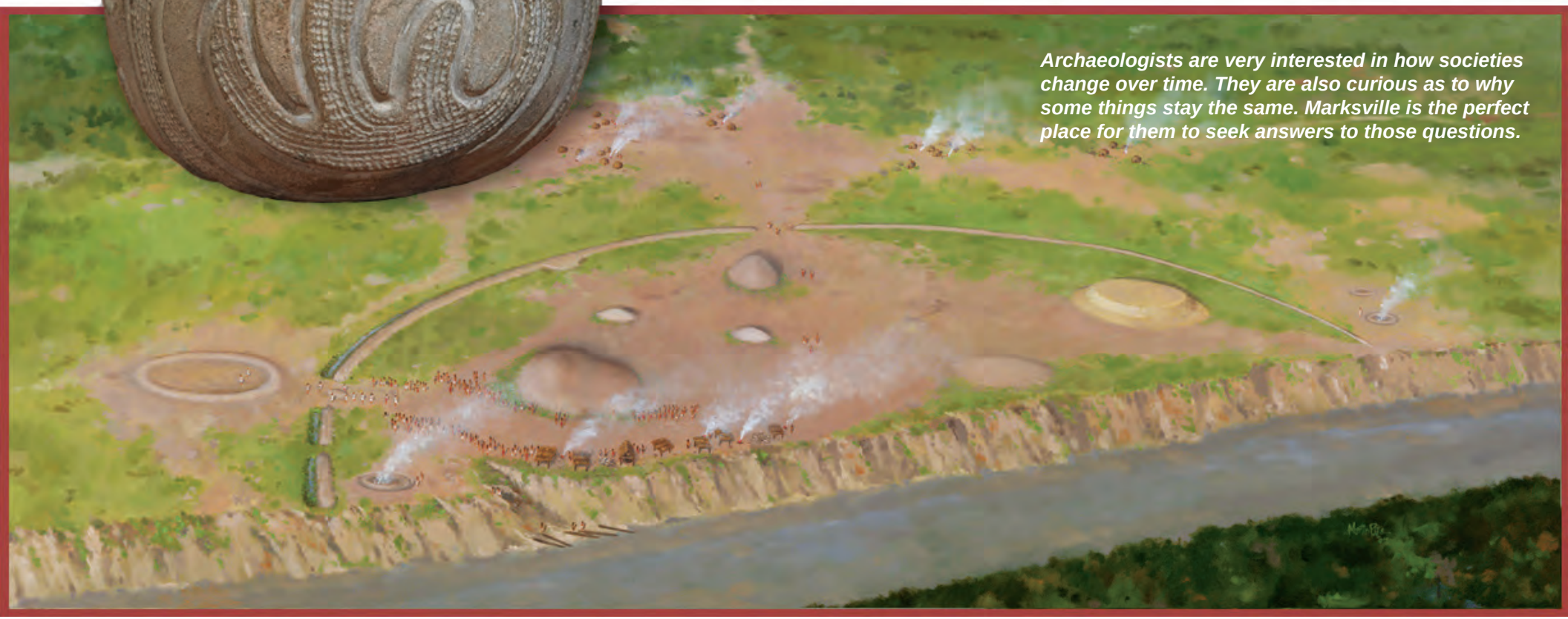
MARKSVILLE

A.D. 1 — A.D. 400

The Marksville site in central Louisiana shows how ideas from far away can spark change. About the time of Christ, travelers brought news of the Hopewell culture from where it started hundreds of miles to the north. That culture had distinct artifact styles and rituals. At Marksville, people adopted several of the new customs, but not all of them. The site they left behind gives a peek at how these people balanced tradition and change.



Archaeologists are very interested in how societies change over time. They are also curious as to why some things stay the same. Marksville is the perfect place for them to seek answers to those questions.

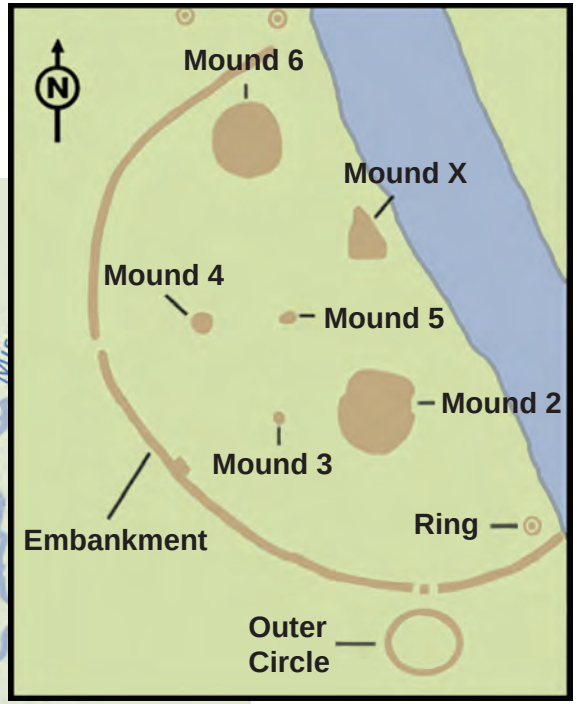
Photo by Kevin Duffy. Painting by Martin Pate.

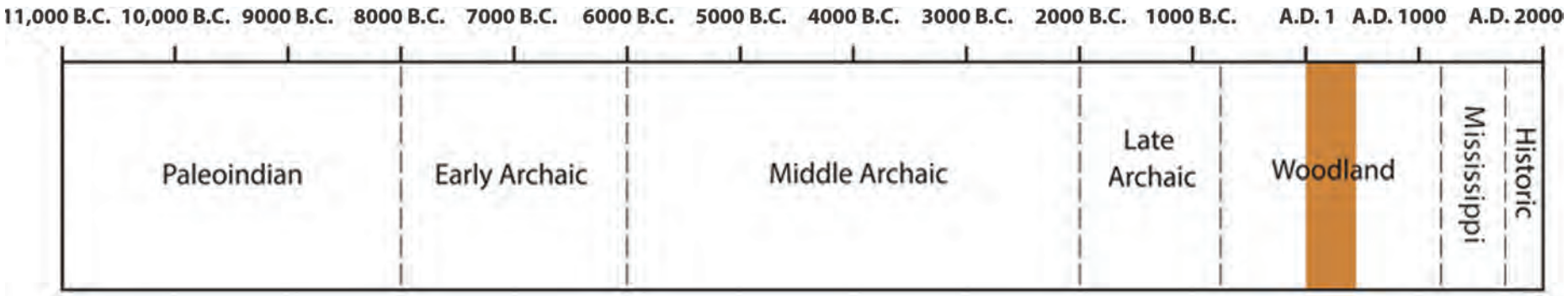
Time and Place

The Marksville site is in Avoyelles Parish on high ground next to Old River. About 2,000 years ago, American Indians built a group of earthworks here. The site has six mounds and one ring enclosed by a C-shaped earthen ridge. The ridge is known as the embankment. Other earthworks, including a circle and more rings, are outside the embankment. Marksville covered at least 60 acres and was the largest site in use in Louisiana at that time. It was a place where people gathered for ceremonies and to mourn the dead.

