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PRELIMINARY REPORT

THE HOPETON EARTHWORKS

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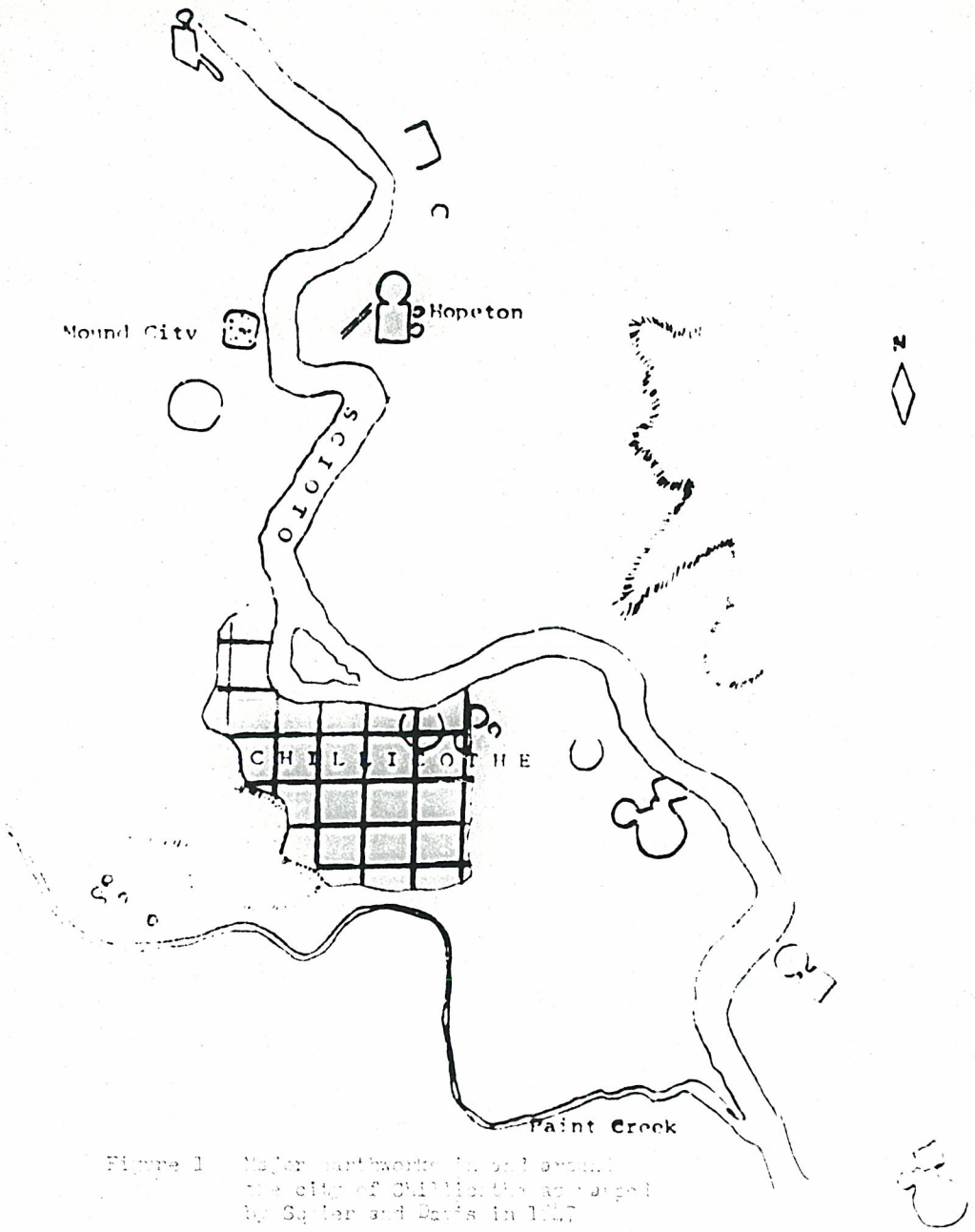


Figure 1 Major earthworks in and around the city of Chillicothe, as mapped by Squier and Davis in 1847

GENERAL STATEMENT

The prehistoric earthworks variously called Hopeton or Hopetown are located in Springfield Township, Ross County, Ohio, on a high terrace overlooking the low bottomland of the Scioto River. These earthworks are northeast of Mound City Group National Monument about 7000 feet in a straightline distance. Intervening between the Hopeton site and Mound City Group is the Scioto River, the channel of which is presently the eastern boundary of the monument plot. These two sites have always been presumed to have been associated beacuse of the one-time presence of parallel earth walls which extended from the Hopeton works to the river.

