Archaeological Bonanza

Well Preserved Articles
Located on Weeks Island

LSU Project Unearths
Stratum of Peat

Baton Rouge, La. — An
unexpected archaeological bon-
anza has been discovered in
Louisiana's largest Indian shell
mound on Weeks Island south of
New Iberia.

A six-month Louisiana State
University excavation project
terminating there recently has
uncovered a foot-thick stratum
of peat yielding extremely well
preserved wood tools and other
organic materials of an ancient
culture.

Supported by a $31,300 Na-
tional Science Foundation grant, the
excavation was directed by Cur-
orator Robert W. Neuman of the
LSU Geoscience Museum and
department of geography and
anthropology.

Neuman said the same layer
of peat was found a second time
some 500 feet away through
core sampling, which indicated
it is very extensive. This
makes it almost a certainty that
a tremendous wealth of prehis-
toric information still remains
to be found there, he said.

The 12-foot-high mound, com-
posed mainly of shell remains
of mollusks eaten by the early
people, is 700 feet long and 120
feet wide.

Neuman said the project was
the first extensive professional
archaeological excavation of a
shell mound to be conducted
along America's Gulf coast.

Work on the mound, called a
"midden," was halted only be-
cause of the exhaustion of
funds, he said. Trenching and
stratigraphic cuts have been
made at four mound locations.

Assistant archaeologist on
the project was Robert S. Neitzel
of Marksville, who had supervised
numerous excavations in the
South including the famous
Natchez Fatherland Site.

The peat was first discovered
in an excavation made near the
edge of the mound along
the east bank of Weeks Bayou.

Although radiocarbon dating
tests have not been completed
on the items found in the layer
of peat, they are believed to be-
long to the Tchefuncte Indian
culture dating back to 250 B.C.

Neuman said the countless
mollusk shells in the mound
represent the inhabitants' chief
food source. A calculation of
their numbers compared in light
of human calorie requirements
will give some idea on the In-
dian populations during the vari-
ous periods.

Mollusks of the same species,
Rangia Cuneata, are still abun-
dant in the wetlands, but have
no appeal as a food source for
people today.

As indicated by the animal re-

Times-Picayune,
July 21, 1971
p. 3, c. 4