

Most of the sites which have been excavated and reported in any detail are mound groups. Two of the most impressive were dug in the Nineteenth Century by members of the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences. One, the Toolesboro Site, is located in Louisa County and is being developed and preserved by the State Historical Society for the future. The other, the Cook Farm Mounds group, which was located in a now crowded section of southwestern Davenport, has been completely destroyed by the city.

The Toolesboro Site consisted of twelve mounds on the bluff overlooking the Iowa River bottoms. There was a village area on the flood plain nearby and three-quarters of a mile away was another group of six or seven mounds. The mounds were forty to eighty feet in diameter and six to ten feet in height. Four mounds in the main group were dug in August of 1875 by Mr. W. H. Pratt, C. E. Harrison and Pratt's son, and described in the *Proceedings of the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences* in 1876. Two mounds were dug by hand and one with the aid of

several teams and some of the local citizens. The fourth mound was washing away on the edge of the bluff and was used as a hog pen.

The first mound, dug by excavating a six by nine foot area from the top down, produced only flint chips and scattered human bones.

The second, excavated in the same way, apparently contained a badly disintegrated log tomb and several skeletons including that of a child in poor condition. Near one skull was a platform pipe and a copper pin.

The third mound was more complex. It had a hard prepared clay floor on which the bones and artifacts were placed. There were two or three skeletons in poor condition, a marine shell cup and portions of at least four large pots. One skeleton had a copper celt which had been wrapped in cloth on his chest, and more than two hundred shell beads around his neck. Also on the floor were two platform pipes and three copper axes.

The fourth mound produced very little; a few artifacts were eroded out of it and later donated to the Academy. They included a copper celt, a copper awl, and some possible polishing stones.

In October, 1875, Pratt returned to Toolesboro when he learned that some of the local citizens had been exploring the mounds in the group three-quarters of a mile away. Six men and three teams spent five days digging four mounds. Not much is known about the mounds, except for a record

of the artifacts recovered. The first mound had a prepared sand floor and several skeletons. A large copper celt with a flaring bit "weighing almost two and a half lbs." and a thin perforated bone implement which might have been a shuttle were found.

In the second mound there were five copper awls, a copper celt, a platform pipe, a lump of galena, and several projectile points. In the third mound were broken pots and antler drifters. The fourth produced bones in poor condition, an unfinished platform pipe with a plain bowl which had never been drilled, and some antler drifters.

Because of the way in which the mounds were dug there is very little information about the burial pattern and association of artifacts. The use of the log tombs is recorded.

There were eleven mounds in the Cook Farm group which was located on a low ridge on the flood plain of the Mississippi only eight to twelve feet above the high water in 1875. They varied from fifteen to sixty feet in diameter and from eight inches to five feet in height. The first excavating was done in 1874 by Rev. Gass and a Mr. Smith. This was reported by Dr. R. J. Farquharson in 1876. Later Rev. Gass wrote a report with some additional information on Mound 3 in Volume II of the *Proceedings*. After that Gass reported on Mound 10, also in Volume II of the *Proceedings*, while C. E. Harrison summarized the work on Mound 11 in Volume III.

At least three of the mounds had subfloor tombs in which the burials were placed, and one, Mound 3, had two such tombs. Mound 5 had a hard clay floor. Most of the burials were in poor condition, but some were recorded as extended. In Mound 2 they were placed in a semi-circle in a sitting position. In Mound 4 they appeared to have been wrapped in cloth or some woven fabric. With the burials were grave offerings consisting of marine shell containers, copper celts, a copper awl, copper and silver hemispheres, copper beads, pottery, pipes, yellow and red pigment, galena, bear teeth, a worked turtle scapula, projectile points and knives of chert, an obsidian point, and a snake skeleton. Not all things were found in any one mound, but the list is quite representative of the grave offerings found in other Hopewellian sites.

In Mounds 4, 5 and 10 there were piles of stones which resembled altars. In Mound 5 the stones were burned and in Mound 4 there was a layer of ashes six inches thick covering the burial area. In Mound 10 human bones were found below the altar. Over the burials in most of the mounds the Indians heaped dirt, shells and stones.

In two of the mounds, 3 and 11, fraudulent tablets were reportedly found which were part of the famous controversy. McKusick (1970) has just summarized this in his book *The Davenport Conspiracy*. In Mound 3 the tablet was found in a disturbed situation; in Mound 11 which was also

disturbed, it was under the altar which casts considerable doubt on the altar and other objects found in the mound.

Other mound groups were reported in considerably less detail in the *Proceedings of the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences*. They were located in groups of from two to ten, along the bluffs in Louisa, Scott, and Jackson counties. They produced pipes, bear teeth, copper axes and other artifacts typical of Hopewellian grave offerings. In some there were stones covering the burials, in others burned clay and ash areas were found. Unfortunately the reports are not complete.

In summary, burial practices in Middle Woodland mounds in eastern Iowa seem to be similar to the practices found elsewhere in the Midwest. There was some cremation, some use of log tombs, and some use of stone slabs—all found in Illinois. The grave goods vary from site to site and include the usual variety of objects considered representative of the Hopewellian cult. More up-to-date and controlled study of sites—both mounds and villages—in Iowa is needed before we will achieve an adequate understanding of the prehistoric occupation of the state at that time and the relationship between it and the nearby areas.