People used the site from A.D. 1 to A.D. 400, during the Middle Woodland period. That time is when the Hopewell culture spread from the Midwest over much of the eastern half of North America. Marksville shows a great deal of Hopewell influence. After A.D. 400, the way of life at Marksville changed, and people left the site. Archaeologists started to study the site about 100 years ago.

What else was going on around the world in Marksville's day? This was the era of the Five Good Emperors in the Roman Empire, which was at the height of its power. In South America, the Moche had come to power in Peru. Meanwhile, the Kushan dynasty in northern India began spreading Buddhism in the region.





Hopewell Culture

About 100 B.C., the Hopewell culture began to flourish in what is now Illinois, Ohio, and other parts of the Midwest. Hopewell groups shared four traits. First, they built groups of mounds and embankments, some of which were hundreds of acres in size. Second, they had elaborate graves inside some mounds. Third, they made artifacts of materials that came from far away. Fourth, they made special styles of decorated pots and pipes.

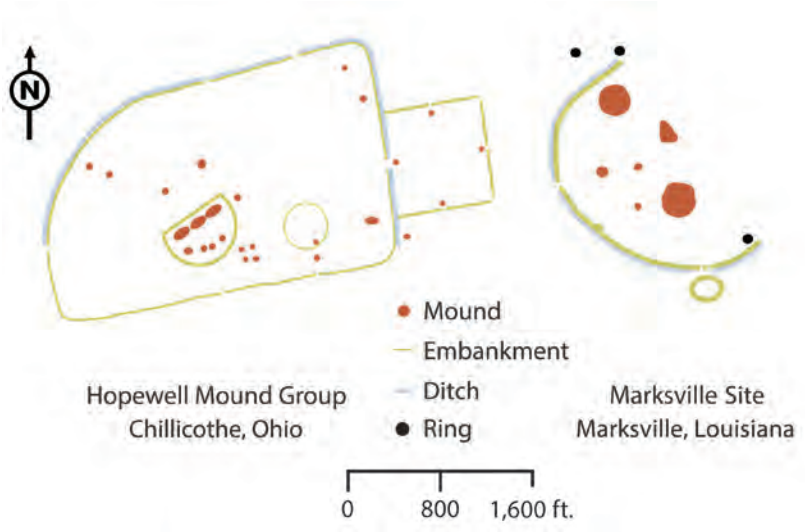
Hopewell ideas swept across most of eastern North America. They spread down the Mississippi Valley to the Gulf of Mexico. Each community decided which customs to follow and how to change them to fit their way of life. The Hopewell customs in use at Marksville were 1) mounds and embankments, 2) burial traditions, and 3) pottery decorations.

The earthworks at Marksville are similar to, but not exactly like, those in the north. For example, in Ohio, people built embankments in circles, squares, octagons, parallel lines, and other shapes. At the Marksville site, people built a large semi-circle and a small circle. They even made very small circular earthworks known as "rings." Rings have not been found at any other Hopewell site. They may be related to a special activity that took place only at Marksville.

One of the mounds at Marksville, Mound 4, is a burial mound. Some of the tombs in this mound are built with logs and cane mats. These graves are very much like Hopewell tombs in mounds in Arkansas and Illinois. Only a few of the people who used the Marksville site were buried in this mound. Those individuals and their families likely were important leaders in the community.

(Above) Some of Marksville's mounds would have stood out not only for their shape and arrangement, but also for their color. Marksville's mounds were built with different colors of soil. Painting by Martin Pate.

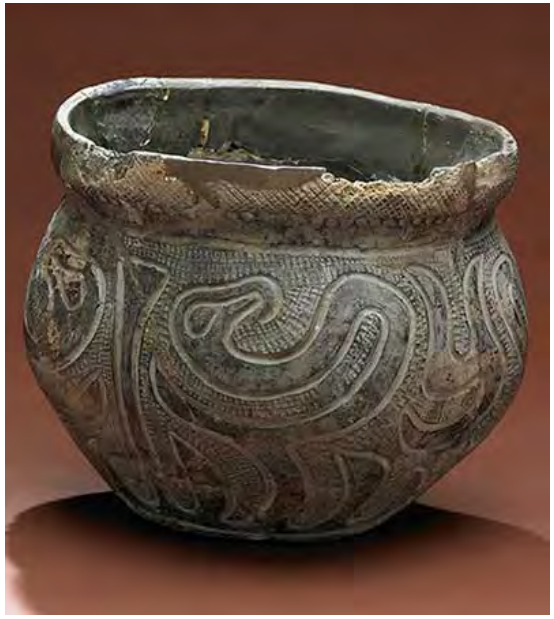
(Below) Hopewell sites vary a lot in size and form, even though many have large embankments and mounds.



Many Hopewell communities traded for large amounts of stone from far away. However, the people at Marksville did not do that. They continued to use local stone to make most of their tools and other items.

The people at Marksville created some artifacts in the Hopewell style. They made pottery bowls and jars from local clay. Then, they added designs that were nearly identical to those on pots in Ohio and Illinois. In particular, certain birds are on pots in all these areas. These designs show that the birds had a special meaning for people in the Hopewell world. Marksville potters also modeled their smoking pipes on styles found in Illinois. Although they made them of local clay rather than stone, the shapes are very similar.

Many communities in Louisiana made pots with Hopewell designs on them. At some places, these pottery designs continued long after people left the Marksville site. Pottery is the major example of the long-lasting effect that Hopewell traditions had in Louisiana. Other Hopewell traits were less widely adopted in this region. For example, earthen embankments and elaborate tombs in mounds were very rare, and Marksville is unusual because it had these.



Hook-billed bird pot, Marksville site, Louisiana
Catalogue Number 331688
Department of Anthropology,
Smithsonian Institution

Clay pipe, Marksville site, Louisiana
Catalogue Number 331691
Department of Anthropology,
Smithsonian Institution

