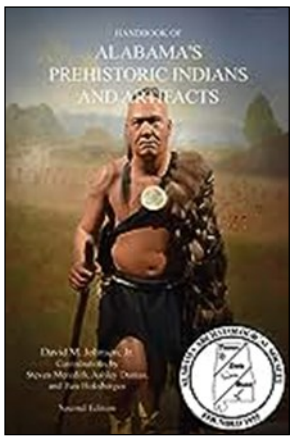
THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ECHOES

The September 2023 Newsletter

The September Meeting will be Tuesday, September 26, 2023 at 3:00 p. m. in the Meeting Room of the McMillan Museum



The Program: Author David Johnson Will Present a Program Based on His Book, Handbook of Alabama's Prehistoric Indians and Artifacts, 2nd ed.

The Amazon website says of the author: David Johnson is an avocational archaeologist. He works for the Alabama Department of Transportation. David is a private property owner that found archaeological sites on his property and had the good fortune of coming into contact with profes-sional archaeologists that took the time to encourage and

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Refreshments

The August meeting will have refreshments after the program. The Society will provide drinks. Plan to bring your favorite finger food.

October Program

Paul Brueske will Present a Program on "The Last Raid on Pollard."

Don Sales with Addie Nelson & McKenzie Morrison, Members of the Student Historical Society of the Alabama Coastal Community College in Brewton.

Human Effigy from Mississippian Period, Bottle Creek Site, Baldwin County

Volume 50 No. 9, September 2023

Our Business Members

Remember to Support Our Business Members

The Program

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educate him in the proper procedures for recording and documenting his finds. Through this process, he saw a need for this information to be available to others like himself in order to provide this same information to the general public. This led to the creation of Alabama's Prehistoric Indians and Artifacts, a project that was only made possible by the cooperation provided by the Alabama Archaeological Society and its members.

News and Announcements

Alabama Historical Association Fall Pilgrimage and Annual Meeting

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The Alabama Historical Commission Is Looking for Input about Historical Landmarks and Properties that Might Need Some Attention to Be Preserved.

This search is part of the commission's "Places in Peril" program. Every year, the Alabama Historical Commission identifies several endangered locations and then works to find solutions to keep them from being neglected or demolished. It does that by taking nominations from the public.

Through October, the Historical Commission is compiling a list of irreplaceable historic places to highlight their plights and use the publicity to preserve them. The Alabama Historical Commission's primary mission is to protect, preserve, and interpret Alabama's Historic Places.

To Learn more about the Places in Peril Program and nominate a landmark property go to <https://ahc.alabama.gov/placesinperil.aspx>.

Current Places in Peril

Epsibeth Missionary Baptist Church, Montevallo, Shelby Co. has served the community of Aldrich, near Montevallo, for more than 150 years

The William Lanford House, Huntsville, Madison County, Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1850,

The Oscar Meredith Home, Tuscumbia, Colbert County, is a dogtrot style home built of hand-hewed logs in 1816 by Afro-American farmer Oscar James Meredith. The home has been damaged by storms in the last three years.

Eddistone Hotel, Selma, Dallas County, built in 1885, housed the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction. After its days as a hotel ended, it hosted a variety of small businesses into the 1990s.

Battleground School, Vinemont, Cullman County, built in 1932, served the community of Vinemont for almost thirty years.

Ben Windham: The Mystery of the Rattlesnake Disc

The Rattlesnake Disc

Alabama Native Americans have been painting, chipping and shaping rock for thousands of years. The Rattlesnake Disk, Alabama's State Artifact, is made of sandstone that was ground and shaped into a circle. The artist then took a hard, sharp rock and etched its design on the front. The Rattlesnake Disc, or Serpent Disc, is an artifact of the prehistoric Mississippian-Age Moundville culture. Approximately 12 inches in diameter, it was probably created between 1300 and 1450 AD.

Photo from the Listic Casting Lab <http://www.lithiccastinglab.com>.

The Alabama Stone

An historical marker in Coker, Alabama, near the site of the stone's discovery, proclaims the Alabama Stone is "one of the earliest pieces of evidence of the white man's exploration in America." But archaeological and anthropological experts have long been suspicious of this assertion. Found in 1817 along the banks of the Black Warrior River, it is one of Alabama's enduring mysteries. Photographed in the Alabama State Archives in Montgomery Thursday, Aug. 5, 2021. ***Photo by Gary Cosby, Jr. of the Tuscaloosa News <https://www.tuscaloosanews.com/>.n***

The following article by Ben Windham is from the Tuscaloosa News for Feb. 22, 2006 <https://www.tuscaloosanews.com/story/news/2006/02/12/ben-windham-the-mystery-of-the-rattlesnake-disc/27669807007/>.

