

Relationships Among Various Clark County Sites

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The Ohio River forms the entire southern boundary of the State of Indiana. The archeological importance of this fact rests upon the evidence that the Ohio has served for centuries as a major artery for the migration and diffusion of various aboriginal peoples.

Although it is known that important aboriginal sites or landmarks appear about the mouth of every considerable stream entering the Ohio within this region, two principal occupational foci seem to stand apart from the rest as of special importance. One of these embraces an impressive area about the mouth of the Wabash River; the other comprises several square miles about, or near, Ohio Falls. As our investigations have extended, it has become increasingly apparent that the ethnology of these two locations is distinctly inter-related and that with each area there are evidences of marked changes in cultural characteristics occasioned by a contact or association of diverse peoples. At both locations the influence of such association upon pottery form and decoration is quite apparent.

Concerning the Ohio Falls location, it should be understood that, except at this point, there are no falls or rapids in the entire course of the Ohio. This is in itself important, especially when it is understood that from the earliest aboriginal times navigation about the Falls of the Ohio was of necessity accomplished by means of portages, one upon each side of the stream, both of which were within the actual precincts successively occupied by various Indian peoples.¹ What effect this situation may have had upon a prolonged and peaceful occupation of this eminently strategic location and to what degree such occupation may have affected migrations by alien peoples provide important elements in a critical archeological study of the region.

Nowhere in Indiana, or perhaps anywhere upon the Ohio, was there a more advantageous location for aboriginal occupancy. There was a remarkably abundant supply of fish-food and of the numerous species of edible molluscae, which persist to this day. Below the "falls" a glacial lake some 15 miles long was the habitat of great colonies of waterfowl. There were perhaps 100 smaller lakes existent a century ago. The extensive "knobland" forests abounded in deer, elk, bear, and other wild game. Beyond this the river terraces were here quite elevated and level, and the rich sandy loam was exceptionally fertile.

The fact is that various aboriginal peoples have successively occupied this immediate region, their villages overspreading more actual acres, perhaps, than is true of any other situation upon the Ohio. How many tons of animal bones have been left here—including those of mammals, fish, and fowl—no one may conceive. Numerous acres, within

¹ Gordon, Capt. Harry, 1916. Coll. Illinois Hist. Libr. 11:294.

which were the burials of hundreds of early peoples, have been washed into the Ohio during the past 100 years. During the extraordinary inundations of 1883-1884 local newspapers reported the complete destruction of these sites; yet during our recent excavation some 200 burials were encountered, and it is probable that many times this number still remain.

The geologic history of Ohio Falls is exceptionally complex, but it is indubitably an important or even paramount element in the local archeological picture. In order to evaluate this close relationship, one must remember, for example:

1. That the earliest occupants of the Ohio Falls sites were "lake dwellers" rather than simply the customary occupants of villages established upon stream terraces.

2. That during some phase or phases of the occupational sequence in this quarter the Ohio was in the process of establishing a new course, migrating meanwhile over an early lake-bed to its present location some three miles west of its earlier long-established channel.

3. That the present islands below the rapids were once integrated with the mainland and that upon them aboriginal peoples lived in villages not yet dissected from this mainland by stream piracy.

4. That for some centuries, or at least since the Ohio has occupied its present channel, periodic major inundations have wholly destroyed certain of the early villages in this area and that it was frequently necessary over a long period of time for the occupants of other sites to abandon their homes for brief or long periods.

During the building of the Louisville & Portland canal (*circa* 1830) aboriginal "fire hearths," skeletal remains, and artifacts were reported found at depths 20 to 30 feet below surface on the Kentucky side of the Ohio. No valid reason appears to discredit these reports. An examination of the artifacts recovered reveals that they pertain to the "Indian Knoll" culture-group, as described by Moore.² That the occupants of these sites later resorted to the higher terraces upon the Indiana shore one may assume, but this is not after all important. What is important is, as Dr. Butts has pointed out, that it is not probable that any of the spectacular changes in the Ohio mentioned must be referred to remote geological times.³ It is certain, however, that these varied and often puzzling geologic involvements must be carefully weighed and considered in any competent analysis of the archeology of the region.

The general archeological sequence at Ohio Falls, as we now interpret it, is as follows:

1. A late or historic occupation during pioneer and pre-pioneer times by small transient groups, some of which may be identified as Shawnee and Delaware; probably, also, transitory occupations by the Cherokee at a somewhat earlier period. It is known that the Cherokee claimed the whole of Kentucky as their tribal habitat, and there are

² Moore, Clarence B., 1916. Some aboriginal sites on Green River, Kentucky. Philadelphia Acad. Nat. Sci.