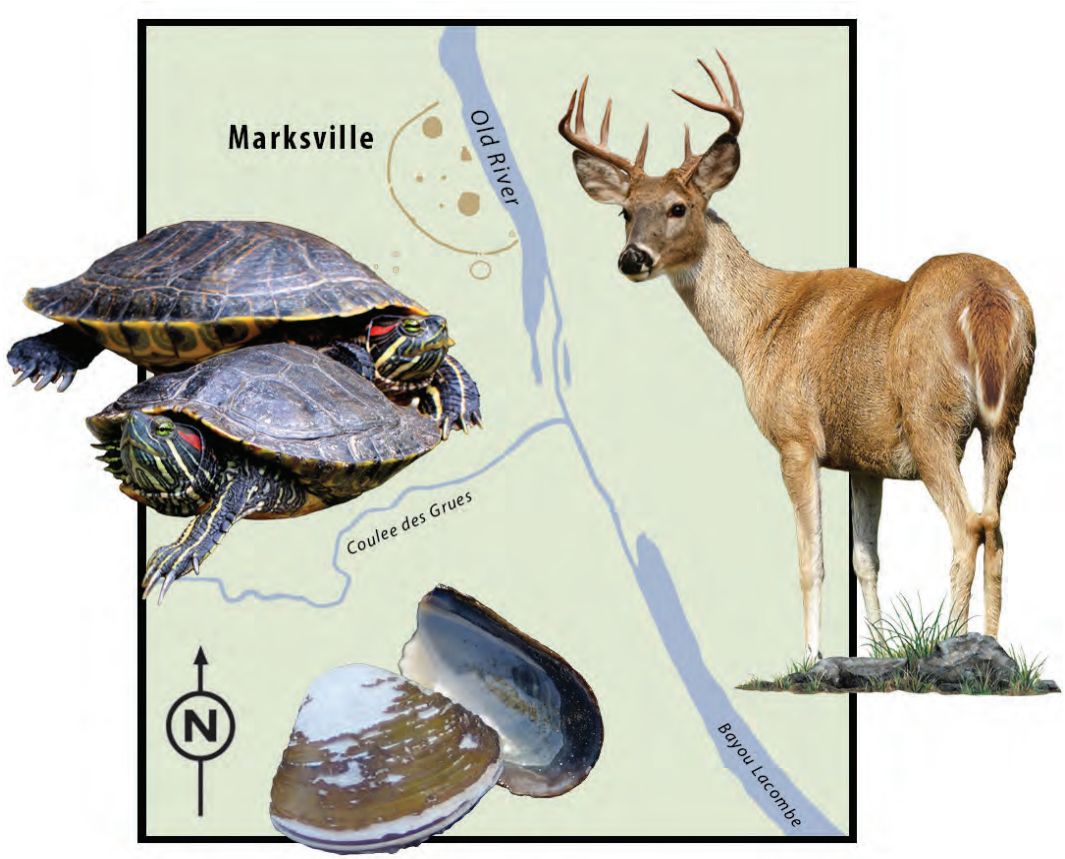
Stone “Monitor” pipe, Oscar Hood site, Illinois
Credit: Kenneth Farnsworth and the Upper Mississippi Valley Archaeological Research Foundation

Hook-billed bird pot, Mundies Mound site, Illinois
Credit: Kenneth Farnsworth and Tommy Bryden

Food

Archaeologists named the Marksville site after the modern city of Marksville, where the site is located. The site sits nearly 25 feet above an abandoned channel of the Mississippi River, now called Old River. The Mississippi River flowed here several thousand years before Marksville. At this spot, between prairie and flood-plain, the people who built the site found lots of resources for food and tools.

Prairies were good places for people to gather certain plants and to hunt deer and rabbits. In the forests east of the site, nuts like acorns and pecans were available. American Indians also harvested wild grapes, persimmons and berries. Although people in the Midwest at this time grew some crops in gardens, the people at Marksville did not. They ate only wild plants. They also hunted animals like turtle and birds. Nearby rivers allowed for fishing and gathering fresh water clams.

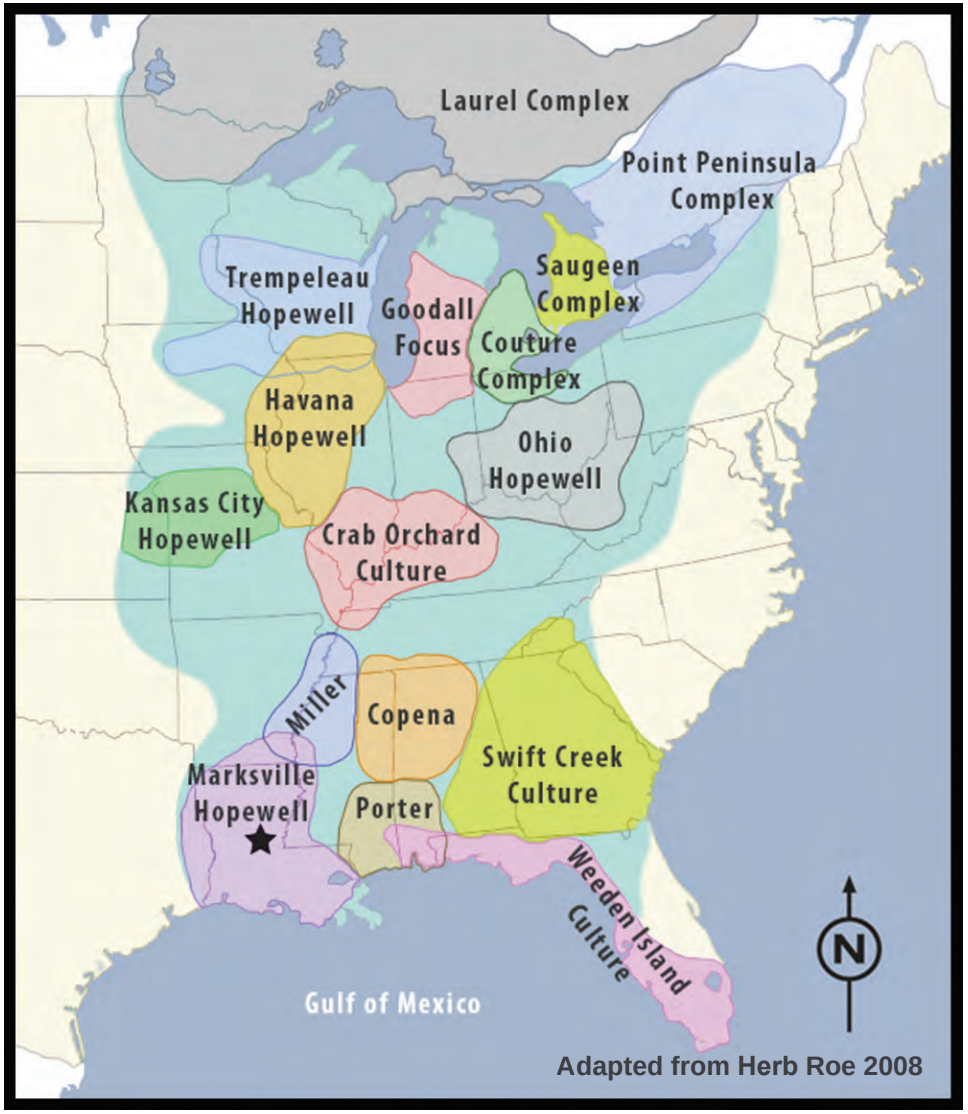


Paintings by Martin Pate.

Trade and Travel

Rivers were ancient people's best means of sending and getting news. Canoes carried people, goods, food, and information. In fact, people probably built most of the big Hopewell sites along rivers in part because it made it easier for them to trade and stay in touch. It is easy to imagine news about events at these sites spreading along rivers, lakes, and bayous.

Long-distance trade was a big part of life at many Hopewell sites. Archaeologists might expect to find non-local stone at Marksville, given that it is so close to major rivers. Instead, it looks as if the people who built the site did not place a high value on trade goods. They preferred to use and make things out of local resources. In this sense, they valued what was familiar to them.

