

A Preliminary Report on the Leonard Site

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Abstract

The Leonard Site, designated 12-Po-20, is located in southwest Posey County, less than one mile from the Wabash and Ohio rivers. Two well known Mississippian sites, Bone Bank and Murphy, are within two miles. Initial excavations reveal both Mississippian and Woodland occupations of the Leonard Site, with the former predominant. Burials with grave goods, pits and post molds have been observed in an area of the village used primarily as a cemetery. Excavation will continue in other areas of the site, with the hope that materials recovered will further define the late prehistory of the region.

Introduction

Although the contour of the area surrounding the Leonard Site is relatively level, a slough forms a natural boundary along the southwest perimeter of the site. With two large rivers near, and a rich variety of plant and animal life present, prehistoric peoples would have found this an attractive area. It still serves as a feeding and resting place for ducks and geese during their passage in the spring and fall. The presence of cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*) some 3 miles northeast at Hovey Lake, suggests the mildness of the climate.

Other prehistoric sites within 2 miles of the Leonard Site include two large Mississippian villages, generally known as Bone Bank and Murphy. The Bone Bank Site has been destroyed by river erosion. Numerous, but smaller, sites are scattered about the general vicinity. As yet little is known of the relationships between these sites and the micro-environment exploited by their inhabitants.

Exploratory excavation of the Leonard Site began in 1964, and has progressed slowly as time and assistance has been available. Work has proceeded by clearing 5 and 10 foot square units, with most of the fill being troweled as well as sifted, (Fig. 1). A test trench near the natural boundary of the slough revealed a small debris pit containing nine Mississippian sherds, and a midden that increased in thickness away from the slough.

A second test trench, at right angles to the first, uncovered a shallow firepit. At a depth of 9 inches, a charcoal-strewn oval, some 69 inches long, marked the shallow grave pit of an extended burial.

With more time available in 1969, the site was surveyed for more intensive and systematic study. Some 43 work units (5 x 5 feet) were selected in an area designated as Grid A. Excavation soon revealed 9 more burials. Four of these appeared at 21 inches depth, or considerably deeper than the others. Finding what appeared to

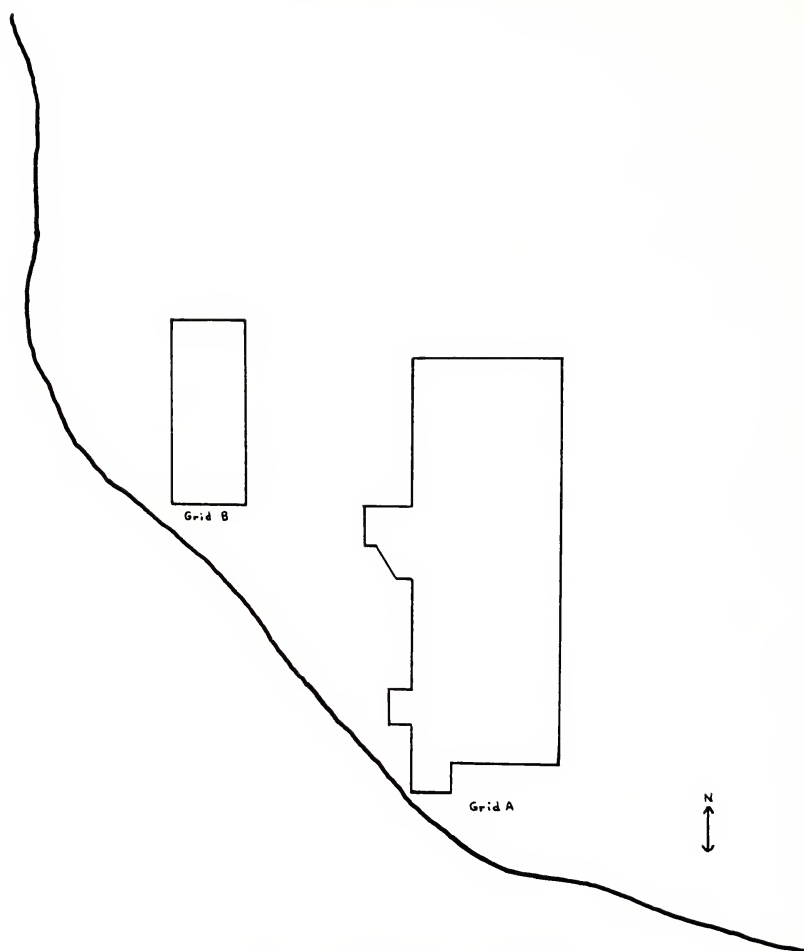


FIGURE 1. *Grid chart for Leonard Site.*

be two levels of burials, the area of initial excavation was reopened, and four lower level burials were found.

As excavation has moved away from the slough, the thickness of midden has increased and frequency of burials has decreased. Apparently the living area of the village lies in this direction. Future excavation will be concentrated away from the slough.