The intent of this preliminary report is to examine the consideration of adding this earthwork site to Mound City Group, to review the relationship of the two sites, and to explore the Hopeton site's potential in terms of development. In the past only general discussions relating to the site have taken place, but no action has ever been undertaken by any government agency at any level toward the preservation of this important prehistoric site.

Certain recent events have stimulated thinking about the Hopeton site. The possibility exists that this site may be effected by, or incorporated in, a proposed rezoning program destine to create an industrial park north of Chillicothe and be annexed to the city. Certain preliminary maneuverings

early in 1964 were unseccessful because of the disapproval of the Ross County Commissioners (in regard to these reference can be made to various press clippings forwarded from this office). Such a rezoning, however, is considered to be forthcoming within the next ten years. The elements surrounding the successful annexation of the area are very complex, involving problems of flood control, school reorganization (in order that the tax base supporting the county schools will not be weakened), and elements of city v.s. county politics. Many of these aspects will have to be reconsiled before the rezoning and annexation will take place. In essence, the resolution of these restrictive conditions could then pose a threat to the Hopeton site in the form of possible municipal annexation, excluding it for all time from proper preservation and development.

ARCHEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

Today, the Hopeton earthworks site is one of the few good examples of a Hopewellian enclosure remaining in Ross County. Originally, this area contained many such sites; it is usually considered as the heartland of the Middle Woodland cultural climax (see Figure 1). The nature of such enclosures in Ross County has never been adequately determined. Traditionally they are considered to be ceremonial sites, perhaps open air temples, of this elaborate and highly developed Indian culture. The Hopeton earthworks are of special

interest because of their proximity to the Mound City Group and because of the suspected (but never demonstrated) association in regard to the parallel earth walls which apparently once extended to the Scioto River probably just downstream from Mound City Group.

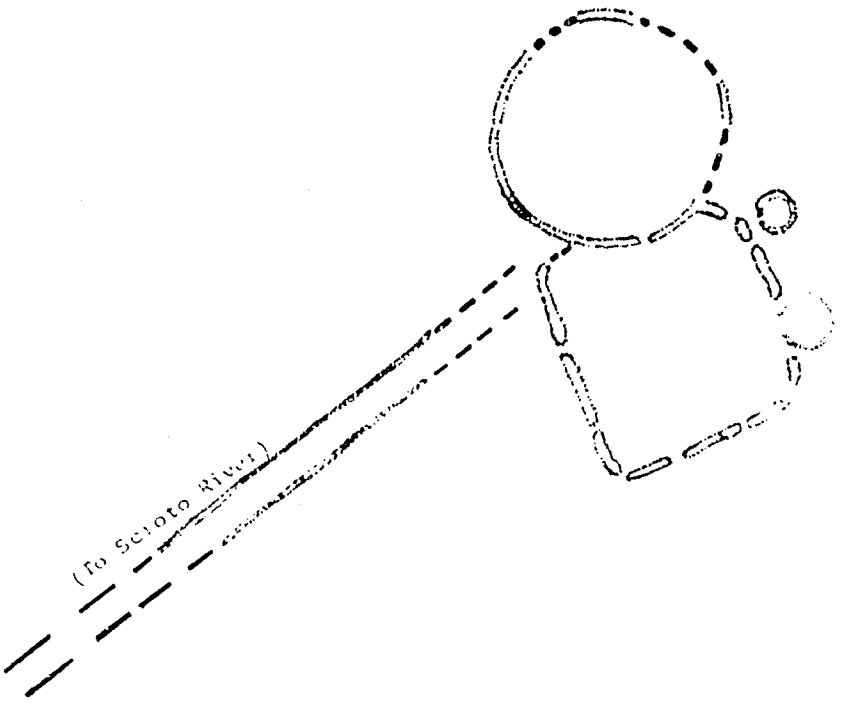
Pioneer archeologists Squier and Davis provided the earliest detail description of these works in Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley.

