A Prehistoric Indian Burial Site in La Salle Parish

An archaeological report on the Crooks Site, a prehistoric Indian burial site near Catahoula Lake in LaSalle Parish, has been completed and has gone to press. This report will form the third volume of the Anthropological Study series issued by the Louisiana Department of Conservation.

The excavation of this site was conducted through the winter of 1938-39 by a field unit of the statewide Archaeological Project of the Louisiana Works Progress Administration, sponsored by Louisiana State University. The materials discovered were analysed and the paper was written by the laboratory unit of the project located in New Orleans. The very interesting series of materials will soon be on exhibit in the Archeological Museum of the School of Geology at Louisiana State University.

The major significance of this work and of the resultant paper lies in the fact that this is the first complete examination and description of an undisturbed site of the Marksville Period, the time at which an advanced Indian culture based on an agricultural economy and practicing the building of mounds first appeared in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

The relatively advanced culture of the Marksville Period is estimated to have moved into the Lower Mississippi about 1100 A.D. Where it came from is not yet known. These invaders were of medium stature, rather heavy in body build, had a tendency toward round

- Tobacco pipes. All are made of clay except c which is of siltstone. These pipes are of the typical Marksville Period form.
skull form, and in addition practiced the flattening of the skulls of the infants. In Louisiana they replaced a short slender population with long undeformed heads, the people of the Tchefuncte Period. This earlier population had been hunters and gatherers. Most of their known sites are large shell heaps near the coast formed as a result of their appetite for mussels.

**THE MARKSVILLE POPULATION**

The Marksville population, however, were assured of a reliable food supply from their agriculture and their sites are to be found widely scattered over the state in areas where good agricultural land was to be found. Such a site is the one at the Crooks Place near Catahoula Lake. The large conical mound and the small flattened structure at this site do not mark the actual site of a town but rather appear to have served as a center for a scattered farming community, much as country churches and their accompanying cemeteries serve similar communities of white men today.

The most prominent feature of the site was the conical burial mound. Excavation showed that it had been built in several stages. First a rectangular platform about three feet high had been constructed. The remains of 382 individuals had been piled on this platform and covered with a mantle of earth. Some time later another mantle containing many more burials had been added to bring the structure to a height of over 20 feet. It contained a total of 1175 burials. Many of the burials gave evidence of having been exposed and partially stripped of flesh before they were interred. This indicates a practice which was well known later for some of the historic Indian groups, the placing of the dead in a "Dead House" for a period and then cleaning the bones before burial. The house for the dead at the Crooks site probably stood on the small low mound which is located near the large one.

Numerous articles had been placed with the burials in the large mound. This includes pottery vessels; pipes; copper ear spools and bracelets; stone, galena, and pearl beads; masses of ocher for paint; and numerous tools of stone. Impressions of finely woven matting were found lining two of the shallow pits in which burials had been placed. In one case the imprint of a conical shaped carrying basket was found, evidently a discarded basket which had been worn out carrying earth to heighten the mound.

**THE WEEDEEN ISLAND CULTURE**

From the evidence gathered at the Crooks Site and preceding investigations of Marksville Period sites, it now appears that this early stage of Lower Valley occupation was ancestral to several cultural stages which have been recognized in the Eastern United States. Changing forms which evolved from the Marksville can be traced along the Gulf coast to Florida where they formed the main part of the Weeden Island stage. Fragmentary remnants of the Weeden Island culture appear in cultures existing in Florida in historic times.

Cultural stages which developed out of the Marksville can be followed up the valleys of the Red and Ouachita Rivers. In 1700 this appeared as the material culture of the Caddoan speaking Indians of northwestern Louisiana and the adjacent parts of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Soon after it appeared in the Lower Valley, Marksville began spreading up the valley of the Mississippi. Somewhere between Louisiana and southern Illinois it began to merge with the culture of a hunting people who had occupied the northern part of the United States previous to the arrival of these influences. This mixed culture reached its highest development in southern Ohio where it is called the "Hopewell Culture". The vigor of this advanced agricultural development is demonstrated by its wide spread over the northeast. Sites are not uncommon in western New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Missouri. All of these northern manifestations appear to have vanished before white men began to record the history of North America.