³ Butts, Charles, 1918. Reverse of topographic map of Camp Taylor and vicinity. U. S. Geol. Surv.

sparse records of Cherokee camps about Ohio Falls. In respect to the Shawnee and Delaware occupations the evidence is substantial and is a matter of fully authenticated record. So much may not be said of the probable Cherokee occupation of which the accounts are meager and less substantial.

Although Borden assumed that burials at Ohio Falls were "within stone graves and usually in a sitting posture,"⁴ and Webb and Funkhouser⁵ (probably upon these grounds) assumed also that this was true, we did not encounter during two seasons of excavation a single stone grave. It is true, however, that two or three stone graves are observable on surface within the lawn of the James Newcomb home (Newcomb site). No others have been observed or reported at Ohio Falls.

2. An intensive occupation, not however prolonged, by an integrated body of Middle-Mississippi peoples who, as we believe, were somewhat earlier established at Wickliffe, Kentucky; at the mouth of the Wabash; in Vanderburgh County, Indiana; and in Floyd County, Indiana, a few miles below Ohio Falls. This is the same group, we assume, who established themselves more unitedly at the Prather-Koons-Wiley sites in Utica Township, Clark County, some six or eight miles north from Ohio Falls. This concentration perhaps represents the easternmost outpost upon the Ohio of the group in question. These people built impressive mounds above the ruins of rectangular structures earlier destroyed by fire, buried their dead usually in an extended position, but sometimes with bodies flexed, beneath the village floor-level, or actually beneath the clay floors of their homes, used copper liberally and artistically, were adept in the fabrication of axes, celts, pipes, etc., of stone, and produced pottery of decorative character—this often including effigy forms.

It should be understood that at Ohio Falls every available acre has been cultivated for 150 years, that recurrent inundations have removed much of the surface soil so disturbed, that erosion has greatly altered the entire surface, that tons of boulders and other workshop material have been removed to facilitate cultivation or to be utilized for cement construction, and that for a great many years relic collectors have resorted to this area and have combed it consistently. It has been therefore impossible to determine the actual areal extent of this occupation or to estimate its importance.

3. An intensive occupation of relatively long duration by a numerous group of Middle-Mississippi peoples. In physical character and in their material culture, they are unlike Group 2; yet there are certain trait-similarities which suggest a contact between the two peoples. In this group the cranium is small and customarily occipitally flattened. Undeformed crania, so far as studied, are moderately dolichocephalic. This is opposed to Group 2, whose crania are relatively large, undeformed, and brachycephalic.

We have found within the midden deposits characteristic of this group no fragment of copper. The burials are customarily upon the

⁴ Borden, Wm. W., 1874. *Indiana Geol. Surv.* 5:185-186.

⁵ Webb, W. S. and Funkhouser, W. D., 1928. *Ancient life in Kentucky.* *Kentucky Geol. Surv.*, p. 174.

right side and are rather acutely flexed. This flexation has been sometimes insured through the introduction of post-like slabs of limestone placed at knees, hips, feet, etc. As a burial practice, round or ovate boulders, always carefully chosen, were deposited in the graves. Red ocher and charcoal appear sparingly with most burials. Most unusual, we believe, is the characteristic use of pillow-like head-supports of native slate—these sometimes worked into roughly oval form but more often representing squared or rectangular quarry-slabs. The inclusion of funerary pottery is typical, and a specific form of pot has been used. This is of one-half gallon capacity, the body is ovoid and thin-walled, the rim is slightly flared, and the two handles are looped and rivetted. This funerary vessel is shell-tempered, as are practically all of the thousands of sherds recovered. It is plain or polished, as is most of the pottery in general. Perhaps one-fifth of the utilitarian vessels were cord-marked. The size range of these is from small and delicate forms to those of exceptional size. Truncate pans and straight-sided vessels are numerous, as are the "water bottle" forms. In vessels with handles both the loop and strap handle appears, but we have not observed the lugged form anywhere within this region.

Within the abundant midden deposits there were no grooved axes and no celts actually identifiable as such. Pestles with expanded bases were numerous, as were more or less crudely shaped mortars. Digging or agricultural tools were customarily of native slate and were quite often notched. Projectile points, knives, and drills were preponderantly of the Wyandotte hornstone, so generally used by Ohio River peoples. The small flint scraper so typical of Wabash River sites does not appear at Ohio Falls or indeed anywhere in this region. While triangular points were perhaps most numerous, notched and stemmed types are almost equally so.