> "They consisted of a rectangle, with an attached circle, the latter extending into the former, instead of being connected with it in the usual manner, The rectangle measures nine hundred and fifty by nine hundred feet, and the circle is ten hundred and fifty feet in diameter ..... The walls of the rectangular works are composed of clayey loam, twelve feet high by fifty feet base... The wall of the great circle.... although much reduced of late years by the plow, is still about five feet in average height. It is built of clay, which differs strikingly in respect of color from the surrounding soil. In the bank of the table land... are several excavations from which large quantities of the earth have been taken..." (p.51)

Fowke, in his Archeological History of Ohio, stated several corrections in regard to the Squier and Davis observations. Supposedly basing his remarks on a careful survey made for the Bureau of Ethonology, he concluded that no sides of the square were straight; side lengths were 957, 791, 962, and 825 feet. The circle was surveyed and diameters of 1,018' (east-west) and 960' (north-south) were recorded.

Squier and Davis noted 2400 feet of parallel walls extending from the earthworks and proceeding toward the Scioto River, but not reaching it. Fowke

HOPETON EARTHWORKS



Tracing from 1937 aerial photograph.
Broken line shows areas not definable
in the photograph

SCALE 1" = 660'

gave additional information of the parallel walls and listed an earlier reference regarding them:

> "In the Portfolio, Vol. II., no. 5, November, 1809, opposite page 419, there is a cut of the Hopetown works. The parallel walls are represented as being connected with another circle on each side of a gateway in a line with the west side of a square. At the other end, the walls are similarly connected with another circle, about the size of that at the southeast corner of the square." (p.195)

This small circle was destroyed, evidently by the river between 1809 and 1845, at which time Squier and Davis described the walls as ending at the brink of a low terrace.

Over the years the Hopeton area has been a favorite haunt of amateur archeologists and surface collectors. A great amount of material has been recovered. Occasionally surface collecting occurs on the earthworks, although it is generally frowned upon by the major property owner. However, it is apparant that much of the terrace and many of the high areas in the bottom land have been occupied at various times in the past by Pre-Columbian populations. In 1963 plowing operations uncovered a burial near the site of the parallel walls; a local collector discovered and removed the fragmentary remains.

Examination of the circumstances and material by the Park Archeologist

yielded some useful information. The exact location of the burial has not been determined but it was very near the original location of the parallel walls and on the same general terrace as the major works. The burial was fully extended, undoubtedly in an intentional grave. Placed upon the chest was a sheet of mica; nearby was a bone awl.

