

Archaeology at the Angel Mounds Site*

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For the past eighteen months the Indiana Historical Society, with the cooperation of the Works Progress Administration, has been exploring a large prehistoric Indian village and mound group known as the Angel Site, in Vanderburgh-Warrick Counties, Indiana. The site is, by far, the most interesting and spectacular aboriginal remnant in the state and occupies an important position in the archaeology of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys.

Physically, the site is dominated by a large bi-level, truncate mound in the approximate center of the village, upon which stood the residence and council house of those who ruled the village. To the west stands a truncate mound, only slightly less imposing than the larger one, upon which a lesser chief made his residence. To the east and west, north and south, the fields contain ample evidence of the habitation of the people composing this prehistoric community. Surrounding the village upon all sides except the river side, is an earthen embankment upon which stood the log palisade, so necessary for the defense of the inhabitants. Smaller mounds cover the field in abundance, some of which may be of a domi-ciliary nature while others may contain burials of important personages.

Explorations to date have been carried on in the village, the palisade embankment and upon the second largest mound of the group. The village has been extremely productive of materials, representing the material attainments of the inhabitants and other culture traits such as domestic house types, fireplace types and method of burial disposal.

The protective embankment has produced evidence indicating the method used in the construction of the palisade, the main feature of which was projecting bastions at intervals of approximately one hundred and twenty feet, which permitted enfilading fire by those defending the village.

As in all mounds of the truncate pyramidal type, all evidence of the structures standing upon the top of the mound at the time the village was deserted has been destroyed by cultivation, erosion and soil leaching. However, due to the custom of increasing the size of this type of mound at regular intervals, a floor previously used has been found seven feet below the top surface. Although at this writing the floor has not been completely explored, enough has been seen to indicate beyond question that the details of the structure formerly standing upon it will be clarified with complete exploration.

Archaeology during the past fifty years has passed through an interesting cycle. At the beginning of the period of intensive exploration the principal purpose of an expedition was to obtain specimens to be used largely for display purposes. Through progressive stages this function

*Presented before the general meeting.

was superceded by the desire on the part of research workers to determine the story that such specimens might tell, with a consequent transposition of emphasis upon the significance of specimens rather than the objects themselves. Today it is becoming more apparent that the archaeologist, with a conscientious desire to exhaust completely the possibilities of the site being studied, must again become a procurer of specimens. This time, however, the specimens are not necessarily procured for display purposes but primarily for the purpose of placing them at the disposal of workers in unrelated but cooperative fields of research. Every archaeological site produces material of interest to every science and, in turn, every science can contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the archaeological field worker. The botanist, the chemist, the zoologist, geologist, metallurgist, and physicist by exhausting the specialized studies of the various elements from a site, can augment tremendously the story of man's past accomplishments and experiences. Mathematical equations applied to statistical tables of culture trait occurrences remove the human element entirely from conclusions that are the necessary result of every exploration. Every person attending a scientific gathering such as the one for which this paper is prepared can find, for the looking, something of interest in archaeology.