According to officials at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England, a visitor tripped on his shoelaces on a stairway a few days ago and tumbled toward disaster.

Flailing, arms akimbo, he landed in the middle of three priceless 300-year-old Qing Dynasty vases -- and smashed them to smithereens.

The vases had sat sedately for 40 years on a windowsill at the foot of the marble stairs. In a backhanded acknowledgement that it may have been unwise to place them there, the museum said it does not expect the man to pay for the damage. Instead, it has hired conservators to try to pick up the splintered pieces and glue them back together.

Well. Rather smashing, as the Brits might say. Yet there but for fortune might have gone two of our own state's most famous artifacts.

Certainly, Moundville's Rattlesnake Disc and the Alabama Stone from Coker have received casual treatment at times. Under the circumstances, it's somewhat surprising that either survived the 19th century. It's also surprising that the relics were discovered within a few miles of each other in the Black Warrior River basin.

Both are unprovenanced artifacts dug up by laymen. But history has handed them strikingly divergent fates. Today one of the objects is in storage, out of public view *(at the Archives & occasionally on view)*. The other is among the best-known masterpieces of American Indian art .

"There is a lot of lore attached to the Rattlesnake Disc," says Bill Bomar, director of Moundville Archaeological Park *(Dr. Clay Nelson is now the Director),* where the disc is on display -- securely ensconced behind glass -- in the museum. "It was discovered in the mid-19th century by a farm hand plowing with a mule-drawn plow. He pulled it up with the plow." Even to the farm worker, who had no background in archaeology, the discovery seemed extraordinary.

Measuring about 12.5 inches in diameter -- the size of a large dinner plate -- edged with 17 bifurcations, the disc depicts the powerful image of an eye embedded in the middle of a human hand. Two horned rattlesnakes, knotted together, their long tongues lashing out from under their fangs, frame the hand and eye.

Executed perhaps around 1300 AD, it is a powerful image that seems to speak to the subconscious. "Most people are pretty sure the hand and eye are a symbol of a portal to the other world," says Moundville archaeologist Jim Knight. "The knotted rattlesnakes are harder to cinch. But it's all about how to get deceased people to the afterlife."

In his work The Mythic Image, popular mythologist Joseph Campbell compared the disc to the traditional culture of Tibet, according to the Ancient American Magazine, which featured the Moundville artifact on the cover of one of its issues.

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Ben Windham: The Mystery of the Rattlesnake Disc

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It "represents a powerful tradition," says the accompanying article, "a long-forgotten ability to communicate with images instead of words."

The riveting design actually is on the back of the artifact. The front side was used to mix paints and "magical substances," Knight says.

It's little short of astonishing that the disc survived its encounter with the plow. Yet, Bomar says it is virtually undamaged, save for a small scar on its left edge. "Legend has it that this is the spot where the plow nicked it when it was first discovered," he said.

Another piece of the legend makes the Rattlesnake Disc's survival seem even more miraculous. Though neither Knight nor Bomar could confirm it, the story says that the disc sat for a long time on a Moundville mantelpiece. The homeowner treated it as a curio, allowing many visitors to handle it, before it finally came into the hands of state Geologist Eugene Allen Smith.

Bomar says he has heard that the man on whose property the disc was discovered took it to the nearby University of Alabama, where Smith had established a fledgling museum of natural history. There, it was donated or sold and added to the museum's collection.

Other accounts say Smith, who had heard about the artifact, visited the landowner's home and bought the disc on the spot for a few dollars.

In any event, the artifact soon drew national attention. Professor William H. Holmes made a drawing of the images on the disc and described it in a Bureau of Ethnology Report for 1880-81 for the Smithsonian Institution.

Perhaps as a result, Clarence B. Moore, the pioneer Southeastern archaeologist who first excavated Moundville in 1905, was aware of the disc before he began to dig, Knight says.

At some point, the artifact was loaned to the National Museum in Washington, where it remained for a long time before it was returned to Tuscaloosa.

Now it is on permanent display at the park museum. "We put it out on loan perhaps once in a decade," Bomar says. "We briefly loaned it to the Art Institute of Chicago, where it was seen by over a million people."

That's in contrast to the state's other famous antiquity, the Alabama Stone. The public rarely sees it these days.