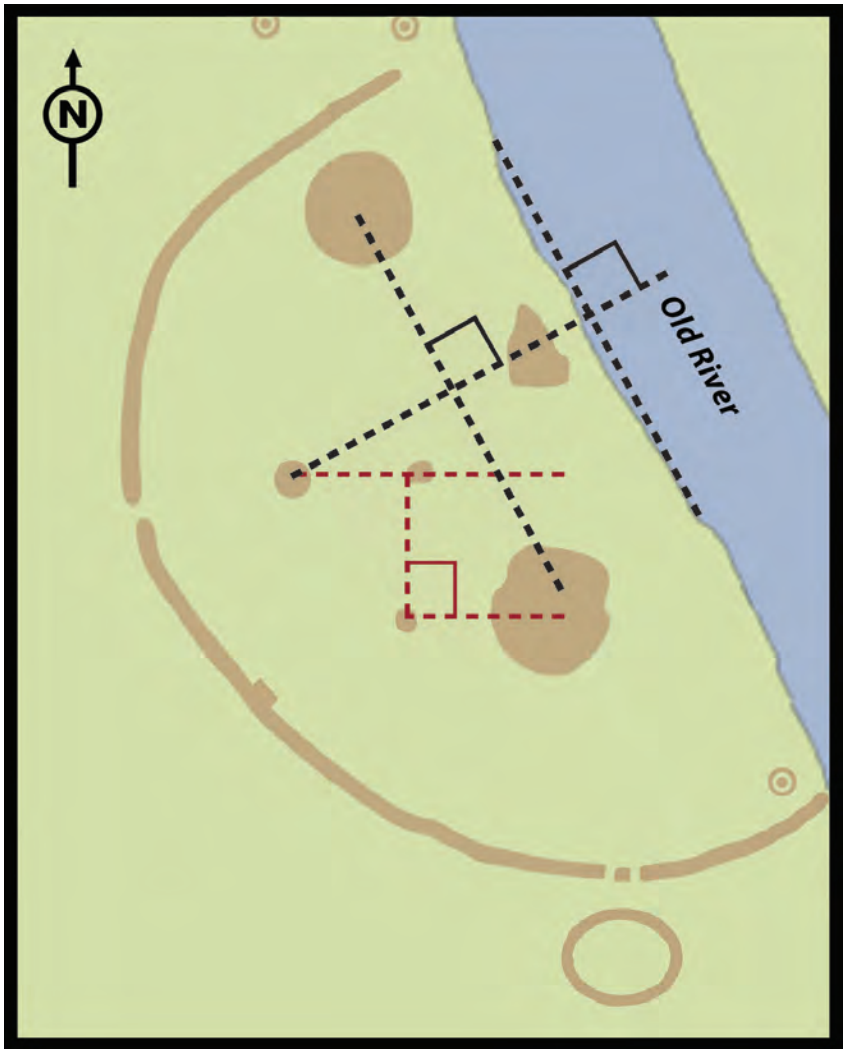


Hopewell people did not share a single culture. Rather, they had a common set of beliefs that was carried to other people through trade and travel. Each group chose what Hopewell beliefs to adopt and how they would be expressed in their culture. The area of trade and shared beliefs is called the Hopewell Interaction Sphere. The sphere stretched in the U.S. from Minnesota to Florida and from New York to Kansas City and Louisiana. At Marksville, people adopted Hopewell earthworks and burial customs but did not choose to trade many materials. People made most stone tools from rock that was found locally. Stone from far away (left) was used only rarely at Marksville. These pieces are from Illinois (dark) and Missouri (light).

Ceremonial Life

American Indians built the Marksville site in a Hopewell style. This means the site has different kinds of mounds that, together, form geometric patterns on the land. Builders enclosed these mounds inside an embankment, an earthen ridge that surrounded the site. Yet, it was not just how the site was built that ties it to Hopewell culture. Just as important is how the site was used.

Archaeologists have not found any houses at Marksville. This means that American Indians probably used the site just for ceremonies. They also honored the dead there. Mound 4 was only used for the burials of important people, and perhaps their families. The earthworks and burials are the strongest signs of a Hopewell connection at the site.



Geometry is a way for people to think logically about space. It is a process that expresses patterns that can be seen in the natural world. The people of Marksville tapped into that process. The result was a beautiful arrangement of mounds, each built in a unique relationship to the others (above).

The geometric patterns found at some Hopewell sites are very complex. Some patterns, like those found at the Newark site in Ohio (left), may have been used as a way to track the paths of the sun, moon and stars. Painting by Steven Patricia. www.snpatricia.com.

Ceremonies may have even taken place outside the embankment, at an earthen circle and several earthen rings. The circle is south of the embankment and its purpose is not known. A raised walkway connects the circle to the embankment at one of the openings.

The rings, which are smaller than the circle, were among the first earthworks people built at Marksville. The American Indians built a fire in a pit inside each ring and later cleaned the pit after each use. There is a narrow space between the ring and the fire pit. This means that only small groups of people could have used them at any given time. Archaeologists have not been able to tell what sorts of activities or ceremonies people performed within the rings.

Some artifacts may shed light on ceremonial use of the site. Archaeologists have found clay pipes at Marksville. Healers or leaders may have used these pipes in ceremonies. Researchers have also found human figurines at Marksville and other Hopewell sites. Only the head portion of one has been found at Marksville. It is unclear why people made these figurines, but they certainly could have used them in rituals.

A lack of artifacts also reveals something about the site. Archaeologists have found lots of artifacts along the edge of the bluff where the site overlooks Old River. Yet, they have found few artifacts in the open spaces between the mounds. Perhaps, like the pits in the rings, people cleaned the site plaza between ceremonies and dumped the trash along the bluff. Then again, the activities conducted in the plaza may not have produced any artifacts, or these areas may not have been used by most people. Regardless, it means that the spaces inside the embankment were not all used the same way.

Painting by Martin Pate

Mound 4 is the only burial mound at the site. Thirty-four people (and two dogs) were buried there, some laid to rest with fancy pots and other things. The few people buried in this mound, together with its position inside the enclosure, indicate this place and these people were important. The people buried in this mound may have been political, religious or other kinds of social leaders. A look at another nearby Hopewell site makes it clear that the people in Mound 4 were treated differently in death than most people.

The Crooks site had only two mounds and no embankments. Yet, one of these mounds, which is the same size as Mound 4 at Marksville, had more than 1,100 burials! Many of these individuals were buried in a mass grave rather than in separate tombs. Archaeologists found a range of Hopewell objects buried in the mound, some of them lying next to bodies.

Some of the pots in Mound 4 were very ornate, while others were plain and tiny. The front row of cups in the photo below stand barely over two inches tall!

The special burial customs at the Marksville site were short-lived. All of the bodies in Mound 4 represent, at best, no more than a few generations. Even so, people still used the site for nearly 400 years. Painting by Martin Pate.

Catalogue Numbers (Left to Right): 369012, 369011, 369013, 369009, 369008, 331693, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution

Explore the Site

Marksville's story did not end in prehistory. The site also played a role in modern U.S. history. The city of Marksville bought the site in 1933 and invited the Smithsonian Institution to come investigate it. The Smithsonian sent Frank Setzler to serve as lead archaeologist for this project, along with his assistant, James Ford.

This was during the Great Depression, and many people were eager for a paycheck. Crews of local people dug under professional supervision at this site in 1933 and 1939. This was the first large-scale excavation funded by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). In many ways, it served as a test case for future federally funded digs around the country during the Depression.

