

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY

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Archaeological investigations on the route of the new Natchez Trace Parkway, now under construction by the National Park Service between Natchez and Nashville, have revealed definite linkage between burial-mound-building peoples of a basic Woodland pattern in the Central and Eastern states and prehistoric inhabitants of Northern Mississippi. Following the lead of Jesse D. Jennings, former Park Service archaeologist who pioneered the location of over 200 sites along the Trace and identified the Miller culture within the Woodland pattern at Lee County sites in 1940-41, the writer began work on MCs-16, a mound and village group in Chicksaw County near Houston, Mississippi, known as the Bynum site.

Progress on the Bynum site continued uninterrupted through the winter of 1948. In all, five conical burial mounds were excavated, three in essentially undisturbed condition, the remaining two being only remnants. Simultaneously, a five-acre village area was systematically gridded with 10-foot trenches at 40-foot intervals, with the result that seven circular patterns of individually set post molds denoting large communal houses were uncovered, one of which extended partially beneath a mound. Significantly, this mound, designated A, featured an extended flesh burial of a paramount individual accompanied by flexed burials nearby, all lying on a burnt floor and framed by large logs. Although the only grave goods were two pairs of copper spools on the wrists of the paramount burial, sherds in the mound fill of Mounds A and B indicated clay-grit cordmarked pottery was known at the village when the mounds were constructed.

Evidence indicated that the intact mounds, B and D, were built by people whose burial customs included such key traits as the deposition of cremations and flesh burials in circular pits following a fire ceremony. The fire involved destruction of a canopy of some sort supported by heavy upright logs. Copper spools in pairs differing slightly in manufacture from those of Mound A, greenstone celts, flaked spear points, bucyrcon shells and

galena traces were included in the pit with the burials. Finally, the earth mound was erected over the pit and its contents in a single continuous operation. No intrusive burials were encountered nor were additional burials laid down in the mound fill during construction.

An occupation at the Bynum village by people associated with cordmarked pottery may have followed the first mound building represented by Mound D. These people left a scattering of flexed burials cramped into small oval pits, head oriented to the east. None of these burials occurred inside the large house patterns, nor were they identified with any other post-hole patterns in the village.

As an added horizon above the prehistoric occupation of Bynum village, burials of early 19th Century Chickasaws were discovered as the excavations drew to a close. One cluster of these burials lay directly above and intrusive upon a 60-foot circular house pattern.

The final report on the Bynum site was written by the author and John M. Corbett, laboratory archaeologist, who joined the Natchez Trace Parkway staff during the Bynum operations, but left for a Washington office assignment when the first draft of the manuscript was completed. Publication of this report is expected within the next two years.

Operations were next transferred to the Natchez area in Mississippi in October 1948, and a series of stratigraphic tests were made on the second largest temple mound in the United States, the Emerald Mound, near the extinct village of Selzer-town, 12 miles north of Natchez. This earthwork, with basal dimensions of 700x400 feet, averaging 30 feet in height, and surmounted by a 17 foot truncated mound at the west end and a disturbed remnant of a mound now six feet high on the east end, was found to be essentially as estimated by Squier and Davis over a hundred years ago, i.e., earth fill contoured over a natural oval hill, the top of which may have been flattened as the peripheral area was filled. Profile cuts demonstrated that a village site had first occupied the hill, and rectangular walled structures with posts set in trenches were encountered in this initial occupation. Next, an earth rampart five feet high was created at the foot of

the hill, possibly with a palisade along the inner slope of the rampart. Finally, fill was added between the rampart and the hill, and beyond the rampart; and a second occupational level was established, to disappear in turn beneath more fill.

Also in accord with Squier and Davis's report of lateral secondary mounds observed on top of the primary platform early in the 19th Century, internal evidence on the north side of the primary fill indicated steep-sided earth mounds were once erected and later obliterated by added fill within the primary structure.

Natchezean-type incised pottery with clay-grit paste was found throughout the fill of the primary mound, with brushed pottery conspicuous, particularly in the old village level. A small minority of shell tempered ware was observed. In general, the pottery types corresponded more clearly to Louisiana-Southern Mississippi ceramic types than to the more northern Middle Mississippi ceramic wares.

Analysis of sherd types by stratigraphically established zones was carried out by the writer at the laboratory at headquarters after the completion of the tests, and a final report is now in its first draft.

Concurrently, a small test was made at the rich Anna Mound site on the bluffs of the Mississippi 15 miles north of Natchez. One of the smaller of eight truncated pyramidal mounds was tested to a depth of 17 feet and over 1300 sherds were recovered from a 5x10 foot excavation. Zones of occupation and building were established, beginning with a village zone at the base. A close correspondence with the Emerald Mound was established, with, however, significant differences in ceramic type percentages as in the Emerald Mound tests, no features except post-holes in trenches were noted, and the artifacts were almost 100 percent ceramic. The Anna test report is being undertaken at this time by the writer.