Pits, Middens, and Post-molds

Seven fire-pits have been recognized at the Leonard Site, all of which contained charcoal and ash. Stones cracked "*in situ*" by a rapid change in temperature are not in association. However, sporadic examples of such have been excavated in the site area. One feature

(Feature 6) had large amounts of burnt clay in context with the charcoal.

Shallow depths of 5.25 inches to 10.5 inches are apparent in 5 of the pits. The basin shape is predominate, with the exception of Feature 10 which is wedge shaped with steep sides.

Features 16 and 17 record what appears to be a double pit. Being bowl shaped, the sides of the upper pit are steep and angle inward. Contact with a basin-shaped lower pit was made at the 26-inch depth. The upper pit shows no indication of being intrusive into the lower pit.

Seventeen pottery sherds and six faunal specimens were recovered from the upper pit. The lower pit, with a depth of 6.5 inches, contained 4 sherds and 1 faunal example. The sherds excavated from both pits show glacial granite, and iron concretion tempering.

Two debris pits (Features 1 and 27) had shallow depths of 6.25 inches and 5.5 inches, respectively.

Pit 1 with a diameter of 14.5 inches was basin-shaped and contained 16 shell tempered pottery sherds. Eight distinct forms of paste and surface decoration are evident. The sherds are typical of Neeley's Ferry Plain, and all three time components at the Kincaid Site.

Pit 27 measured 13.5 inches in diameter. Nine examples of faunal material (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and two smooth paste, shell tempered sherds were present in this pit. Four stones were also in context with materials recovered.

No quantities of shell have been observed so far. Some 13 examples have been recovered, with 2 of these being artifacts in association with burials.

Eighteen post-molds have been charted with no apparent indication of a structural pattern.

Post-molds (6) in Grid A are tapered to a definable tip at the base. Mold depths of 6.5 inches to 13 inches have been recorded. Support material around the posts is composed of clay without the inclusion of cultural debris.

Molds in Grid B show both tapered and blunt bases. The blunt base is defined as a post that has a diameter of 4 inches but tapers to 2 inches at the bottom. Support material includes clay, burnt clay, and charcoal.

Pottery

The Leonard Site has yielded 577 pottery sherds. The types of tempering materials used in the manufacture of the potsherds are listed in Table 1. Sherds of shell tempering are 17 mm to 0.8 mm in thickness. Diameters of 5.7 mm to minute particles were noted in the crushed shell. Paste colors range from black to light gray, and light tan to salmon.

TABLE 1. *Number of pottery sherds by tempering materials.*

Tempering of Pottery Sherds	Total
Shell	487
Glacial Granite	27
Sandy Paste	18
Clay	14
Iron Concretion-Clay	12
Reground Sherd	8
Shell-Sand	5
Shell-Quartz	3
Iron Concretion-Sand	3

Sherds having non-shell temper measured 15 mm to 5 mm in thickness with temper diameters of 3 mm to minute particles of mica. Paste colors are buff to dirty orange with an occasional black.

The glacial granite used for tempering is composed of Quartz, Hornblende, Biotite (Mica), and Feldspar. In this igneous rock there appears a conflict of forming possibly due to slow chilling. The loose crystalline structure is easily crushed for tempering purposes. Stones of this glacial material are readily available in the Wabash River Valley and specimens have been excavated at the Leonard Site.

Iron concretions used as tempering could have been intentional or accidental. Every clay deposit contains a percentage of iron sulphide. When ground waters come in contact with calcium in the soil above the clay strata a basic solution results. This solution through absorption into clay attacks the iron sulphide. When evaporation takes place the result is a basic iron concretion.

Clay used for pottery making at the Leonard Site has the iron concretion in association. Perhaps the clay was used because of the composition or it was used without knowledge of the adhering properties of such.

Shell tempering was predominant in sherds with surface decorations (Table 2). Grit tempering occurred only in the cordmarked sherd.

An engraved sherd was in association with Burial 11. Chippings at the edges of the geometric design indicate that engraving took place after the vessel had been fired. The sherd is typical of the Moundville focus and is recorded as such. Materials of this type have been excavated at the Kincaid Site (1).

Ceramic Vessels

Six pottery vessels and one trowel have been recovered from the Leonard Site. Special mention of four vessels follows.

Artifact 165 is a shell tempered vessel with punctate and incised body decorations. Eight flat strap handles are connected to the shoulder and pinched flared rim. Visual inspection of a wash out at

TABLE 2. *Surface decorations of pottery sherds.*

Surface Decorations	Total
Smooth	489
Incised	32
Punctate (Stick)	9
Stick Punctate and Incised	5
Lugs	4
Nodes	3
Reed Brushed	3
Vertical Applique Stripping	2
Pinched Rim	2
Cordmarked	1
Punctate (Reed)	1
Nodes and Incised	1
Engraved	1
Strap Handles (Flat)	7
Strap Handles (Projecting Horns)	1
Perforated for Suspension	1

the south edge of the site revealed this vessel. The type matches a variety found in the Lower Tallapoosa-Upper Alabama River Valley.

