

The Fifield Site (Porter '37), Upper Mississippi Manifestations in Porter County, Indiana¹

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The Fifield Site (1), a Northern Indiana Village, is in the north-central part of Porter County (Liberty Township) situated on a pleasant little bluff overlooking the swampy valley of Damon Run Creek. Interested persons will be taken to the site by the writer who lives nearby. The soil is a light sandy loam which in Section A (sections explained later) is farmed yearly but which is much less fertile in Section B. Though the site has not been surveyed it appears to cover at least twenty acres, a small portion of which is wooded. The grassy strath below, and extending far east and west, appears, itself, to have been a fairly good small game ground.

The site exists amid Woodland surroundings. These affiliations, especially Hopewell, were established in 1930 by McAllister on the basis of mound explorations made in his survey for the State Historical Bureau. No villages proper were examined, either because there are none other than the Fifield Site, or, like it, they were missed completely by the surey party (2). These Hopewellian surroundings in the northern and southern sections of the county are, of course, alienated to the Fifield Site, which upon superficial examination can be seen to be Mississippian, and with more detailed study, as will be shown, can be placed into the Fisher Focus, Fort Ancient Aspect, Upper Mississippi Phase.

The site was divided into Sections A and B physically because of a bit of erosion between the sections, and culturally because of the majority of Woodland tendencies on the A side. Though the surface collections generally paralleled the later pit findings as to pottery types, form and decoration, it became apparent that in Section A twice as much Type II pottery, the coarse, crumbly, thick, grit-tempered ware, was to be found as in Section B. Besides this, in Section A nine notched projectile points were found, while the only form to be seen in B is the triangular (Fig. 1, A, B). This is perhaps flimsy evidence, and if it weren't for the fact that Type II pottery appears in the pits of Section B mixed with Type I, the typical Fifield ware, the exceedingly small amount of Type II might be ignored as a negligible coincidence.

After the surface collections were made, a promising spot in Section B was chosen and two plots of three five-foot squares each were laid out beside each other. When the humus was removed four pits were revealed, two in each plot. Carrying the plots down to the exhaustion

¹ Glenn A. Black, Angel Mounds, showed very helpful interest when the material was being studied at I. U.; W. R. Adams, Bloomington, identified all the bones; Bob Forth, Bloomington, made the photos, and assistance in making the excavations was given by Paul Humphreys, S. Rand, and R. Cooper, all of the Calumet Region. Mr. Don F. Boyd, Dir. Sauk Trails Boy Scout Camp, revealed the site and was otherwise helpful.

FIG. 1



Fig. 1

Top: Flint tool forms. A, typical projectile point; B, a second type found in Section A; C and D, drill types; E, blank or scraper.

Middle: F, G, H, I, some trailing designs. G, found mostly on necks; I, often suggested in some form but never in suitable detail.

Bottom: J, assumption of use put to F (middle) and illustration of G.

of these pits constituted the entire amount of excavation. Although comparatively much was procured, it is evident that the findings listed

here are only beginnings and suggestions, and that future explorations will prove more interesting and rewarding, should they be corroborative or corrective.

Before discussing the contents a word might be said of the basin-shaped pits themselves. Were they cooking, storage, or refuse pits? Pits I and II at six inches (the humus, a six to nine inch plowline, is never considered as a level) were discovered to be one pit, though a division on the basis of content could still be discerned. One side was fire-burnt on the bottom and the profuse animal bones, mixed with a dense almost greasy humus among which were unidentifiable vegetal remains and charred nutshells, were almost invariably burnt, sometimes very charred and calcined. The other side contained clean though badly broken bones in a lighter, sandier matrix. Also in the darker burnt side was found a raccoon penis bone which is considered by some to have been used to fish things out of cooking pots. Much refuse was found throughout both sides. This was true also of the other two pits. Pit III seemed to be definitely divided, especially in the lowest level, into a cooking pit and an unfired "refuse-storage" pit similar to pits I-II. In the unfired section of III the bones were still white and generally more complete. Pit IV gave no such hints, the entire matrix being a greasy black, with large bones mixed promiscuously with charcoal, shell, pottery, and projectile points to a depth of only six inches below plowline. In this pit was a post-hole-like outline six inches in diameter which extended over a foot perpendicularly below the pit bottom, possibly to hold the pot over the fire. This was the only feature even likely to be a post-hole. The pits were from three to five feet in diameter at Level I and except for pit IV were around two feet deep counting the humus.

There were profuse faunal remains found in the four pits with some rather interesting specimens in addition to the more common material. Of course deer bones comprised the major amount of the mass and next in line of prevalence were dog, box turtle, and snapping turtle, though these were not plentiful. In Pit IV large bones of what is probably wapiti, but may be cow, were found. Bison is apparently present and good examples of wild turkey, a species of waterfowl, wolf, bear, striped skunk, raccoon, opossum, mountain lion, bobcat, muskrat, beaver, fox and gray squirrel, and species of fish were turned up. The passenger pigeon, which, according to W. R. Adams of Bloomington, is enigmatically rare in mid-west aboriginal villages, appeared in all the pits but IV. Most puzzling is the presence of a domestic chicken humerus in Pit IV. Pit IV, however, is the shallow pit and the excavation showed that it still merged without dichotomy into the humus, possibly allowing for a later introduction of the bone.