A third field campaign is scheduled to begin September 15, 1949, at MJe-1, a Coles Creek village and mound group known as the Gordon site, in Jefferson County, 25 miles northeast of Natchez. This excavation is expected to take three months and will be followed by a laboratory operation to process and study the material. Programmed work on five additional sites will be

supplemented by salvage of any new sites found within construction limits of the Parkway for the duration of the Archaeological Survey Project.

The first extensive investigations on Natchez Trace Parkway, undertaken before the work described above, were conducted between April, 1940, and February, 1941, by a Works Projects Administration project sponsored by Natchez Trace Parkway with Jennings, as sponsor's representative, supervising work at four sites and Albert C. Spaulding, WPA State Supervisor, in charge of the excavation of four more sites. These eight sites, all in Lee County, Mississippi, were as follows: MLe-14, 18, 19, and 90, all historic Chickasaw villages associated with the "Chickasaw Old Fields" west of Tupelo, Mississippi; MLe-14, though yielding Chickasaw house patterns, also sowed by the evidence of Natchezean pottery that it may have been in the area of the Ackia battlefield of 1736 when Bienville's punitive expedition against the Chickasaw and their Natchez wards failed. The remaining four, MLe-53, 53a, 56, and 62 were related to an older horizon, designated the Miller culture, derived ultimately from a generalized Woodland basic pattern and were characterized by burial mounds and cordmarked pottery. A complete report of the eight historic and prehistoric sites was made by Jennings.¹

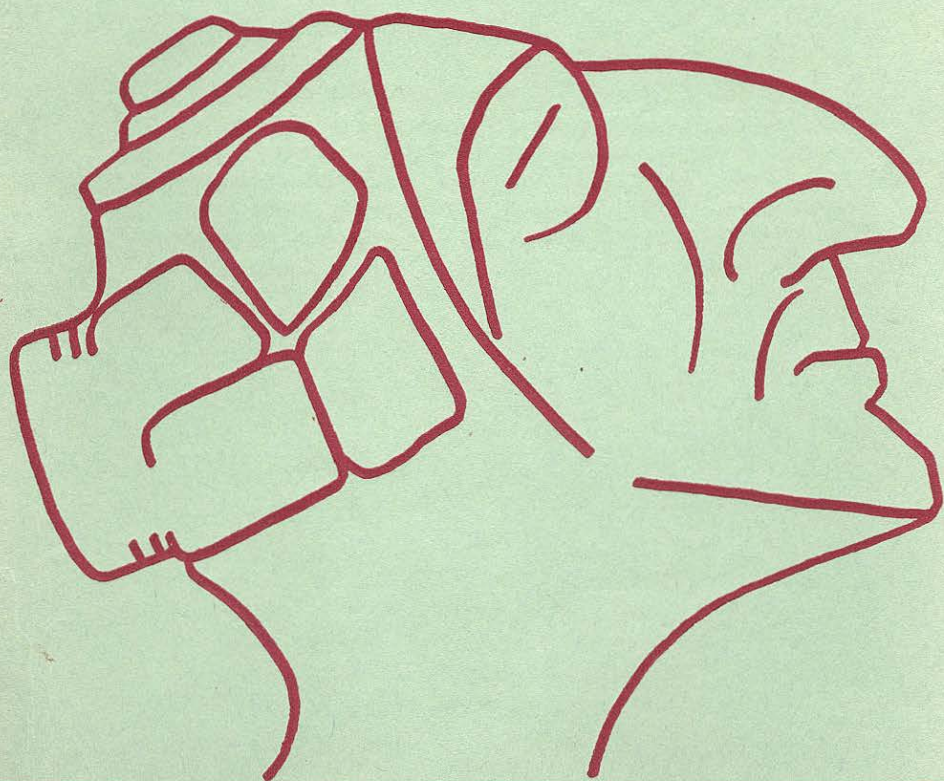
The war years brought the work of the Archaeological Survey of Natchez Trace Parkway to a halt. In 1946, a new project was programmed by Jennings and accepted by the Park Service, with funds annually set aside for field work. Four major and five minor sites were chosen for excavation within the Parkway right-of-way. Before work could begin, Jennings was transferred to the office of Region Two and the Trace assignment was assumed by the writer.

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1. J. D. Jennings, "Chickasaw and Earlier Indian Culture of Northeastern Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History*, III, (July, 1941).

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