Part of the reason is that 189 years after its discovery at the point where Big Creek enters the Warrior River, people still don't know what to make of it.

Bard Cole told the stone's story in an entertaining article in the Winter 2005 issue of Alabama Heritage magazine.

A 17-year-old boy named Tommy Scales found the stone when he was helping his father clear some land near the mouth of Big Creek. On the bank, tangled in the roots of a large poplar tree, he spotted a big, triangular wedge of sandstone with an inscription that he was unable to decipher.

"HISPANETIND REX," it said. Under the words was the number 1232.

According to local Historian Matt Clinton, the 204-pound stone was hauled into Tuscaloosa and placed at the door of the log cabin that served as the office of Levin Powell, who was the county's first tax collector.

There it remained for several years, a curiosity (and perhaps a doorstop).

Powell, a Virginia native who later became postmaster, was highly regarded in the frontier community. Perhaps Scales thought Powell had the book learning to translate the crooked Latin inscription.

The words are an abbreviation of "Hispaniarum et Indiarum Rex," meaning "King of Spain and the Indies."

The tendency of history buffs in the 19th century was to claim the rock was an artifact of Hernando de Soto's ill-fated expedition of 1539.

But in this context, the 1232 on the stone made no sense as a date. It was long before de Soto, and the king of Spain did not even know that the Indies existed at that time.

As much as anything, the numerals led many professional historians to dismiss the Alabama Stone as a crude forgery. The late Peter Brannon, longtime state archivist, bluntly described it as "just a fake," the product of someone "one Sunday afternoon [who] just didn't have anything to do …"

Ultimately, he ordered it removed from display in a room of Indian relics. Neither fish nor fowl, it has remained in storage ever since *(However, it was photographed at the state Archives in August, 2021.)*.

"It doesn't fit into telling the story of history," Cason explains. "We just don't know what it is."

One thing that is known is that the 19th century was a time when similar artifacts -- nearly all of them with questionable pedigrees -- were discovered.

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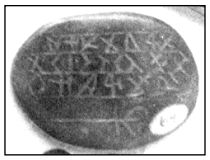
Ben Windham: The Mystery of the Rattlesnake Disc



The Grave Creek Stone was discovered in 1838 during the excavation of the Grave Creek Mound, in Moundsville, West Virginia, on the Ohio River, about 10 miles south of Wheeling. The stone was a small inscribed sandstone disk, about 1 7/8" (4.8 cm) wide, and 1 1/2" (3.6 cm) high. The reverse side was uninscribed.

In November of 1860, David Wyrick of Newark, Ohio found an inscribed stone in a burial mound about 10 miles south of Newark. The stone is inscribed on all sides with a condensed version of the Ten Commandments or Decalogue, in a peculiar form of post-Exilic square Hebrew letters. The robed and bearded figure on the front is identified as Moses in letters fanning over his head.

_When John W. Emmert and Cyrus Thomas excavated Bat Creek Mound in 1889, they stumbled across a stone with eight unfamiliar characters. When Thomas saw it, he announced it as "beyond question letters of the Cherokee alphabet." The stone was forgotten for around 70 years until an ethnologist named Joseph Mahan was confused by the fact that the letters didn't look like Cherokee. He sent a photo to his friend Cyrus Gordon, who realized that flipped upside down, the characters looked exactly like Paleo-Hebrew letter. It was housed in the Museum of the Cherokee in Cherokee, N.C., but as of January 2023 no one at the Museum had seen or knew the location of the stone. It was latter questioned as a fake *(https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/bat-creek-stone).*

The Kensington Runestone is a slab of greywacke stone covered in runes that was discovered in central Minnesota in 1898. The Kensington Runestone is believed to be one of the oldest records of Scandinavian exploration in existence. The stone's inscription told a dark tale of settlement and murder—and today, there are very mixed feelings on whether the stone is authentic or a fabrication.

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There was the Grave Creek Stone, filled with weird characters, from 1838, in Virginia; the Newark Decalogue, a version of the Ten Commandments that came to light in 1860 in Ohio; the Bat Creek Stone, with alleged paleo-Hebrew characters from an East Tennessee Indian mound, in 1889 and the Kensington Runestone, with a purported date of 1362, that was discovered in Minnesota in 1898.

Most famous of all, perhaps, were the golden tablets that Joseph Smith said he dug up in the 1820s in Palmyra, N.Y. Using magical goggles to help him translate what he said was an ancient script written in "reformed Egyptian" characters, Smith dictated a complex tale of a lost tribe of Israel.