Bone, shell, and stone tools and artifacts were found in the pits in addition to pottery. The projectile points are small, finely chipped triangles of flint; these appeared in great numbers both on the surface and in the pits, but in no pits were any notched forms found. Also of flint are two types of drill, a small nail-like form and a larger T-shaped variety. The blank or scraper is present, though not in profusion (Fig. 1,

A, B, C, D, and E). A comb or hairspreader with depressions drilled around the edges (Fig. 2, S), a notched rasper-like artifact, a beamer, a flat needle, and an unfinished whistle were of bone. A sharpened antler tine and one small cylinder of antler were found. In addition, a notched shell spoon, and a tiny bead of the same material were encountered. The discovery of a split beaver incisor with scratched incisions across the front enamel was of interest; the reason for the incisions is not known.

Of eight-hundred cord-roughened and smooth body sherds from the pits, the cord-roughened sherds outnumbered the smooth four times; .025% of these were of Type II ware, three-quarters coming from Pit IV. The Type II ware was decorated only in one instance, there by lug.

Whenever there was enough of a sherd to indicate the shape of the vessel, it was the flared bowl (olla) form. The handles are small loops on the neck but not connecting the neck and shoulder as in the Fisher prototype. A fortunate find was an almost complete example of this type from the middle level of Pit III (Fig. 3).

The principal means of decoration aside from ordinary cord-roughening is trailing, and notching of rims (Fig. 2). The trailing is divided between (1) a medium to narrow "antler-point" groove and ordinary narrow trailing, and (2) a broad, shallow type which dictates slightly the shape of the vessel, modeling having been involved in executing it, resulting in a rippled effect (Fig. 3). Therefore it is probably not actual trailing but an advancement thereon. It seems to consist generally of rows of parallel vertical canals or wide grooves around the shoulders of the pots; trailing proper, be it antler-point or otherwise, follows (with only one exception) angular rectilinear designs about the necks, shoulders, and bodies of the bowls (Fig. 2, E, F, G, H, I, M, N, P). There was usually not enough of the design to tell what motif was intended but the general idea, or one idea, seems to be similar to that found at Fisher and shown in drawing here. Lines often joined one main line at similar angles; here again the sherds were too small to show the intentions of the potter. (Fig. 1, F, G, H, I, J).

Only cord-roughened parts or pots were decorated in the above ways.

Of forty-six rim-sherds all but five were notched in one of two ways, that is, (1) plain notching on the top, outer, inner, or both sides of the orifice, or (2) incising in like manner (Fig. 2, A, B, C, I, K, M, N, P, R, T). The majority was of common notching by impressing a rounded stick on the flattened lip. Only a few notched rims were of smooth collars—decoration of any kind seems to be subsequent to cord-roughening. One rim was punctuated on the flattened lip (Fig. 2, O).

There were perhaps two instances of incising, suggesting a chevron development (Fig. 2, N), but the boundary between incising and narrow trailing is obscure. There is one sherd with a scratched cross. Rare cases of thumb depressions and four reliable examples of punctate, two from Section A and two from B, including the rim mentioned above.

were turned up. The practical absence of punctate is puzzling. Lugs or knobs appeared on five sherds, these probably non-functional, both welded and pinched little protruberances near the orifices (Fig. 2, A, D, O). Several other odd features were noted but minutiae can be omitted because of the lack of sufficient numbers to permit classification and generalization.

Considering the above with what is diagnostic of Fisher Focus it becomes apparent that the Fifield Site comes under that division