Now it is your turn to experience Marksville for yourself. Read about the features of the map to learn more about the site and the people who built it.

Embankment

A massive 3,117-foot-long ridge, or embankment, encircles six mounds and almost 40 acres at Marksville. That is the size of nearly 20 soccer fields! A ditch runs along the outside of the embankment, marking the area where people took soil to build the embankment. People passed in and out of the enclosed area through three small gaps. Two of these gaps lie close together on the south side of the embankment. They lead to a causeway across the ditch and to the Outer Circle.

The embankment stands nearly 10 feet high at its peak and under 2 feet at its lowest point. Why does its height vary so much? It varies because the embankment was built in relation to the natural ground surface. The embankment is lowest where the ground surface is highest, and it is tallest where the ground level is lowest. Building it this way means the top of the embankment is at the same elevation all around the site.

It is clear that people built the site with a plan in mind. The embankment is a part of that plan. People may have used the embankment to help track the movement of the sun, moon and stars, perhaps to plan ceremonial events. This interpretation is difficult to prove, though. To date, no data have been found at the site to suggest this is clearly the case.

Mound X

It is hard to tell what Mound X looked like when American Indians first built it. Sadly, the mound has been greatly altered by development and farming. Today, it is triangular in shape and just over 3 feet tall.

All of the other mounds have numeric designations (i.e., Mounds 2, 3, 4, etc.). Why is this mound different? As it so happens, an early researcher counted 27 mounds in the Marksville area when he did a survey of the site in 1926. However, because Mound X is so low and has an odd shape, archaeologists did not identify it as made by people until 2000. By then, giving the mound a number (Mound 28) would have caused too much confusion.

Sometimes, important archaeological discoveries are hidden in plain view. Mound X, indicated by the arrow in the image above, went unnoticed by archaeologists for nearly 80 years!

Mound 2

Development and farming have damaged Mound 2 over time. In spite of this damage, the mound is still visible. Today, it stands 13 feet tall and is 295 by 263 feet wide at its base. As part of the site plan, a line between this mound and Mound 6 forms a line parallel to the bluff's edge. Builders made the mound out of earth found near the site, including at least one layer of black clay dug from the near-by river bank. This mound also has an odd shape whose meaning and purpose is unclear.

People may have used Mound 2 for important rituals. Near the mound are the remains of a rectangular structure with a sunken floor. Dug into this floor was a large rectangular pit filled with charcoal from one or more large fires. Very few artifacts were found in the structure leaving few clues to the activities that took place in and around it. Artifacts and features are scarce on the west and south sides of the mound, while artifacts and features are common between the mound and the bluff edge.

Mounds 3 and 5

Looking at Mounds 3 and 5, it is clear that the people who built the site had a plan in mind. The two mounds are in a direct north-south line. Mound 5 lies east of Mound 4 while Mound 3 lies west of Mound 2. Each mound is low and dome shaped, over 65 feet in diameter and roughly 3 feet high. These two mounds are unique at the site because each is built entirely of white-colored earth.

Civilian crews dug at Mound 5 during the 1933 project. They cut one trench through the mound, which people can still see today. A large depression is also visible in the center of Mound 3. It is the result of an excavation in 1926. This dig found no artifacts in the mound.

Mounds 3 (below) and 5 (above).

Mound 4

Mound 4 is the site's only burial mound. It is also the only mound at the site to be completely excavated. It was originally 20 feet tall and 100 feet wide at its base, and it had a conical shape. The mound contained the remains of at least 34 people and two dogs. Some burials included decorated ceramic pots and pipes. After workers finished excavating the mound in 1933, they rebuilt it.

Mound 4 began as a 5-foot-high, rectangular platform of earth. A line of wooden posts stood along two sides of the platform, and a large burial chamber was in the center. This tomb was 8 by 12 feet in size and 3 feet deep. People laid several bodies along with artifacts in this tomb. Then they covered it with logs and mats of woven cane. Several smaller tombs were on the platform around this large grave. The builders covered the entire platform with a pile of earth and added more burials. Then, they topped the mound with a second layer of earth to give it the final conical shape.

This mound was reserved for the burial of important people from the community. Children buried in the mound may have been members of their families. This kind of treatment was unusual during the Middle Woodland period in this region.

Archaeologist Gerard Fowke started work at Mound 4 in 1926. He only dug a portion of the mound, though. In 1933, civilian crews dug the entire mound under the direction of archaeologist Frank Setzler.

Mound 6

This is the largest of the site's mounds. Although the original shape of Mound 6 is not easily visible today, it once had two tiers, or levels, with flat tops. The lowest level is now largely buried below the modern ground surface. Archaeologists think that this mound may also have originally had a dome-shaped mound on its top. Farmers probably removed it in the historic era so they could plant crops there. Today, the mound is 13 feet tall and 312 feet in diameter.

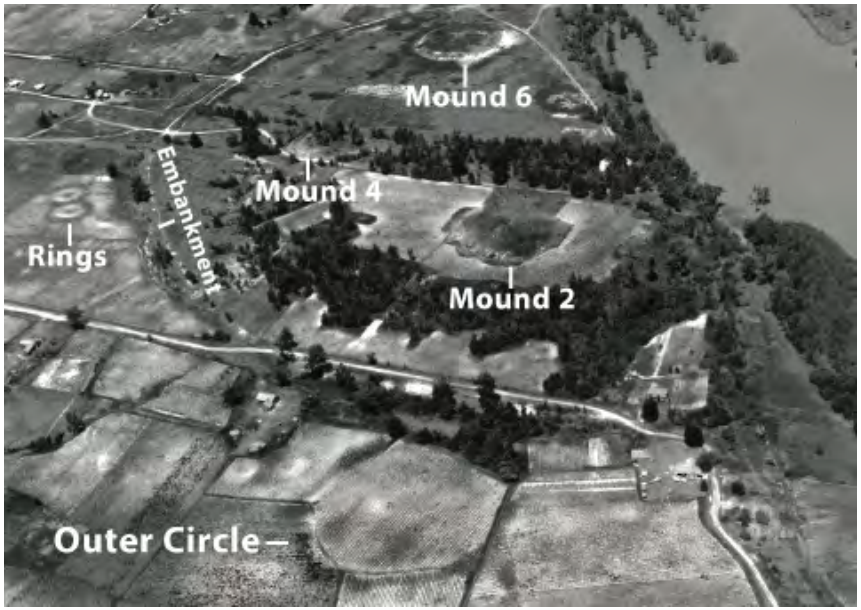
This mound stands out because of how people made it. They built it using mixed soils, except for the mound's outer layer, which is mainly yellow clay. The kind of soil people used to make the mounds clearly mattered a lot. The use of clayey dirt would have helped the mound keep its shape and resist erosion. What the different colored soils meant is open to debate. Native Americans built this mound and Mound 2 in a line parallel to the edge of the bluff on which the site sits.

(Above) Archaeologists making a map of Mound 6.