Even though "grave goods" are in this manifestation rare, crude bone drills, needles, etc., are sometimes present, as are tubular beads of bone, and discoidal beads of shell. Except in the decoration of elbow pipes, upon the bowls of which human effigy faces or heads appear, there is little attempt at decorative expression. Although pipes of stone or clay in elbow, ovoid, and conical forms are abundant and are included with burials, decoration seems confined to the elbow type.

4. An occupation of especial importance, involving an extensive area upon both sides of the Ohio, of a group whom Moore has described from the Indian Knoll site upon Green River, Kentucky, some 150 miles southwest of Ohio Falls.

The material culture of this group has been so well described by Moore that we shall attempt here only a few observations by way of comparison. It must be concluded that the concentration of these peoples at Ohio Falls was much more extensive and prolonged than that at Indian Knoll and that it comprised, in fact, a tribal center of this group. There is much reason to believe, also, that it was occupied much earlier.

In general, the cultural character of the two sites is identical. There are, however, suggestive differences. Among these are:

a. That while Moore found numerous objects of copper at Indian

Knoll, we found none whatsoever at Ohio Falls, either within the midden deposits attributable to these people or in those of Group 3 above them.

b. That while Moore reports that the flint implements of Indian Knoll were customarily of a "dark flint," which we suspect was derived from the prolific quarries of southern Indiana, it was observed at Ohio Falls that the group of Indian Knoll affinity had apparently no knowledge of this material, or in any event, used it insignificantly. It is because of this fact that we are inclined to believe that a certain chronological value attached to the use or disuse of this material by Indian peoples upon the Ohio.

In almost every respect the material culture displayed at Ohio Falls was superior to that of Indian Knoll. It was obviously slightly affected, if at all, by contact with other peoples. Neither at Ohio Falls or at Indian Knoll does it appear that pottery was made or tobacco used. At Ohio Falls, at least, it is apparent that the use of the bow-and-arrow, if it was used at all, was much less practiced than the use of the spear or lance.

Inasmuch as Hrdlicka has assumed upon the basis of cranial characteristics that the people of Indian Knoll were Algonquin, none of the crania collected at Ohio Falls have been studied. Although there are numerous points in Hrdlicka's analysis upon which one may not agree, we are inclined to be receptive in respect to a possible Algonquin affinity. Our reasons are based upon abundant similarities in culture-traits, however, and not upon the physical element.

5. A possible "pre-Indian Knoll" occupation characterized by extensive underlying, midden deposits usually displaying a sod-line "break" or contact between the inferior and superior midden accumulations. The homogeneous and richly organic deposits of this stratum are, in fact, quite different in character from those of the identified Indian Knoll levels. They are composed almost entirely of millions of small molluscae (*Pleurocera*, *Campeloma*, etc.) in varying stages of disintegration; this is opposed to midden deposits of the superior strata, in which the *Unio* prevails. There are within this stratum no bones of larger mammals, except such as may have accrued from the midden deposits above. Instead, the animal remains comprise those of fish and waterfowl. Though our excavations have revealed that this deposit extends to a maximum depth of 8 feet 9 inches, resting sometimes upon sterile glacial outwash clays and in other quarters upon the lacustrine clay of the earlier lake-bed, the whole of human origin, we have found nowhere human remains or artifacts within it.

It is admitted that we have heretofore assumed that this midden was attributable to an occupation by the group of Indian Knoll affinity, this assumption based upon the unreliability of "sod lines" in sites of this character and upon the fact that the Indian Knoll midden upon the Kentucky side was upon the same glacial clays, or marls, earlier mentioned.

Upon the now denuded islands below Ohio Falls and upon the low rock shelves slightly above the normal pool-stage of the Ohio, Folsomoid projectile points have been found frequently. Almost invariably these are patinated and reworked. Upon an extensive low terrace upon a

branch of Silver Creek in Monroe and Union townships, similar Folsomoids have been found at several unimpressive campsites, these barren of pottery, so far as we have observed. It is of course possible that the Folsomoids of Ohio Falls may have derived from the stratum we have just described, for certainly none have appeared in the upper strata.

At the Robinson site in Washington Township, there is an impressive circular earthwork. Near this are a number of unexplored stone graves, these quite obviously representing an intrusive occupation of the site by later peoples. At the so-called "stone fort" at the mouth of Fourteen Mile Creek, a difficult examination of the surface has revealed no other evidence than a few plain or cordmarked, shell-tempered sherds and a customary use of Wyandotte flint. Artifacts from an apparently related village site suggest a Middle-Mississippi association. Upon the site itself triangular arrow points appear most numerous.

In the foregoing we have attempted to discuss as briefly as possible the several complications presented in the region. It must be admitted that the entire Ohio Falls region is decidedly important archeologically. It must appear obvious that our own survey has accomplished little more than to suggest the desirability of further investigation.