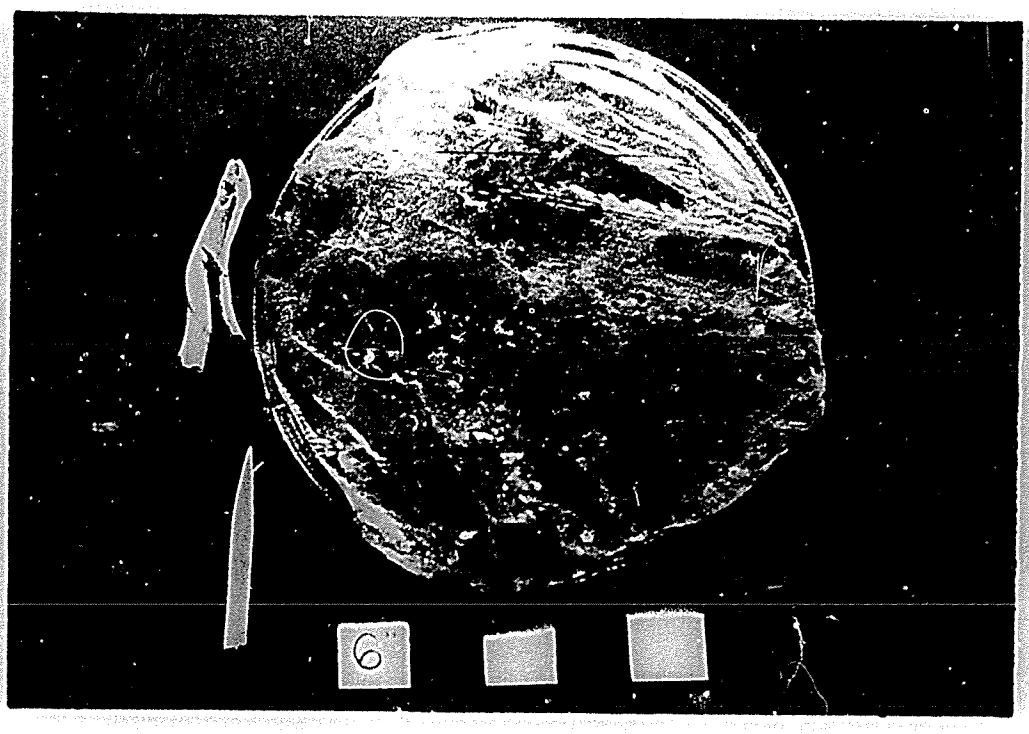


Figure 3 Mica, awl, and conch fragment from burial

Post cranial remains were very fragmentary, undoubtedly due to the manner in which they had been removed from the grave. The skull had been damaged by the plowing activity but was restorable. Evaluation of the restored skull indicated that indicially and morphologically the individual (female) most probably belonged to the Lenid variety (with some admixture). In essence this physical type is the one with the highest correlation with Hopewellian cultural remains in this state.

Figure 4. Hopewell cranium from the vicinity of the Hopeton works. Restoration and measurements by S. D. Faust

It would seem that this and other surface finds would indicate that there remain a great amount of archeological material at this site. The present condition of the "square" part of the earthworks would suggest that structural and functional details would be available (See Figures 5-7). Much of this would contribute to the understanding of the Hopewell culture, especially the non-funerary aspects; the Mound City Group represents and interprets the funerary aspects.

Figure 5. South wall and southwest corner of the square of the Hopeton works; appear as elevated areas in the plowed field to the left of the road. Looking west, toward the Scioto River.

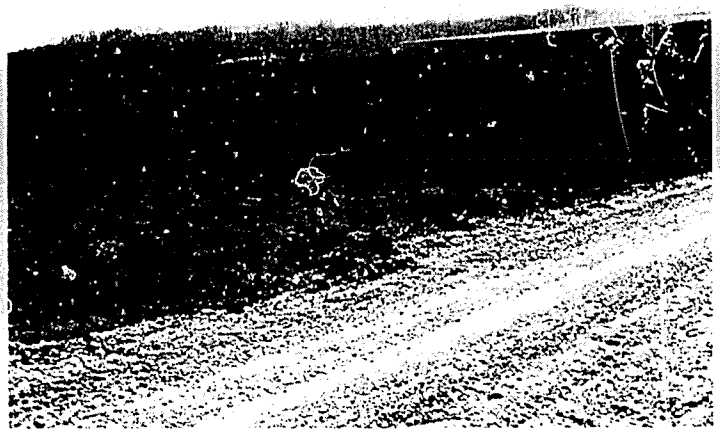


Figure 5 South portion of the square, View is to the southwest.

Figure 7. Interior of the southwest corner of the square. Wall can be defined by the rounded profile at right center and by the distinctly lighter colored clay.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SURROUNDING AREA

Expanding Mound City Group to incorporate the Hopeton works would make possible the presentation of a better balanced picture of this prehistoric way of life. New areas of interpretation could be presented which would involve the functions and ceremonial aspects of the earthwork sites, and the ways in which they might complement the funeral sites (assuming that the two areas were contemporaneous). If Mound City Group and Hopeton would prove to be of different time periods of the same culture, the preservation and interpretation of a larger segment of the history of the people and perhaps developmental transitions could be possible. Interpretation might also include habitation data if available, and information on the later inhabitants. The direct result of such an expansion would be, then, a broadening of interpretive horizons of Hopewellian remains.

A major expansion would embrace several hundred acres; more extensive public use in such an area might be envisioned. Longer nature trails through the bottom land and wooded areas along the river or in the old river channel might be developed. Two wooded areas, well removed from the earthworks, have potential for development as campgrounds during the summer months; use in the spring might be restricted because of the possibility of spring floods in the lower areas.

