

Surface Pottery from Marion County Indiana

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On the famous Strawtown site on White River in Hamilton County a most unusual combination of pottery sherds was found some years ago. This was first discovered by finding a very large rim sherd, with attached handle, carrying the type of decoration known as "Fort Ancient." Before that discovery the sherds found at Strawtown were of the design known as Woodland; the type believed to be predominate on the majority of Indian village sites in this section of Indiana. With the discovery of this large sherd the Strawtown earthworks, refuse pits, and villages were searched over many times for artifacts, pottery, and archaeological material pertaining to the peoples who lived here.

Continued investigation at Strawtown and subsequent work by the writer in Marion County has revealed the fact that the mingling of Fort Ancient and Woodland sherds on the surface on many sites in this area is a predominate characteristic of these sites. The two types just mentioned are typical of many village sites in Marion County. At the present time there are 35 villages, 12 or more camp sites, and 2 burial places which exhibit this combination. At least 25 of these villages are located on White River, which runs through the central part of the county. Also a number have been found on Fall Creek which enters Marion County at its northeast corner and runs in a southwesterly direction until it flows into White River near West Tenth street and White River boulevard about one-half mile west of the Indianapolis Hospital center.

One-half mile north and west of this point on the east side of the river between the Indianapolis Baseball Park and the Emricksville bridge on the north side of state road 34 three villages were found: two on the first terrace, and one on the second terrace. Here we find both Woodland and Fort Ancient pottery sherds. I would mention the fact that at the site on the second terrace many triangular points, to the probable exclusion of other forms, was the feature of the stone artifact finds; while the two sites on the first terrace produced not only triangular but also stemmed and notched points. This is one of the interesting problems—the discovery of triangular points to the exclusion of other forms on one village site, and then the combination of triangular and stemmed or notched points on an adjacent site which from all other appearances is identical to its neighbor.

It is well to emphasize here that on these Marion County village sites I have found on the surface Fort Ancient sherds classified as belonging to the Upper Mississippi phase of the Mississippi pattern with sherds considered diagnostic of the Woodland pattern; and also in physical proximity on many sites triangular points which may be diagnostic of the Mississippi pattern and types of stemmed and notched points generally considered diagnostic of the Woodland pattern.

Moreover a strange circumstance presents itself in the probability that this mingling on the surface of so-called Mississippi and Woodland artifacts is restricted to Marion County and a portion of Hamilton County to the north. As I have mentioned above the majority, probably all, of the villages lie on White River or its tributaries, in an area extending from central Hamilton County to the southern boundary of Marion County. A persistent effort to trace this pottery manifestation on down White River as it flows south into and through Morgan County has failed to find such a combination.

I have tramped the shores of White River for its entire journey through Morgan County and in the places where villages should have been found on the basis of discoveries in Marion County no sites were to be found, except one village two or two and a half miles south of the Marion County line. This site was on a knoll about one-fourth mile back from the river. Here I found very few pieces of pottery, and one of them, a very small sherd fragment with a Fort Ancient trailed design; the majority of sherds were Woodland. This is not a final analysis, however, because I am inclined to feel that there may be villages under the heavily silted first terrace. This, of course, is conjecture and the fact remains that on the first terrace and at various places on the second terrace where I looked for villages none were to be found. Contrast this with the heavily covered villages in Marion County, and on up into Hamilton County as far as the Strawtown site. Above Strawtown and on into Madison County I found an absence of village sites bearing this combination of pottery.

Therefore, as far as careful search will permit me to state the case, it appears that the combination of pottery types and projectile points apparently is localized in Marion County and a portion of its neighbor to the north, Hamilton County.

There is a village north of Thirty-eighth street on the east side of the river. The property belongs to the Indianapolis Water Company, and covers 113.50 acres. This strip of land is in a very large turn in the river, and there are at least five different places where pot-sherds may be found, due to the high water in the spring cutting a very large wash from the north side of the field to the extreme south edge. This wash cut the village site to some extent. Both Woodland and Fort Ancient sherds are found. Projectile points of stemmed and notched forms are most prominent on this site. To the west approximately 500 feet, the river, during the high water, has silted this village. There are sherds for at least 200 feet east and west and the same distance north and south—both Woodland and Fort Ancient. Also were found triangular points, and a few stemmed projectile points, hammer stones, anvils, burnt rock, and animal bones. Going to the west edge of the field there we find another site. There have been hundreds of sherds found here of both Woodland and Fort Ancient. Triangular points are the most outstanding; there are very few of the other types along with the sherds. Also there are two rather crude celts of gray slate, three granite celts (all broken), two broken slate gorgets, animal bones, shell, and burnt rocks. There are a few places in this field where the sherds are very

small. Some of the sites are so close together that possibly a combination of 3, 4, or even 5 may represent pottery manifestation embracing one big village. This is noticeable at several of the sites, and reminds us of the large Fort Ancient sites in southern Indiana. This condition is met on the site east of Michigan road and on the north side of the river. Here we find the discoloration in the top soil with pottery, burnt rock, and animal bones. The ground rises after leaving the bank of the river and continues to rise to the east where it joins the first terrace. This is filled to some extent with a silt on the lower bank or first terrace at the east end of the field. At this point the high water has cut through a village, which is 4 or 5 feet below the present level of the first terrace. The fire pits and burnt rock were visible approximately 2 feet above the bottom of the wash on the north side of the first terrace in the spring of 1940. A broken stone axe, projectile points, both types of pottery, and a very large animal bone (unknown) were found on the surface.

The surveyor is under the impression the village is located between the wash and the river bank to the west and south. In other words it appears that high waters have washed out the center of the village and left evidence of its remains on each side of the wash.

Dr. J. H. Oliver's farm is located on White River in Sec. 17, 133 acres, and Sec. 20, 27 acres. The two sections join on the north and south. In April, 1939, this village site was surveyed by Mr. Eli Lilly, Mr. Glenn Black, Mr. Paul Weer and the writer. The party gathered several hundred sherds, both Woodland and Fort Ancient, triangular points, projectile points, celts, two broken beamers, one bone awl, animal bones, elk teeth, and the antler of an elk. There were two pits very outstanding. Number one in the east portion of the wash measured 4' 10" N and S, 4' 5" E and W. Number two, 3' 9" N and S and 4' E and W. This measurement was made from the red circle of burnt earth. The surface of these circles contained small particles of animal bone, burnt rock, and very few sherds. Twenty-five feet to the west of the top edge of the wash a cache of shell, animal bone, and a few sherds were found. Going to the south central part of the field the river has cut a village site to some great extent. Here we found ten charcoal circles from nine to fourteen inches across surface. These places may have been posts for a house. Shortly after this survey the ground was prepared for a stand of clover and the surface evidence was destroyed.

In conclusion, there is a great deal more to be done in Marion County and the adjoining counties to the north and south. This report will be continued.