Outer Circle

The Outer Circle lies just south of Marksville's embankment. The circle is barely noticeable today. Most of it stands only an inch or two above the surface. Its shape is easier to see below the ground, where it shows up as a dark stain in the soil. Originally, the circle may have stood up to 2 feet tall with walls that were 20 feet wide. It measures about 320 feet in diameter, and it is surrounded by a ditch.

Archaeologists think a small causeway, or raised path, may have connected the circle to Marksville's plaza. This path would have been almost due north of the center of the circle. Archaeologists have excavated in this area, from just inside the Outer Circle to just inside the site's enclosure. They found only a handful of artifacts. To date, researchers do not know how or why the Outer Circle was used.



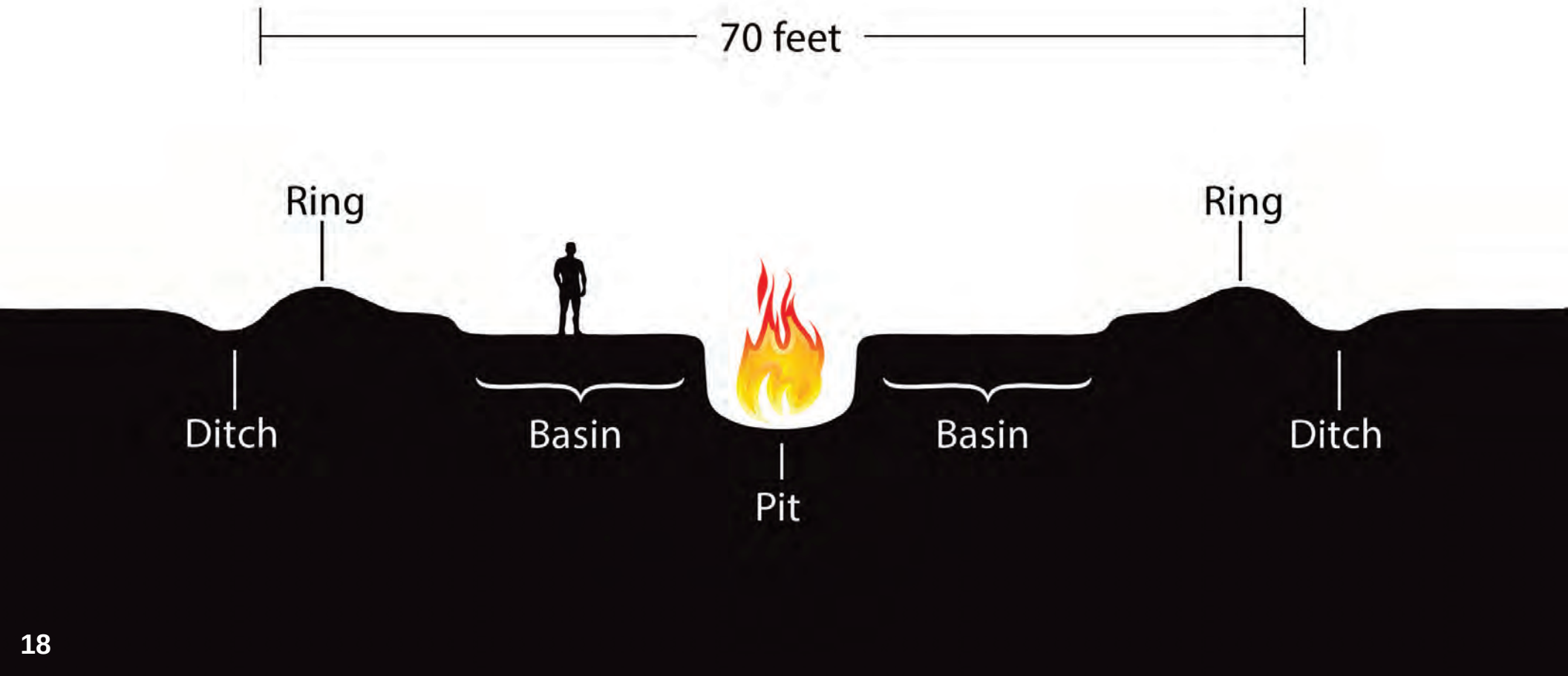
(Above) Black and white photo of the site, courtesy of LSU Museum of Natural Science.
(Below) Detail from painting of the site by Martin Pate.

Rings

The rings are among the first earthworks that American Indians built at the site. These features vary in size from 30 to 100 feet in diameter. Each ring is less than 4 feet high and is surrounded by a ditch on its outside edge. Inside each ring is a shallow basin, up to 3 feet deep. In the center of each basin is a deep pit, some up to 10 feet across and over 6 feet deep. People built a fire in the deepest pit and cleaned it out after each use.

It is unclear what kinds of rituals people held at these rings. The earthen ring would have made it hard for people outside of it to see what was taking place in the basin and pit. Small groups probably met for ceremonies, lighting a fire inside the pit. Eventually, people stopped using each pit and filled it with dirt. They left the ring surrounding each pit intact. After the ritual use of the pit ended, people could still see where each one had been.

Most telling, perhaps, is the fact that all but one of these rings are outside of the embankment. If these are ceremonial places, then the ceremonial landscape includes much land outside the embankment. This means that the sacred landscape extended beyond the embankment and mounds.



Artifacts

What is an artifact? Is it just a thing left over from the past, or is it something more? One way to think about artifacts is as the facts in a story. Archaeologists interpret those facts to test ideas about the past. As you look at the things found at Marksville, think about the way archaeologists have used them to understand what life was like at the site.

Bifaces

Archaeologists expect to find many different kinds of stone tools at big sites like Marksville. Yet, most of what they have found there were either projectile points or sharpened tools called bifaces. They used these tools and projectile points for many other tasks besides hunting. They could be used to butcher game, to scrape hides to make leather for clothes or containers, or to carve wooden tools and implements. They were the original multi-purpose tool. Most bifaces found at the site are 2-3 inches long and 1 inch wide. Like the projectile points found at the site, bifaces were made from local rock.

Figurine

Archaeologists found the head of a single clay figurine in Mound 4. The body portion of the figurine was missing. The figurine head is about an inch tall. Like most Hopewell figurines, the one found at the site has some fine details. The intended use of this and other Hopewell figurines is unclear.

Catalogue Number 369081
Department of Anthropology,
Smithsonian Institution

Pipes

People used clay to make ceramic platform pipes. Platform pipes are common at Hopewell sites. Yet, there are some differences between pipes found at sites in the eastern versus western Midwest. The Marksville pipes more closely resemble pipes found at Hopewell sites in Illinois and Missouri. However, they tend to be more flat at their base than those Hopewell pipes. In addition, pipes found farther north tend to be made of stone, not clay.

Healers could have used these pipes in ceremonies to heal people's bodies and spirits. People with high status or rank could have also used them for special or sacred events. In historic times, pipes were often used to declare war or peace. North American Indians also smoked pipes to show respect to foreign leaders. Perhaps similar customs were common at Marksville.

Catalogue Number 331691
Department of Anthropology,
Smithsonian Institution

Pottery

This vessel (top right), found in Mound 4, is unusual for having two distinct designs on it. One (left) is a series of nested triangles. The other (right) is a combination of straight and curved lines. The lines on the right design separate areas that are smooth from those that are rocker-stamped.

