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Western Reserve and Northern Ohio

HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

CLEVELAND, OHIO.

No. Twenty-Three—October, 1874.

RELICS OF THE MOUND BUILDERS.

BY C. C. BALDWIN, SECRETARY.

In July, 1874, the Secretary of the Western Reserve and Northern Ohio Historical Society brought with him from Memphis, Tennessee, a very valuable addition to the collection of relics now in the Society's museum belonging to that mysterious race, the Mound Builders.

They are the generous gift of Colonel L. J. Du Pre, editor of the *Memphis Appeal*, a gentleman whose contributions in print and in manuscript concerning the first known inhabitants of our country are of absorbing interest.

With one exception the mounds from which these articles were taken are located on Mississippi River, about sixty miles below Memphis.

Among them is a skull in good preservation, showing at its base the marks of pressure against a board or other hard substance, producing a flat depression. The skull is said to have been taken from the bottom of a mound about forty or fifty miles below Memphis.

Among the contents of the mounds of this vicinity was a black baked basin, shaped much like a tin wash-basin, which contained a skull lying within it face upward. The material of the basin is similar to that of the black vessels hereinafter described, and the skull (now in Memphis) is in a state of preservation similar to that donated to the society. Both skulls are of uncommon thickness and strength.

The donation contains numerous specimens of pottery. Some of them are of brown clay baked and retaining its color, some of them are black throughout as if made of river mud. They are all mixed with pounded shells in the manner common with the Mound Builders except No. 14. None of this pottery is glazed, although

some of it is very smoothly and handsomely made and some pieces have a hard outside finish that appears something like glazing.

No. 1 is a vase of handsome form, painted red and of smooth, hard surface, nine inches in diameter, six and a half inches high to the shoulder. The mouth or spout is broken away, but may be guessed to have been like number three.

No. 2 is a soft, black porous vessel, not far from round, about eight and one-half inches in diameter, five and three-fourths inches high to the spout, which is one and three-fourths inches wide, and of which about that length remains. This vessel was probably a water cooler, to which use it was by shape and structure well adapted.

No. 3 is a vase of smooth, hard surface—striped in three colors, red, white and brown, about the size and shape of number one. There remains, however, the spout or top of the vase, striped, five inches long in diameter, at the lower end one and five-eighths inches, at the upper end one-half inch aperture. The spout stood upon the top of the vase, and the whole resembled in shape some of the Peruvian vases, used for holding fluids, and closed with a round stone used as a cork.

This and number one are too smooth, sharp and regular in outline to have been formed with the hand. They were very likely moulded, and very nicely too, as the joints do not show. The inside shows the plain marks of fingers pressing the fine brown clay against the moulds. The shells are pounded much finer in this and number one than in the others.

No. 4 is an unbroken pot, five inches in diameter and five high, with a curved mouth two inches in diameter. It is made

of brown, hard baked clay, color stained by fire, and of close texture.

No. 5 was found with the skull already mentioned, and is a black vase six inches in diameter four and one half high, with a mouth two and three fourths inches across. The outline of this vase is quite sharp and graceful, showing good taste and skill. The material is hard. This and No. 4 both look as if they might have been used in cooking, although differing much in form, color and material.

No. 6 is four and a half inches in diameter, by four high and two across the mouth. It is of rough pottery and very nearly whole.

No. 7 is a rare bit of pottery, black in material and color, well baked, pear shaped, with a round unprojecting mouth near the top. This vase is not whole. It shows that it was much thicker above the mouth with a protuberance, which perhaps had a hole through it for the purpose of suspending it to the side of the room or cabin.

Among the vases found in the locality of this, were some with small perforated ears, intended for suspension, by passing a thong through them.

A view of the inside of the cabin of a Mojave family, found in Lieut. Ives's report upon the Colorado river, well illustrates this custom.

The diameter of this vase is four and one half inches, total height remaining, six inches, of which half an inch is above the upper side of the mouth.

The officers of the society do not remember to have seen figured any vessel of similar shape to this, and it may be considered almost or quite unique.

No. 8 is five and one-third inches in diameter, three inches high, and three and three-fourths inches across the mouth. It is shaped like a small basin, with contracted mouth. It has marks of fire and is of brown clay.

No. 9 is four and one-third inches in diameter, three and one-half inches high by two and one-half inches diameter across a low mouth. It is rough baked clay, with marks of fire.

No. 10 is a small basin six and one-fourth inches in diameter, narrowing at the top to five and one-fourth inches, two and three-fourths high, black in color, and the upper part ornamented with diagonal marks. This is a kind of ornamentation very common in the pottery of the Mound Builders and Indians, but the only ornamentation of that kind in the collection we are now describing.

