

## Early Native American Iroquois Mound Builders in Jay County, Indiana

Indiana Department of Geology and Natural History 12th Annual Report, 1882

### Archaeology



The antiquities of Jay County are full of interest. Though there are no extensive earthworks, the whole region abounds in relics of the aboriginal and prehistoric peoples. The characteristic implements, utensils and ornaments have been found in every township-such as grooved axes, hammers, pestles, fleshers, arrowheads, totems, pipes and pottery. The only mounds observed were very small, and almost obliterated, being in two localities-one group of five small ones, located in Section 35, Penn Township; another of three similar mounds in Section 13, Knox Township. They are all obscurely oval, being from twenty-five to fifth feet in length, and from three to five feet high. Some have been almost obliterated by cultivation.

Dr. Arthur, of Portland, has thoroughly investigated their structure, but they have yielded no specimens, either in implements, pottery or bones. All of them contained ashes and alternating layers of clay, burned brick red, and beds of charcoal. They were probably habitation mounds, and possibly some of the outlying villages of that

numerous people who have left monumental evidences in the great earthworks of Winchester and Anderson that this region was a center of their national power. While the mounds are thus unimportant, the relics gathered from various parts of the county are full of interest.

Their abundance and variety has attracted the attention of many collectors. Extensive collections have been made by Dr. C. S. Arthur, of Portland, Gen. J. P. C. Shanks, Mr. John Lalley. Dr. Porter, of Geneva, Adams County, also has a large number of fine specimens, many of them gathered in Jay County.

These various collections include a variety of articles not often equaled in a single county. Much of the workmanship is quite elaborate, showing in execution both taste and skill. The hardest rock has been fashioned and polished into symmetry and beauty. The excellence of the work is amazing as we remember it was wrought by men who had no knowledge of the harder metals.

The variety of material used is astonishing. We have observed Indian arrowheads of all descriptions, flints of every color, even to green. One arrowhead, in possession of Gen. Shanks, is made from crystalline quartz. Most of the stone axes are made of granite, in its various forms of syenite, diorite, or greenstone. The pipes are usually steatite, or soapstone. Some of these are of curious form, and exhibit considerable skill in copying natural objects. Dr. Arthur's collection contains one that is a fair representation of an otter, and another a good imitation of a rattlesnake's head.

Tubular pipes are met with. One in the possession of Dr. Porter, at Geneva, is about ten inches long, made of steatite. The bowl is funnel-shaped and horizontal, not turned up in ordinary pipe form. A shorter one in Dr. Arthur's cabinet shows the marks of the teeth of some energetic smoker.

Occasionally throughout this county rounded masses of a flinty silicious stone are found, having a sharp angular fracture, quite spheroidal in form, and varying in size from a hen's egg to the fist of a man. They have evidently been used as implements. They are not the ordinary hammer stones, having neither grooves nor polished surfaces. All of them have the sharp angular pointed appearance on the sides where the laminations of the material end. They all have this characteristic. Only a few of them have been found.

Dr. Arthur suggests their use in the manufacture of implements from the granitic rocks. It was found upon trial that the burned edges of these stones would readily disintegrate the hardest green stone, when applied with continued yet gentle blows. The sharp

points granulated the granite very rapidly, and a few hours only would suffice to form a battle-axe or pestle from any syenitic boulder.

We have not learned whether implements of this description have been observed in other localities. We offer this as a suggestion of their probable use.

Near the Salamonie, south of Portland, on the land of Mr. Jonas Votaw, in Section 28, Wayne Township is a deposit of sand and gravel, in which were found at one time seventeen human skeletons, lying at a position below the present level of the Salamonie, apparently an ancient sepulcher. The bones and relics were all in an advanced stage of decay, so that many crumbled on exposure. The only relics preserved were a tubular pipe of steatite, and what is evidently the osselet of a squid or calamary, the internal bone or shell of a cephalopod, called the "pen," from its pointed, pencil-like form. The specimen is a perfect one, with the conical cavity at the lower end, showing distinctly its nature. It must have been transported from the sea coast as an ornament. Other relics of similar nature and origin have been discovered, indicating tribal communications among the ancient people, and interchange of commodities.

In a gravel pit just south of Portland, in Section 20, one of those broad, shoal-like deposits of gravel and sand, overlaid by a few feet of yellow sedimentary sand soil, was found a locality, about three feet below the surface, where ashes and charcoal were found mingled with the gravel, some of the boulders showing the action of heat. Associated with them were fragments of pottery, of rather a rude character, yet exhibiting some symmetry of outline, with traces of ornamentation, being decorated by marks made with the fingernail before the baking of the pottery. There were no indications on the surface of any disturbance of the soil; no irregularity of outline either in elevation or depression. It is probable that a small habitation mound had once occupied this spot that in such yielding, sandy soil had, in the lapse of ages, been wholly obliterated.

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**Contributed by Jim Cox**