Many contemporaries called his story a fake and a fraud and the criticism has not abated with time.

But that has not stopped the religion that Smith founded from becoming one of the fastest growing in the world. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accepts the authenticity of his tablets as an article of faith.

Moundville's Rattlesnake Disc initially was regarded with deep skepticism. "The drawings were so exotic that people originally proclaimed it a fake," Knight says. Even the Smithsonian's Professor Holmes "rather discredited its genuineness," Clarence Moore wrote in his 1905 book.

"Moore later found lots and lots more artifacts with the hand-and-eye design," in his excavations at the site, Knight says. That solid archaeological proof -- something Smith was never able to produce -- restored credibility to the Rattlesnake Disc.

Today, the disc is the jewel in the collection of the museum named for Walter B. Jones, the state geologist who directed digs at Moundville during the Depression years.

The Alabama Stone, meanwhile, remains in a third-floor storage area of the Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. Whether it deserves better is, like Smith's tablets, largely a matter of faith. One thing seems sure. Neither of the famous Alabama artifacts is likely to be placed in an open windowsill at the foot of a slippery marble staircase. And for that, we all can be grateful.

The ECHS *Journal* Section

"The First Alabamians" 12,000 BC to AD 1700, By Craig Sheldon Feb. 19, 2009

From a presentation for ArchiTreats at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. References to members of the audience and to illustrations have not been included in this article .

The has been the year of Alabama history (2009). Some would argue that history in the strictest sense begins with the coming of the Europeans and other peoples from the old world. I believe it is also important to celebrate some 14,000 years of human heritage in Alabama. Today we will talk about the First Alabamians, the indigenous who occupied this region. This is a daunting task, as Dr. John Hall related in last month's Architreats lecture, Alabama is a very diverse geographical and biological region. In promoting the differences of many different local cultures, it is very difficult to summarize all of these.

Our knowledge of the prehistoric and early historic cultures in Alabama come largely from archaeology, which is limited to those artifacts and features that are actually preserved. Alabama is a very rich archaeological area. It is actually harder to find sites without Indian artifacts than those with them. The 29,000 sites discovered thus far are a small percentage of the actual total. Very few of these sites have been excavated by archaeologists. Many of these sites cluster along rivers and also cluster close to where archaeologists live.

Traditionally archaeologists have divided prehistory and early historic times into six periods or stages: **Paleoindian-11,500 BC; Archaic Period-8,000 BC; Gulf Formational-1700 BC; Woodland-200 BC; Mississippian-1000 AD; Protohistoric-1540-1700.**

The Paleoindian Period -The Pleistocene Geological Era

The earliest occupation of Alabama began during the Pleistocene Geological Era which ended about 8,000 BC. Due to sea level lowering, the coast of Alabama was about a hundred miles south of its present location. During this time, Alabama's climate was similar to that of the northern Midwest and southern Canada with northern coniferous and temperate oak, hickory, pine forests. In addition, modern species of animals, megafauna, mammoths, mastodons, horses. bison and others roamed grass lands and forests.*

**Note: Megafauna are the large land animals of the last ice age, such as mammoths, an extinct species of elephants. Mastodons were shorter and stockier than mammoths with shorter, straighter tusks.*

Groups of nomadic hunters, ultimately from Northeast Asia, entered the area around 12,000 BC. Probably *organized* into small bands, constantly on the move, they left sparse evidence of their culture beyond beautifully crafted, fluted stone projectile points. *(Clovis, Cumberland and Beave Lake Points-11,500 BC to 10,500 BC).* These were the high technology of the times, used for spears projected by spear throwers. In the western United States, such points have been found at kill sites of mammoths, mastodons and bison.

No similar kill sites have been found in Alabama. This is an irony that we have no kill sites in Alabama or the southeast when you realize that most fluted points, Clovis points, are found in the eastern United States. One of the greatest concentrations of surface finds of fluted points in North American are found in Florence, Alabama in the Tennessee Valley. Another concentration may have been along the Gulf Coast at that time, that coast line now submerged 300 feet beneath the Gulf of Mexico.

The Archaic Period – 8,000 – 1700 BC

The following Archaic period (8,000 -1700 BC) is marked by the appearance of the modern environment, new types of stone and bone tools and changes in lifestyle. Beginning around 8,000 BC, the climate

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Left to Right: American Mastodon, Wooly Mammoth and African Savanna Elephant.
Picture from Britannica

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Clovis spear point found in Monroe County, Alabama. Clovis points are lance-shaped, partially fluted, and used for killing mammoths and other very large game.

