

All over the North American continent, from Lake Superior to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Alleghanies to the Rocky Mountains, are found the remains of an extinct and prehistoric people. These remains consist for the most part of earthen mounds, often of vast extent and almost countless numbers. Hence their unknown creators are called the mound-builders.

These strange structures may be divided into two classes: enclosures and mounds proper. The chief purpose of the enclosures seems to have been for defence—the formation, as it were, of a fortified camp. They were sometimes of great size, covering many hundreds of acres. They were surrounded by parapets of earth, in the form of circles, octagons, or similar figures. They were evidently designed for protection against an intrusive race, and formed a line of forts from the Alleghanies to the Ohio.

Another striking form of enclosure is that designated animal mounds. These are outlines in earthwork, in low relief, of sacred animals—probably the totems of different tribes, as the turtle, lizard, serpent, alligator, eagle, buffalo, and the like. They are especially numerous in the valley of the Wisconsin. The “Great Serpent” of Adams County, Ohio, is over a thousand feet long, and the “Alligator,” of Licking County, is two hundred and fifty feet long and fifty feet broad. The mounds proper are of much less extent, but of greater elevation. Some, there is reason to believe, from the presence of charred bones, charcoal, trinkets, etc., were used as altars for the burning of sacrifice, and perhaps for the offering of human victims. Others are known as temple mounds. These were chiefly truncated pyramids, with graded approaches to their tops, which are always level, and are sometimes fifty feet in height. In Mexico and Central America this class is represented by vast structures, faced with flights of steps and surrounded by temples of stone.

More numerous than any are the sepulchral mounds. They always contain the remains of one or more bodies, accompanied by trinkets, cups, and vases, probably once containing food provided by loving hands for the departed spirit faring forth, as was fondly believed, on its unknown journey to the happy hunting-grounds beyond the sky. The size of these is generally inconsiderable; but they sometimes attain great magnitude: in which case they probably cover the remains of some distinguished chief. One

of these, known as Grave Creek Mound, in Virginia, is seventy feet in height and nine hundred feet in circumference. Sometimes earthen vessels are found, containing charred human remains, indicating the practice of cremation among the mound-builders.

But there are other evidences of the comparatively high state of civilization of those remarkable people. There are numerous remains of their art and manufactures. Among these are flint arrow-heads and axes, pestles and mortars for grinding corn, and pipes, frequently elaborately carved with considerable artistic skill. These last often occur in the form of animal or human figures, sometimes exhibiting much grotesque humour, and frequently executed in very intractable material.

Remains of closely woven textile fabrics have also been found, together with implements used in the spinning of the thread and manufacture of the cloth. The pottery and other wares of the mound-builders exhibit graceful forms, elegant ornamentation, and much skill in manufacture. On some of these the human face and form are delineated with much fidelity and grace, and the features differ widely from those of the present race of Indians. Copper implements, the work of this strange people, are also found in considerable quantities. Among these are knives, chisels, axes, spear and arrow heads, bracelets, and personal ornaments.

But the most striking proof of the mechanical skill of the mound-builders is their extensive mining operations on the south shore of Lake Superior. Here are a series of mines and drifts, sometimes fifty feet deep, extending for many miles along the shore at Ontonagon and at Isle Royal, off the north shore. In one of these was found, at the depth of eighteen feet, resting on oaken sleepers, a mass of native copper weighing over six tons, which had been raised five feet from its original bed; numerous props, levers, ladders, and shovels, employed in mining operations, were also found.

These old mines had become extinct long before the discovery of America, for the present race of Indians had no knowledge of copper when first visited by white men; and trees whose concentric rings indicated an age of four hundred years have been found growing upon the accumulated rubbish that filled the shafts.

The commerce of the mound-builders was also quite extensive. Copper from these northern mines is found widely distributed through eighteen degrees of