The artist used a wooden or bone tool with a rounded tip to carve the wide lines on the clay while it was still wet. The tool that created the rocker stamping was a curved piece of wood, bone or shell whose edge had series of teeth, like a saw. Rocking the tool back and forth across an area produced the pattern of tiny indentations.

Marksville containers from Mound 4 vary in size and shape. Some, like this one (middle right), are oddly shaped and difficult to describe. The function or purpose of this unique shape is unknown. The main figure in the design has two parts: a central triangular segment attached to a curving serpentine part. It is not clear what this design represents.

This pot, like all from Marksville, was made from clay mixed with grog temper. The artist added tiny fragments of ground up pottery to the clay before making the container. This grog temper helped the pot hold its shape when the potter baked it in a fire to make it hard.

The design carved onto the surface of this vessel (bottom right) is very unusual. Archaeologists do not know what the design or image is meant to represent. The picture shows how a tool with a serrated edge was rocked back and forth to create the stamped pattern.

This pot, like all the whole or restorable vessels researchers found at the site, was with the burials in Mound 4. Elsewhere at the site, archaeologists found only fragments (sherds) of pots and their overall designs are unknown.

Catalogue Number 369002, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution

Catalogue Number 331694, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution

Catalogue Number 331696, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution

Archaeologists recovered two pots of this shape (top right) from Mound 4. The form is unusual because it looks like two pots of different sizes were stuck together. The upper design is unique at Marksville and may represent a plant. The heart shape would be the leaf, while the teardrop shape would be the seed. It has not been possible to identify what plant this is. Possibilities include the eastern redbud tree, the red mulberry tree, and wild ginger. American Indians in the eastern United States used all of these plants.

In the center of the lower design is a bird. The head has a circular eye and a bill with the upper part hooking over the lower part. This bird image also appears on other examples of Marksville and Hopewell pottery. The hooked bill suggests a bird of prey, like a hawk, owl or vulture. The stylized designs on this pot may represent real plants and animals. It is also possible that the figures have ceremonial importance.

This short, “tubby” vessel (middle right) has a repeating curvilinear design around its body. The design is emphasized by the plain and rocker-stamped areas. The lip of the pot has a series of notches made by pushing a small round tool into the edge.

This pot (bottom right) has a series of very carefully drawn nested triangles and ovals covering its entire surface. In addition to the body design, two lines circle the pot just below the rim. These lines are regularly interrupted by three dots. A series of very fine diagonal lines decorate the lip, or top edge, of the pot. This vessel, like all of the ones pictured, is from Mound 4.

Overall, the openings of pots from Mound 4 are much smaller than pots from other areas of the site, suggesting the vessels are smaller in size. Some of the pots in the mound may have been made just to accompany the dead and were part of the burial ceremony.

Catalogue Number 331689, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution

Catalogue Number 369003, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution

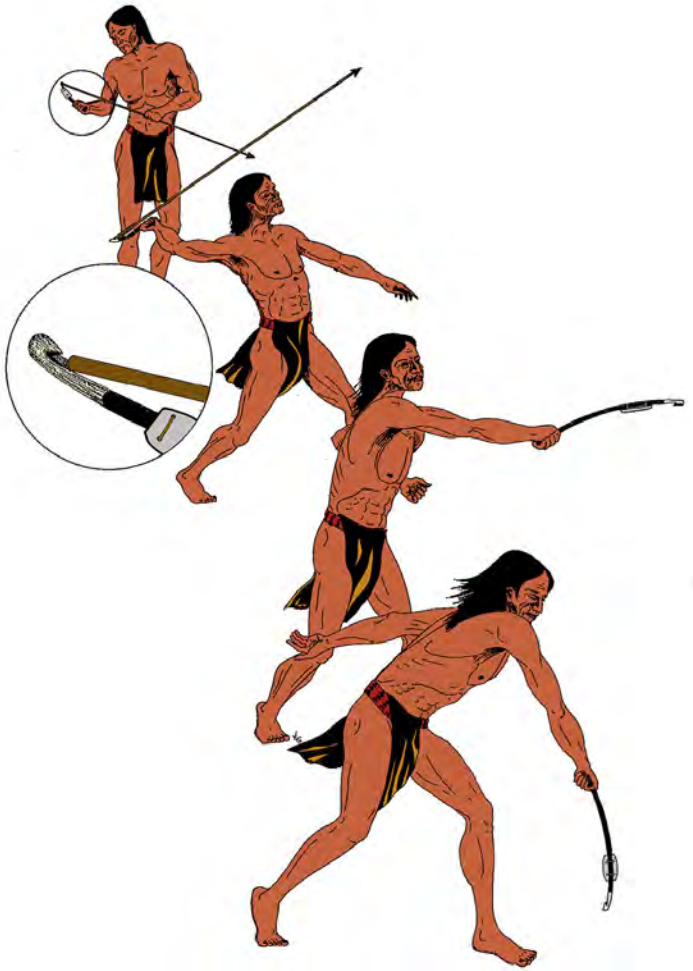
Catalogue Number 331697A, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution

Projectile Points

Projectile points are chipped stone artifacts used as multi-purpose tools for hunting and butchering. American Indians at the site never made stone points in a distinctive Marksville style. Instead, they used styles of stone points that were already in use in Louisiana. Kent and Gary types were most popular. That people did not develop new styles of projectile points at Marksville is not much of a surprise. The existing points served their needs. This is one way archaeologists can see practices that endured at the site.

Credit: Kevin Duffy

All of the projectile points that archaeologists have found at the site were used on lightweight spears thrown with atlatls. Shaped like an oversized crochet needle, an atlatl is an ancient hunting tool that gave the dart extra power and speed. A hunter inserted the hooked end of the atlatl into a shallow socket in the end of the dart. Hurled with a smooth, gliding motion, the dart flew toward the target while the atlatl remained in the hunter's hand. Sometimes, a weight attached to the atlatl helped to balance it and made it more effective.



Atlatl thrower illustration by Jon Gibson.

Learn More

Want to learn more about Marksville? Check out the resources below! Still have some questions? Be sure to explore the **Top Site FAQs** section.

- **Louisiana Office of State Parks Marksville State Historic Site**

- **McGimsey, Charles. "Marksville and the Middle Woodland." In *Archaeology of Louisiana*, edited by Mark Rees. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010.**

Marksville State Historic Site
837 Martin Luther King Dr.
Marksville, LA 71351

Credit: Tommy Hailey

Glossary

Artifacts: Artifacts are things people made or used which have survived the passage of time.

Earthworks: American Indians built the mounds, embankment, circle, and rings at Marksville using nearby soils. Since these things are made of earth, they are called earthworks.

Features: Unlike artifacts, features are not portable. They are generally part of a site and include things like buried garbage pits, hearths, burials and the remains of earthen walls. Archaeologists usually recognize features in the soil because they “cut” into or intrude upon the color, texture, or contents of the existing soil.