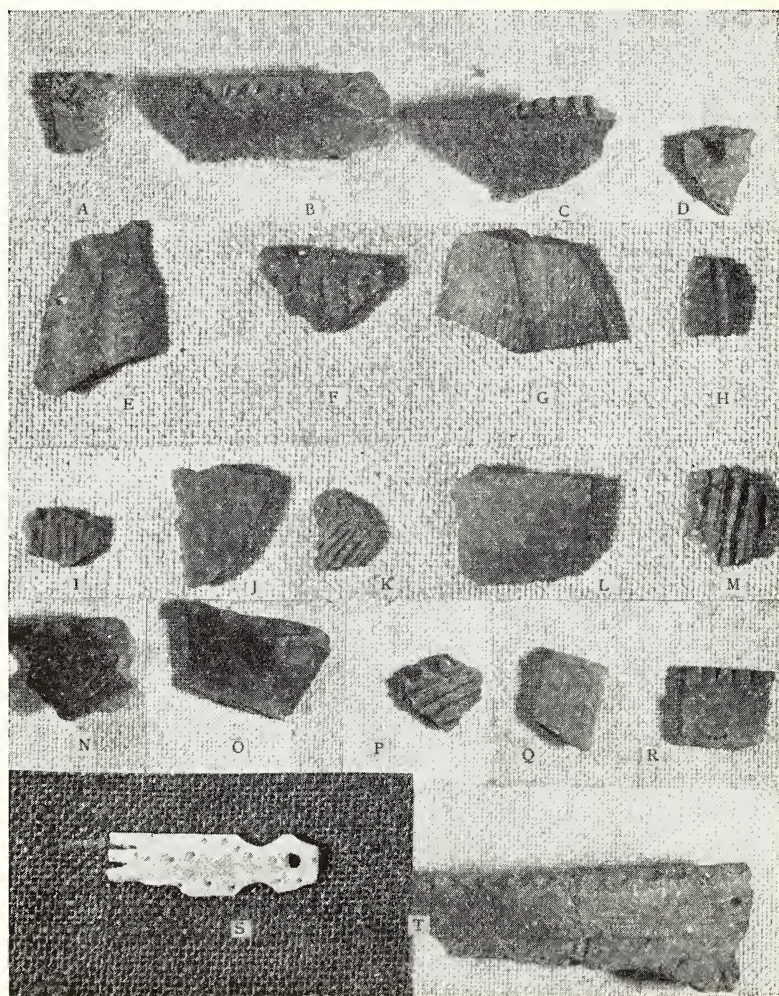


Fig. 2.

Rims and body sherds illustrating decoration techniques.

S, a broken comb converted into an ornament; T, drilled rim, for repair purposes?

most conveniently. The shell-tempered pottery of consistent bowl (olla) form chiefly decorated by trailing, rarely with loop handles on opposite sides of the rim; the fine little triangular points; the shell spoon; the whistle; the antler cylinder; and the bone beamer are things which might be found right on the Fisher Mounds Site (1).

But it finally must be admitted that there are a few problems. It can be said that the things that Fifield lacks, such as punctate pottery, beads, ear spools, gastropod ornaments, shell pendants, the various awls, and antler projectile points will probably appear in future investigations; and it must be remembered that much of the material from Fisher Mounds can be considered actual grave goods, while the Fifield material is utilitarian trash. But the Fifield village also has

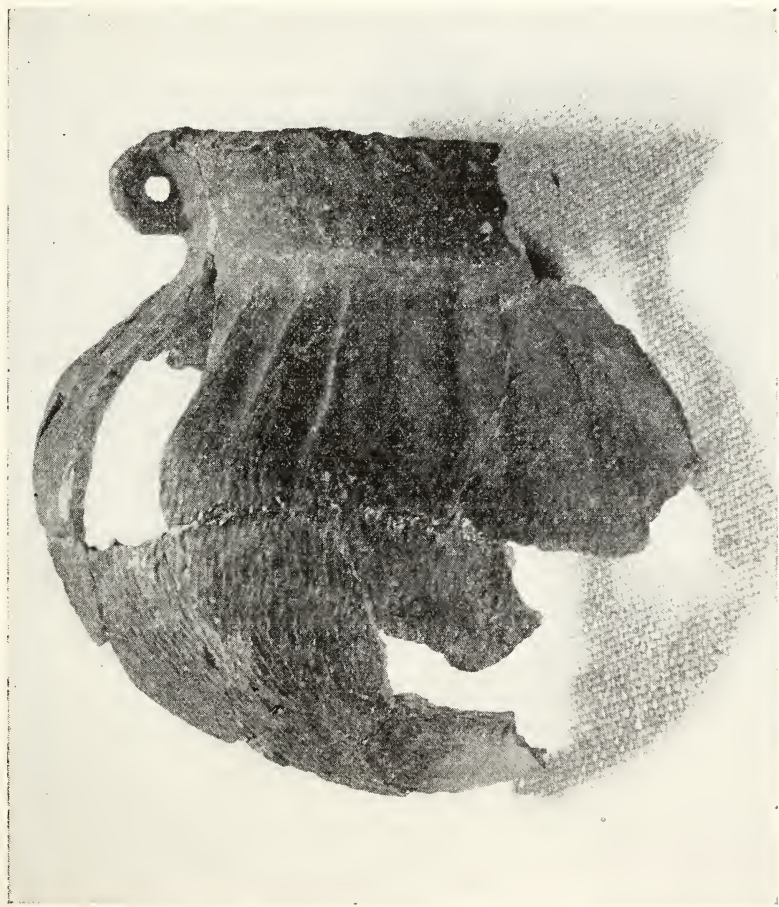


Fig. 3.

Almost complete bowl (olla), sole Fifield vessel form; it illustrates most of the diagnostics.

some things which are unknown to Fisher. The drilled hair-spreader is similar to a Madisonville type. The bone rasper is reminiscent of some Feurt forms; and the bead is not a Fisher type. Also, the Fisher people apparently did not eat Bison or passenger pigeon though this does not seem to be of much importance.

Aside from these things there are further questions. Pit IV's chicken humerus is one and the two pottery wares poses another. If we are to say that the Fifield people made two types of pottery why isn't a considerable amount of the second kind shown? Likewise it does not seem likely that a few sherds might have been brought in by outsiders and strewn here and there for no particular reason. We can look to future investigations to add to our knowledge about this site and how it is related to other Fort Ancient foci.

Literature Cited

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2. MCALLISTER, J. GILBERT. 1932. The archaeology of Porter County. *Indiana History Bulletin* 10, No. 1:62-66.