

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.



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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.



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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.



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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.



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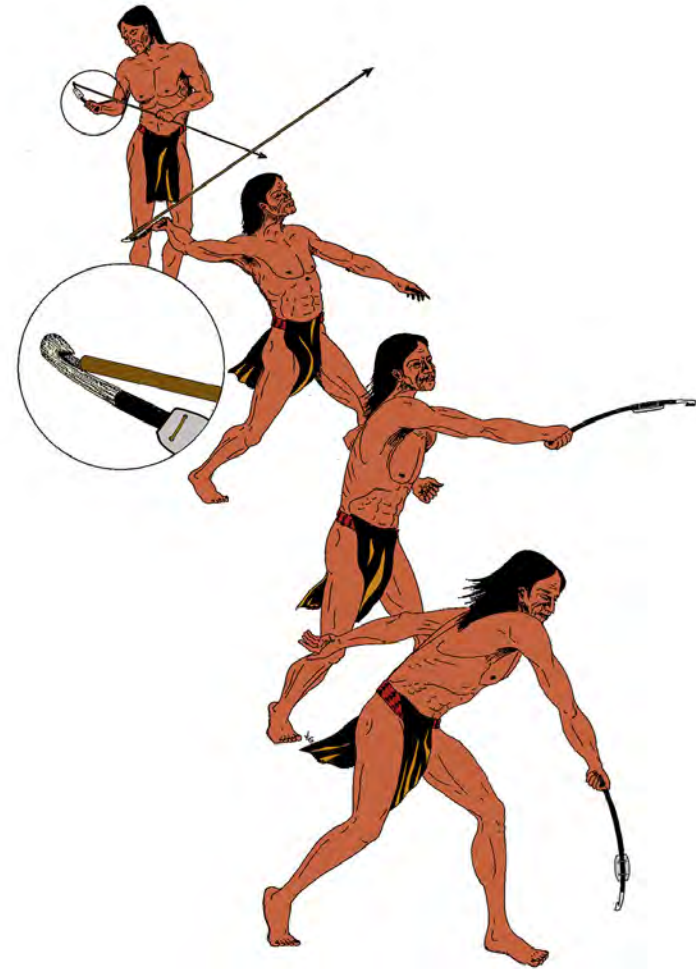
Projectile Points

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. Hurling 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.