Beaver Lake points are lanceolate (leave-shaped), narrow, and side-notched. Rare but they do occur throughout Alabama, northeastern Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri.

A tip from a Cumberland projectile point made on Sand Mountain in northeastern Alabama. Composed of chert, a fine-grained sedimentary rock deposited in marine environments, it is found in the

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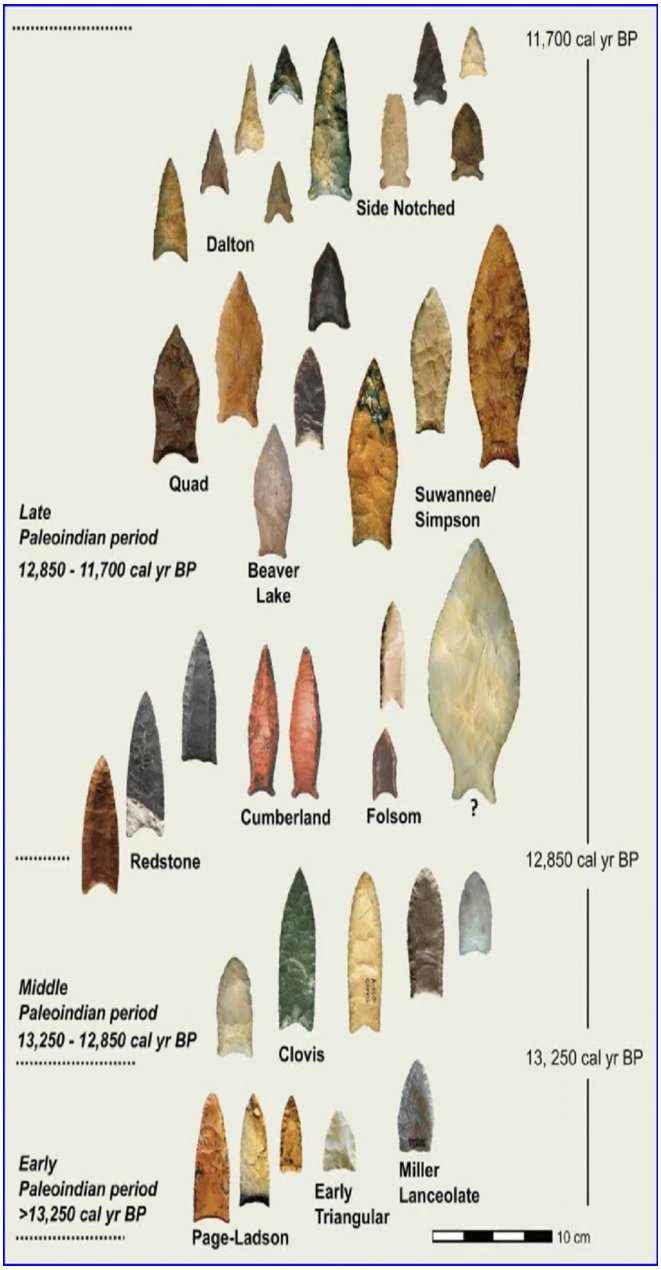
warmed, sea levels and coast lines gradually stabilized near their present locations, megafauna disappeared, modern species of plants and animals predominated, and the human population increased.

The 6,000 year period is the longest in Alabama prehistory. The carefully crafted fluted Paleo-Indian points disappeared, replaced by somewhat cruder but still adequate points for spears propelled by spear throwers. The stone tool inventory diversified to include knives, scrapers, spokeshavers, hammer stones, awls, grinding stones. Wild plants became more important in the diet or at least the evidence for them.

Groups began to live more into the environment, developing regional archaeological subcultures. The earliest part of the Archaic



A Timeline and Key Diagnostic Paleoindian Projectile Points from the Southeastern United States.
From <https://www.researchgate>.

Period in the southeast is actually best known in northern Alabama where we find some of the earliest archaeological sites, securely dated by radiocarbon dating.