Hopewell Culture: Hopewell people did not share a single culture. Rather, they had a common set of beliefs that was carried to other people through trade and travel. Each group chose what Hopewell beliefs to adopt and how they would be expressed in their culture. The area of trade and shared beliefs is called the Hopewell Interaction Sphere. The sphere stretched in the U.S. from Minnesota to Florida and from New York to Kansas City and Louisiana. Hopewell sites often have earthworks, burials in mounds, stone brought from far away and distinctive styles of artifacts, like pottery. At Marksville, people adopted Hopewell earthworks, burial customs, and some artifacts, but did not choose to trade many materials.

Middle Woodland Period: (A.D. 1 – A.D. 400) This period saw a rise in population and an expansion of Hopewell traditions. At this time, some people could also be born into, or gain, more social or political power than others. Some people, who may have been leaders, had special burials.

Top Site FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Q1. What American Indian tribe(s) built Marksville?

Archaeologists do not know what tribe lived at the Marksville site 2,000 years ago. However, the Avoyel Indians, who met the first European explorers in the area, may have descended from the people who built the site. In the late 1700s, the Avoyel joined with the Ofo, Tunica, and Biloxi tribes, as they moved to the area. Today, the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana lives in Marksville.

Q2. What religion did the people of Marksville practice?

Archaeologists are still learning about the religious beliefs of the Hopewell tradition. The fact that only certain animals show up in Hopewell art may mean those creatures were sacred. The Hopewell practice of enclosing mounds within embankments forming geometric patterns may also speak to religious beliefs. The people who built Marksville could have shared these beliefs or adapted them to fit with their existing views.

Q3. Why did American Indians build the mounds at Marksville in geometric patterns?

Archaeologists do not know why people built the mounds and embankments in geometric patterns. These patterns may have simply been attractive to the people who built the site. However, the fact that many Hopewell-era sites have similar designs may mean that there was a powerful idea guiding the choice of these patterns. Religious or other symbolic reasons cannot be ruled out.

Q4. How did the people of Marksville dress?

Archaeologists have found only one figurine at Marksville, and it is unknown if it is an image of a real person. Figurines from the same time period found at other sites offer clues about how people looked. Some of these figures show men wearing deer skin breechclouts and perhaps a deer skin shirt. Their hair was worn long and tied in a bun. Women wore knee-length skirts of deer skin or woven cloth. They wore their hair long down their back or tied in several buns. Some figurines show females carrying infants. Archaeologists can only guess that people from Marksville dressed the same way.

Q5. Why were birds the only animals depicted on Marksville pottery?

Archaeologists do not know why people at Marksville chose only to depict birds on their pottery. It is very likely that these birds had some symbolic value.

Q6. Why did American Indians build the site at this specific location?

Archaeologists do not have a clear answer to that question. It may be that the site was simply a good place to camp. Perhaps there were great shade trees around the site at A.D. 1. Fishing on the Old River would have probably been good, too. Alternatively, there may have been few trees around the site allowing a clear view of the horizon in all directions. This may have made observing the stars, sun and moon easier. Given the ceremonial purpose of the site, people may have chosen this spot for religious reasons. Finding evidence for those religious reasons would be difficult, however.

Q7. Did American Indians live at the site permanently?

There is not really any evidence for a village at or anywhere near the site to suggest people lived nearby. It seems likely that a small group of people would have resided at or near the site in order to take care of it. Most people probably came to Marksville only to take part in ceremonies, staying just a short while.

Q8. How did American Indians at Marksville prepare and serve their food?

People probably cooked their food over fire pits or inside of earth ovens dug into the ground. They also likely used pottery for making and serving some of this food. Interestingly, archaeologists have found some large but poorly preserved deer bones in trash deposits along the edge of the bluff upon which Marksville sits. These kinds of bones are usually associated with the meatier parts of deer. This is what archaeologists would expect to find if the people of Marksville held big feasts at the site. Without more evidence, though, it is not clear that this was the case.

Q9. Were the dogs at Marksville pets?

Dogs have lived with people as companions, pets and co-workers for thousands of years. There were quite likely dogs living with the Marksville people. Two dogs were buried in Mound 4. One was buried in a pit on the platform and the other was buried in the overlying earth. The presence of these two dogs in their own pits within the burial mound suggests each was particularly important to the Marksville people. Perhaps these dogs were more than pets or companions and had a sacred or religious meaning to the people.

Q10. What kind of events took place at the Marksville site?

In additional to funerals and mound building, many other special activities may have happened at the Marksville site. These include feasts, weddings, trading, competitions and celebrations of celestial events.

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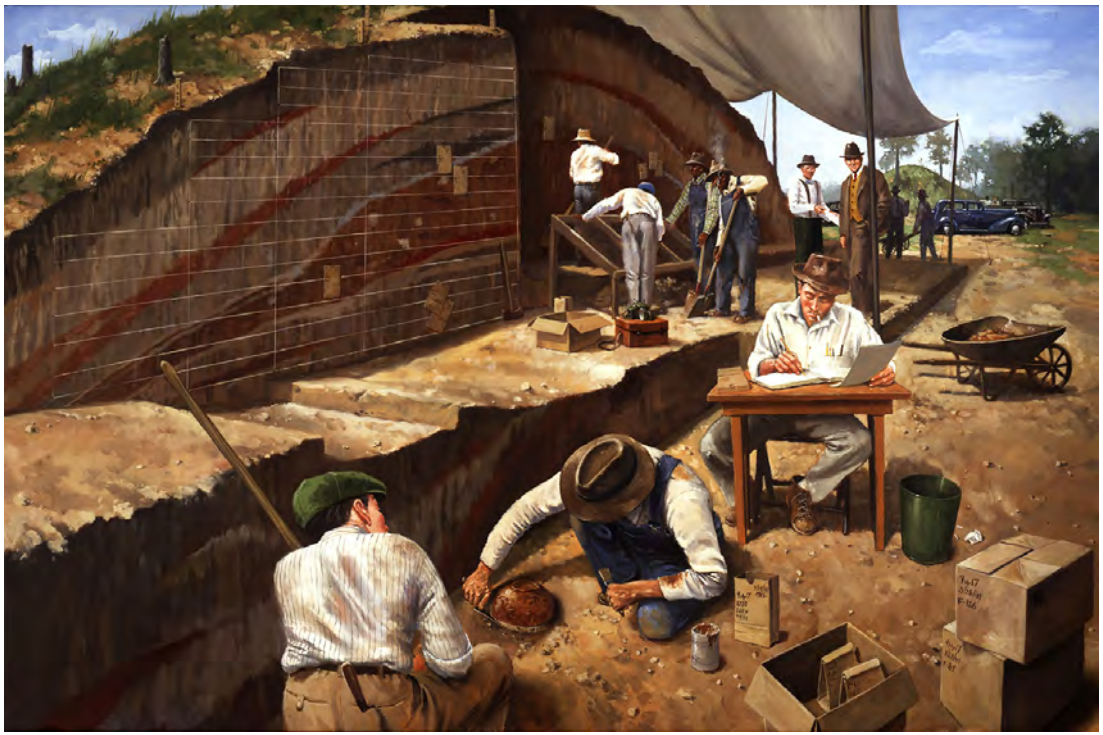

Painting by Martin Pate.

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