No. 11 is a very small vase, brown clay color, a little over two inches in diameter and two high, one and one-half across the inside of the mouth.

No. 12 is very much like No. 11, a little larger, and mouth gone.

No. 13 is the ornamental handle of a scoop or dipper, with a part of the vessel attached. It is painted red. The handle represents the head and beak of a bird, much like those ornaments not uncommon in Peruvian and Mound Builder ceramic ware. The handle is a very convenient one, the thumb resting nicely on the crest.

No. 14 is a graceful vase, almost perfect, of thick but brittle ware, painted red, with a long, narrow neck—looking as if it might have held some perfume or precious liquid. Its diameter is three inches; height five inches, of which two is neck; the diameter of the neck is one inch. This vase is the only one which has no pounded shells mixed with it.

None of the vessels have any feet. Indeed, vessels with feet are exceedingly uncommon among relics of the mounds. There are, however, three hollow feet which evidently belonged to some vessel shaped apparently like our old-fashioned iron pots. These feet are of some size, being three and three-fourths inches high, and two inches in diameter. The bottoms imitate the cat-like feet and toes of some animal, joining usefulness and an artistic imitation of some object in natural history—an art in which the Mound Builders excelled.

In this collection is also a skinning knife made of polished quartz, streaked white and red; an instrument for dressing skins, of slate colored quartz rock, also polished very smooth. Also an implement of quartz, three inches long and one wide, with a blunt edge on each end.

There is yet to be described a very interesting relic, it is a round stone of reddish quartz, three and three quarter inches in diameter, one and one-eighth inches in thickness, nicely worked with a depression pecked on one side for the thumb. The edge is straight from side to side of the stone, but beveled. The use of this stone is unmistakable. It was rolled along the ground in one of their games, which came down to some of the Indian tribes within the time of history. It was played by two players at a time, each of whom had a pole. One rolled the stone, which from its beveled edge must continually turn toward the right. As soon as the stone started the two players threw their poles and the one whose pole lay nearest to the stone when it stopped was the victor, and had the right to roll the stone the next time. Such is the mode of playing described by Du Pratz in his History of Louisiana, published in 1758.

Adair's book, published in 1775, describes the game as played among the Cherokees.

"The warriors have another favorite game called chungke. They have a square piece

of ground well cleaned. Only one or two on a side play at this ancient game. They have a stone about two fingers broad at the edge, and two spans round; each party has a pole about eight feet long, smooth and tapering at each end, the points flat." Adair then gives the method of playing, substantially as above, and adds: "In this manner the players will keep running most part of the day at half speed, under the violent heat of the sun staking their silver ornaments, nose, finger and ear rings, their breast, arm and wrist plates, and their wearing apparel." All the American Indians, says Adair, are much addicted to this game, which to us appears to be a task of stupid drudgery; it seems, however, to be of early origin when their forefathers used diversions as simple as their manners. The hurling stones they use at present were from time immemorial, rubbed smooth on the rocks and with prodigious labor; they are kept with the strictest religious care from one generation to another, and are exempted from being buried with the dead. They belong to the town where they are used and are carefully preserved."

If public property they would rarely be buried with the dead. They are however sometimes found in mounds, and Mr. C. C. Jones, in his excellent books on the Antiquities of Georgia, relates the finding of a fine one in a mound at a depth of thirty feet.

There are in Arkansas and perhaps in other States along the Mississippi river prepared grounds, sometimes with sun-baked brick. These places are called by those living in the vicinity threshing-floors. Is it not probable that they were chungke yards?

The aborigines had little grain to thresh,

all our ordinary grains being of European origin.

The game seems to have been of general and great interest, where says Captain Romans, "They bet high." Here you may see a savage come and bring all his skins stake them and lose them, next his pipe, his beads, trinkets and ornaments; at last his blanket and other garments, and even all their arms and after a l it is not uncommon for them to go home, borrow a gun, and shoot themselves.

Catlin says that the Mandans used sometimes to stake their liberty upon the issue of this game.

Adair says the Cherokees had a piece of ground carefully prepared and kept for this game near their council house, or as he calls it "State House."

Mr. Jones says the traces left in Georgia of such grounds show a careful preparation and are parallelograms in shape slightly elevated from sixty to ninety feet in length and about half as wide.

Captain Romans describes the ground as being an alley about two hundred feet in length where a smooth clay ground "is laid which when dry is very hard."

May not some of the mysterious and carefully prepared grounds of the mound builders within the State of Ohio, have been public yards for the playing of this game.

It is curious that the Mandans whom Catlin found west of the Missouri River and whose traditions pointed to the Ohio River had the same name for this game, as had the Creeks.

Col. Du Pre also presented to the society several photographs, two of a skull taken from one of the mounds, the others representing various objects of curious interest.