At the Stanfield-Worley Bluff Shelter in Colbert County, so-called Dalton points dating from about 7500 BC marked the transition from the Paleo-Indian period to the Archaic. More revealing than the Dalton points was the Increased inventory of stone and bone tools suggesting a more sedentary lifestyle and an increase in the number of local plants and animal species exploited. The nutting stone is sone of our oldest evidence for the exploitation of wild plants. *(Nutting stones*

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At Left, Stone tools found in Alabama. At Right, Bone tools had been mainly made from bone splinters or were cut into a useful shape. Archaeologists are convinced that bone tools were purposefully made by deer antlers cut into shape. The bone was fashioned into tools such as spoons, knives, awls, pins, fish hooks, needles, flakers, hide scrapers and reamers.

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used prehistorically for crushing nuts as foodstuffs).

At the opposite end of the Tennessee Valley in Jackson County, there is Russell Cave National Monument. Though not as old as Stanfield-Worley, this large bluff shelter was used continuously for about 6,000 years. This is indicated by over 15 feet of layer upon layer of campfires and refuse. This site is accessible to the public and is one of the best locations in the southern states to learn about early Indian cultures. (*Occupied during the middle and late Archaic Period (8500 to 100 BC).*

Middle and Late Archaic Subperiods-Classic Archaic Culture

The subsequent middle and late Archaic subperiods saw the rise of what we call Classic Archaic Culture with larger human populations, more efficient exploitation of wild plants, large inventories of artifacts and the first evidence for ceremonialism. Large middens of river mussel shells, some over 20 feet thick accumulated along the Tennessee River and along the Gulf Coast. Shell middens provide valuable information about Aboriginal use of the coast and can show changes in diet, behavior, activities and settlement over the last 12,000 years. One of the most important features of midden places is that the shell can easily be dated using the radiocarbon method of

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Mass Production of Food-Middle Archaic Period

From Watershed: Archaeology at Dust Cave By Archaeologist Nathanael Fosaaen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cn1EfFs6gfk>.

Archaeologically, we are usually talking about things like fireplaces, storage pits, post holes, earth ovens, other holes in the ground that were used as tools in one way or another. So it was generally believed that the cave and rock shelter sites were generally used by young men as temporary hunting sites. We don't see a lot of discussion of what women and children were up to in these kind of sites. They
weren't really acknowledged a whole lot as even existing until the early 2,000's AD, maybe a little bit earlier, but in Dust Cave we have evidence of mass processing, starting in the middle Archaic Period that's the turning of nuts like acorns and pecans into edible food.

In the middle Archaic Period this was done with boiling pits since pottery hadn't been invented yet. They'd use hot rocks boiling so those pits were a common feature in the transition to the Middle Archaic Period, and ethnographically speaking, the processing of these kind of food resources, these kind of plant foods was led by women in the community all over the world.

In the US during initial colonization by Europeans, we see that kind of gendered labor between women and mass resources from the Appalachians to California, and the whole community seems to be involved in the collecting part of the job. But it seems universally to be women who turn these mass resources. those nuts into flour or oils, into cakes or whatever other kinds of food preparation.

Those mass resources become a huge part of the diet in that Middle Archaic Period. Here in this region in northern Alabama, southern Tennessee, that's partially because it's one of the only food resources that could be stored up for long periods of times. So the fact that women were controlling that food resource means that they probably had a certain degree of micro political power within their communities.

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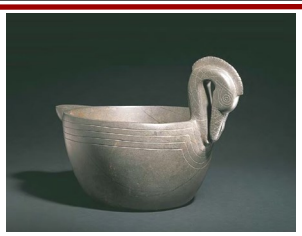

The Moundville Duck Bowl-arguably the most beautiful piece of prehistoric Native American art ever discovered in the United States.

Mississippian Culture pottery found at the Moundville site.

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dating.

Large stem projectile points were produced by the thousands. These are the most common types of points found in modern archaeological collections. Often misnamed as arrowheads, they are actually spear points.

Hitherto in the Archaic, meat and vegetables were roasted over fires or hot stones or water heated by hot stones. Sometime around 1600 BC, stone bowls began to be carved out of soft soap stone, or steatite. There are steatite outcrops along the eastern flanks of the Appalachian Mts. from Alabama to Maine.

The southernmost exposure in the eastern United States is at Coon Creek to the northeast of Tallassee, Alabama. It is likely that this quarry supplied much of the soapstone found in the sites across the Gulf Coastal Plain, including the major ceremonial site at Poverty Point in Louisiana, over three hundred miles to the west.

Both the soapstone vessels and the ceramic vessels enabled meat and vegetables to be boiled in their own broth, creating stews, greatly enhancing the nutrition and efficiency of the diet.