Figure 8 (large fold-out map) illustrates theoretical boundaries of the area. Approximately 900 acres would be involved. Landforms and locations can best be visualized by referring to Figure 9 (page 14) which is a photocopy of an aerial photograph taken in 1937. Roughly one-half of the area is low bottom land. The remainder is terrace land not subject to the occasional spring flooding.

At present most of the area is under cultivation with the exception of a wooded area along a small creek and portions of an old channel of the river. One farm dwelling and two sets of farm buildings are located upon this tract. One public road (township) enters the area from U.S. route 23 and extends westward into the bottom lands. Projected across the river it would strike the Justice Department field just north of Mound City. One private farm road runs through the area, entering from U.S. 23 and extending westward through the southeast corner of the square, to eventually divide; one fork leaves the tract, the other turns southward to junction with the township road.

Following Figure 9 and completing this brief report are several photographs of some of the landforms and features included in this tract and mentioned in the narrative or on the maps.

Figure 9 Aerial view of the Hopeton works. The square, circle, small circles, and parallel walls are visible in the center of the photograph. Note that the locations of the mounds once located within the square are discernable.

The C. & O. Railroad runs in a generally northward direction past this site; to the east of the railroad U.S. 23 can be seen (it passes under the r.r. just above the little settlement of Hopetown, to form an "X"). The private farm road which intersects the earthworks can be seen as the east-west white line which passes through the southern portion of the square. The township road extends from the Hopetown settlement and passes just north of the inverted "U" formed by the old river channel.

Figure 10 Junction of the township road with U.S.23. The view is westward along the township road.

Figure 11 Looking westward along the township road which extends into the bottom land. This photograph was taken from near the intersection with U.S. 23

Figure 12 Small wooded area and creek which are located just north of the township road. View is west from U.S. 23

Figure 13 Direction of the view is westward along the township road. This bridge marks the point at which the small creek, flowing from the old river channel, intersects the road.

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Figure 14 Township road; view is eastward toward U.S. 23 from the junction of the road with a private farm road.

Figure 15 Low bottom land along the Scioto River. The river is beyond the line of trees to the west. Photograph was taken from the upper terraces.

Figure 16 View across the low botton land toward the river. The Visitor Center at Mound City Group is visible through the trees along the river bank.

Figure 17 Looking eastward toward the higher terraces upon which the Honeton works are located. The earthworks are to the left of the farm buildings. This view was taken from the low bottom area near the river.

Figure 18 View eastward across the upper terraces upon which the the earthworks are located. The main works are to the left of the farm buildings. The farm road which runs through the works is marked by the diagonal white line and the row of utility poles near the center of the photograph.

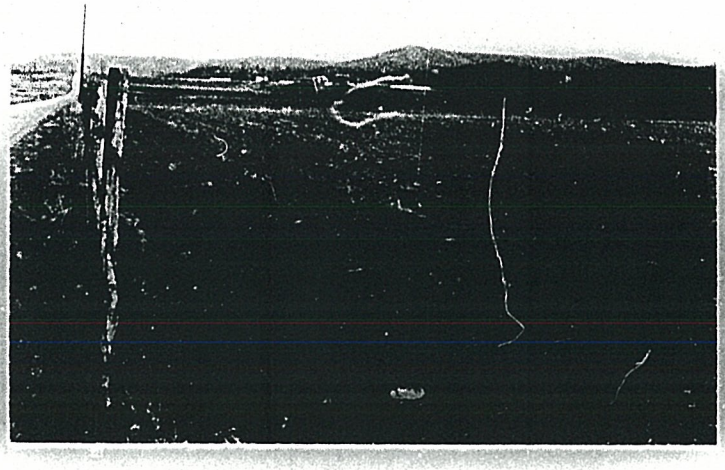

Figure 19 Looking eastward toward the Hopeton site. The west wall of the square can be seen at the left of the picture at the point at which the road crosses the wall. The southwest corner is visible in the plowed field to the right of the road. The Mount Logan range is visible in the background.

REFERENCES

Bureau of American Ethnology 12th Annual Report, p.472, Plate XXXV

Fowke, Gerard Archeological History of Ohio. Columbus, 1902

Portfolio, Volume II, No.5, November, 1809, p.419

Squier, E.G. and E.H. Davis Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley, Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, Volume I, Washington, 1847