A plain paste, globular vessel was excavated in association with Burial 5. Four flat strap handles are equally spaced around the vessel. Also in evidence is a rudimentary collar such as found at Cahokia (2).

Pottery Vessel 116, found in association with Burial 2, is shell tempered and globular. Two flat strap handles are on opposite sides of two lugs. The smooth paste vessel has a slightly flared rim. Comparable types are also found at the Cahokia complex (3).

Vessel 1204 is similar to Jar 23 found at the Kincaid Site (1). Perforations on opposite sides are for suspension purposes. The flared rim is pinched. Shell tempering and smooth paste are noted with the globular shape.

Burials

Sixteen primary Burials have been recorded at the Leonard Site. Burial 10 was intrusive into Feature 16, and Burial 13 was intrusive into Burial 16.

The extended burial position was preferred by these people. The exception to this practice was Burial 13 which was recovered in a semi-flexed position. Ten of the burials are noted as facing east, or a slight deviation of such.

Level 1 burials range from 8 to 13 inches deep while Level 2 burials measure 19 to 21 inches deep. The depth measurements were taken from surface level to the frontal area of the skull.

The burials were seemingly placed in pits. In the shallow (Level 1) burials these pits became apparent as the horizon of culture debris

decreased. Charcoal, in considerable quantities, was found in the fill around the burials, but there was no evidence of charring of bones. The radiocarbon date of a charcoal sample recovered from Level 1, (Burial 15), was 1490 A.D. (4).

Level 2 burials were in pits of comparable physical characteristics, however, 11 to 13 inches of hard sterile clay was in evidence above the pit area. There was no indication of a burial pit until 1.5 to 3 inches above the frontal area of the skull. This peculiar situation resulted in the miscalculation of burial levels on the part of the writer.

A headless burial (No. 6) was recorded among the lower level burials. Similar burials have been recorded at a number of sites in Illinois. In one instance at the Kincaid Site, the skull was found wrapped in bark, and placed on a level above the remainder of the body. This burial was found in a mound dated pre-1523 A.D. (1).

Evidences of deformed crania due to cradleboard flattening were noted on burials at Po-20. Lipping of the lumbar vertebrae on some burials was also apparent. Concentrated study of the skeletal materials will undoubtedly disclose additional physical abnormalities.

Associated grave goods have been found with five Level 1 burials. These burial offerings have diagnostic traits of the Middle Mississippian cultures. Four of the burials were adult males with the fifth being an infant. Sex of the infant burial was indeterminate due to decomposition of the skeletal material.

TABLE 3. *Stone, shell, and bone traits.*

General Utility Tools	Weapons
Snub-nose Scrapers	Triangular Shaped Points
Side Scrapers	Leaf Shaped Points
End Scrapers	Lanceolate Shaped Points
Core Scraper	Side Notched Points
Bi-Facial Knives	Antler Point, Tanged
Flake Knives	Woodworking
Choppers	Flint Chisel
Shell Ladle	Granite Celt
Fabricating and Processing Tools	Digging or Agricultural Implements
Straight Shaft Drills	Perforated Shell Hoe
Expanding Base Drills	Miscellaneous
Flint Gravers	Shredders
Bone Flaker	Plummets (Galena)
Bone Awl	Galena Chunk (Edges Worked)
Grooved Sandstone Abrader	Cannel Coal Disc

One pottery vessel, two galena plummets, and one knife blade were in association with Burial 2. The vessel (No. 116) was excavated 12 inches northwest of the skull in an upright position. Plummets 117 and 118 were found on the sternum. The left radius region near the wrist disclosed Plummets 117 and 118. Both plummets were fully grooved near the base. A triangular grooved cut is visible in Plummets 117 and 118 suggesting

that the latter had been ceremonially "killed." The left hand held a multi-colored knife blade.

The infant burial (No. 4) contained one trianguloid shaped point with a straight base and convex blade edges. The point was recovered from underneath the right mandible region.

The pottery vessel associated with Burial 5 was described previously in the paper. It was setting in an upright position just above the right clavicle.

Vessel 1204 was excavated near the parietal region of Burial 10. The mouth of the vessel was in an angular position with orientation being to the southeast.

A cache of triangular points was noted near the left pelvic region of Burial 11. The 12 points were positioned as though a pouch was at one time surrounding them. One has a concave base, while the remainder have straight bases. Materials from different regions were used in the manufacturing of these points. The engraved pottery sherd was with this burial, along with a shell hoe, a cannel coal disc, drum fish tooth, and one gar fish scale. This group of burial offerings was found near a humerus.

Conclusions

Further examination of the Leonard Site is necessary before any substantive conclusions can be drawn. An initial site analysis raises questions of its relationship to other Mississippian sites in southwest Indiana, including Bone Bank, Murphy, Mann, and the Angel Mound Site. No extensive relationship can as yet be demonstrated, but there appear to be some similarities with Illinois sites. Further excavation may answer these questions, as well as that of the relationships between co-existing Mississippian and Woodland cultures of late prehistoric southern Indiana.

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