The Woodland Period

During the subsequent Woodland Period, many of the Archaic tools and techniques for acquiring and processing food and other natural resources continued. Major innovations were the appearance of small villages with houses constructed of poles, cane and bark, and the introduction of the cultivation of small garden plots of maize, squash, beans and other cultigens. *(Cultigens are a plant species or variety known only in cultivation, especially one with no known wild ancestor.)*

Celts or axes for clearing fields or cutting poles for houses were carefully crafted from greenstone. *(Greenstone is a common generic term for valuable, green-hued minerals and metamorphosed igneous rocks and stones which early cultures used in the fashioning of hardstone carvings such as jewelry, statuettes, ritual tools, and various other artifacts).* Some of the finest of these have been found in graves in central Alabama suggesting that they served some ceremonial or status purpose. Sometimes there's seven or eight of these in each grave.

Vessels made for family groups appear. Pottery making obviously improved over the fiber-making, fiber-tempered beginnings, and this resulted in a wide range of well-made ceramic vessels and shapes. The many decorative styles of pottery have been used by archaeologists to trace the development and movement of various ethnic groups.

Single burials continue to be made during the Woodland Period within the settlement areas, but multiple burials are also found in small burial mounds. Pottery vessels, ornaments of bone and imported marine shells accompanied many of the interments, but there is little evidence for major differences in status. The presence of severed human heads or trophies in some graves suggest forms of limited warfare or raiding were occurring. During this time, cultural and linguistic diversity may have reached its greatest elaboration in Alabama.

Finally, one of the major icons of the American Indian appears about 700 AD with the appearance of the bow and arrow which replaces the spear and spear-thrower. This must have significantly increased the efficiency of hunting.

The Mississippian Period

The Mississippian Period was the highest point of Aboriginal cultural development in Alabama and in the southeast. Named for its probable origin in the Mississippi River Valley, this culture was spread by small groups moving into river valleys of the south-

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east, in some cases blending with or displacing the resident woodland populations. By AD 1300, Mississippian culture dominated in the arable flood plains of all rivers from the Tennessee Valley to the Gulf Coast.

From all evidence, this rich, complex culture was largely a southeastern invention, with the only significant intrusive items being domesticated plants from Mexico. The economy was based on the intense cultivation of maize, squash, beans, sunflowers and tobacco in large fields located on the fertile river flood plains. Deer, turkey, fish, oysters, clams, nuts, acorns, persimmons, grapes and many other wild foods supplemented the diet.

It is likely, but not proven, that the processing of maize kernels with mixtures of water and wood ashes or lye began at this time, producing the forerunners of hominy and perhaps grits. Permanent round or square houses were constructed of upright poles, woven cane walls, bark and palmetto roofs. Settlements range from small hamlets to towns with over a thousand people. The second largest Mississippian culture settlement in the eastern United States is at Moundville on the Black Warrior River, 17 miles south of Tuscaloosa. The site was occupied from about AD 1220 to final abandonment about 1650. Most construction and the highest population occurred 1200 to 1300.

Here a massive wooden palisade, or defensive stockade, over a mile long encircled 325 acres of central plaza, 22 mounds *(Some estimates are 29),* some over 50 feet high, and scores of houses. The flat-topped pyramidal earthen mounds were substructures for very large wooden structures, some over a hundred feet in length, perhaps intended for ritual or large kin groups or leaders.

Adjacent mounds were used for the internment of high status, burials with rich assemblages of pottery vessels, elaborate ornaments of stone, bone and marine shell and imported sheet copper. Individuals of lower status were buried under the floors of ordinary houses or adjacent cemeteries accompanied with simple vessels and ornaments.

The complexity of Moundville society can only be conjectured from the preserved archaeological remains. It has been suggested it was a chiefdom with groups of elites and commoners. The community was a center for the production of many high-quality prestige items.

Moundville ceramic vessels were some of the finest ever produced in North America in terms of quality and creative artistry. This craftsmanship was also expressed in many other parts of their material culture, such as tobacco pipes of clay and stone.*

* *Note: In 1980, 264 of the finest quality, highest artistic quality ceramic vessels were stolen from Moundville. In 2018 three objects were recovered. The others have not appeared in public collections or to be sold .*

Sandstone pallets served some unknown purpose but were painstakingly made, including the famous Rattlesnake Disc, which is Alabama's official Indian artifact.

Most persons seem to have worn some type of bodily ornament, such as pendants, necklaces, and bracelets, earrings. The most elaborate of these were made of marine shell-these were about three to four inches in diameter-and pendants made out of sheet copper brought from Tennessee or Michigan.

The presence of the impressive Moundville defensive palisade, trophy-head shown in artwork (the head held by a warrior) and of traumatic injuries on skeletons indicate that warfare was a very significant part of Moundville culture.

The Mississippian people were the first Indians in the southeast to be contacted by the Europeans. Moundville had significantly declined in size and construction activity by 1540.

However, the expeditions of Narvaez, 1528; de Soto, 1540; de Luna, 1559, met and fought other Mississippian societies. And the Spanish described them as having fortified towns, corn fields, earthen mounds, public architecture, wooden houses and powerful chiefs ornamented with shell, copper, fur ornaments.

It would be very useful for scholars to correlate the historic Spanish accounts with specific archaeological sites in Alabama and adjoining states, but we presently do not know the specific routes of their expeditions.

(Continued on page 11)

The First Alabamians" 12,000 BC to AD 1700, By Craig Sheldon Feb. 19, 2009

(Continued from page 10)

The Protohistoric Period and the Early Spanish Expeditions

The early Spanish expeditions, were very destructive of indigenous cultures. Massive depopulation was caused my combat deaths, enslavement, starvation, and worst of all, European diseases, for which the Indians had no immunity. Finding no gold and silver, the Spanish abandoned the interior of the southeast. Europeans did colonize the immediate coast of the South Atlantic and the Gulf Coast but avoided the interior for over a hundred years before beginning permanent contact and the deerskin trade. The intervening period 1540, 1559, to maybe 1700 is called the Protohistoric. The Indians gained breathing room to rebuild their culture before having to recontact and directly deal with European powers.

Gone were the Mississippian style of large fortified towns, earthen mounds, elaborate material culture, trade networks, powerful chiefs, stratified statuses, retained with a basic subsistence system of maize agriculture, supplemented by hunting and gathering, typical Mississippian wooden houses, bows and arrows, stone celts, utilitarian cooking vessels, and simple shell and bone ornaments.

The society devolved from powerful chieftains to tribes. Burial of the dead in large ceramic vessels became popular such as in the Alabama River phase of central Alabama which we now see as the forerunner of the historic Alabama.

The ancestors of historic Indian groups such as the Creeks, Chickasaw, Choctaws and Cherokees began to be identifiable during the Protohistoric Period, 17th century. These groups retain the basic Mississippian economy but they began to add items of European manufacture through long distance trade with European colonies on the coast. Brass ornaments, bells, iron hoes, are probably from the Spanish Missions in northern Florida. But the majority of Indians did not come in contact with the Europeans. There were Indians who acted as middle men in between. By the subsequent 18th century, however, the deer-skin trade became a major part of local economics resulting in the historic Alabama towns and tribes.

Dominant among these were the historic Creeks of central and eastern Alabama whose hybrid culture, substantial population, potential military power and political acumen enabled them to resist European colonial expansion for over a hundred and twenty years. They changed U. S. history.*

**Note: The Protohistoric Period is a period between prehistory and written history during which a culture or civilization has not yet developed writing, but other cultures have already noted the existence of those pre-literate groups in their own writings.*

The Legacy of the First Americans

This has been a whirlwind tour, about 500 years per minute. I feel truly humbled by trying to get my mind wrapped around it. What is the legacy of the first Alabamians? We don't know the whole of it. Our knowledge of the 14.000 years of Indian heritage in Alabama is still evolving.

We can identify some important elements that we know or will be further elucidated. First off, part our legacy are the many Indian sites and mounds that are found throughout the state. We have the legacy or the story reconstructed by historians and archaeologists. We have the knowledge that the Indians of Alabama evolved from simple hunting and gathering groups to the most complex cultures north of Mesoamerica. They did it without outside help.

Part of our legacy are the many Indian names for streams, communities, counties and our state. We have the numerous collections of artifacts in private and public institutions. We have many things that have come down to us from the historic periods, such as the wonderful animal tales, the Uncle Remus tales.

We have Southern icons, grits, hominy, yaupon tea. We have the many people in Alabama, large numbers of whom can trace Indian ancestry. We also have remaining groups such as the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Obviously, a lot more archaeology, a lot more history. But where can you go from here? Universities, most of the universities, have archaeology programs. Archaeologists love to talk about archaeology. There are many archaeology sites that you can visit; some of them are developed, some are not. Many people think that archaeology is a closed community, that we do our work sort of separated. No. Archaeology is labor intensive. We love volunteers.

ECHOES
THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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