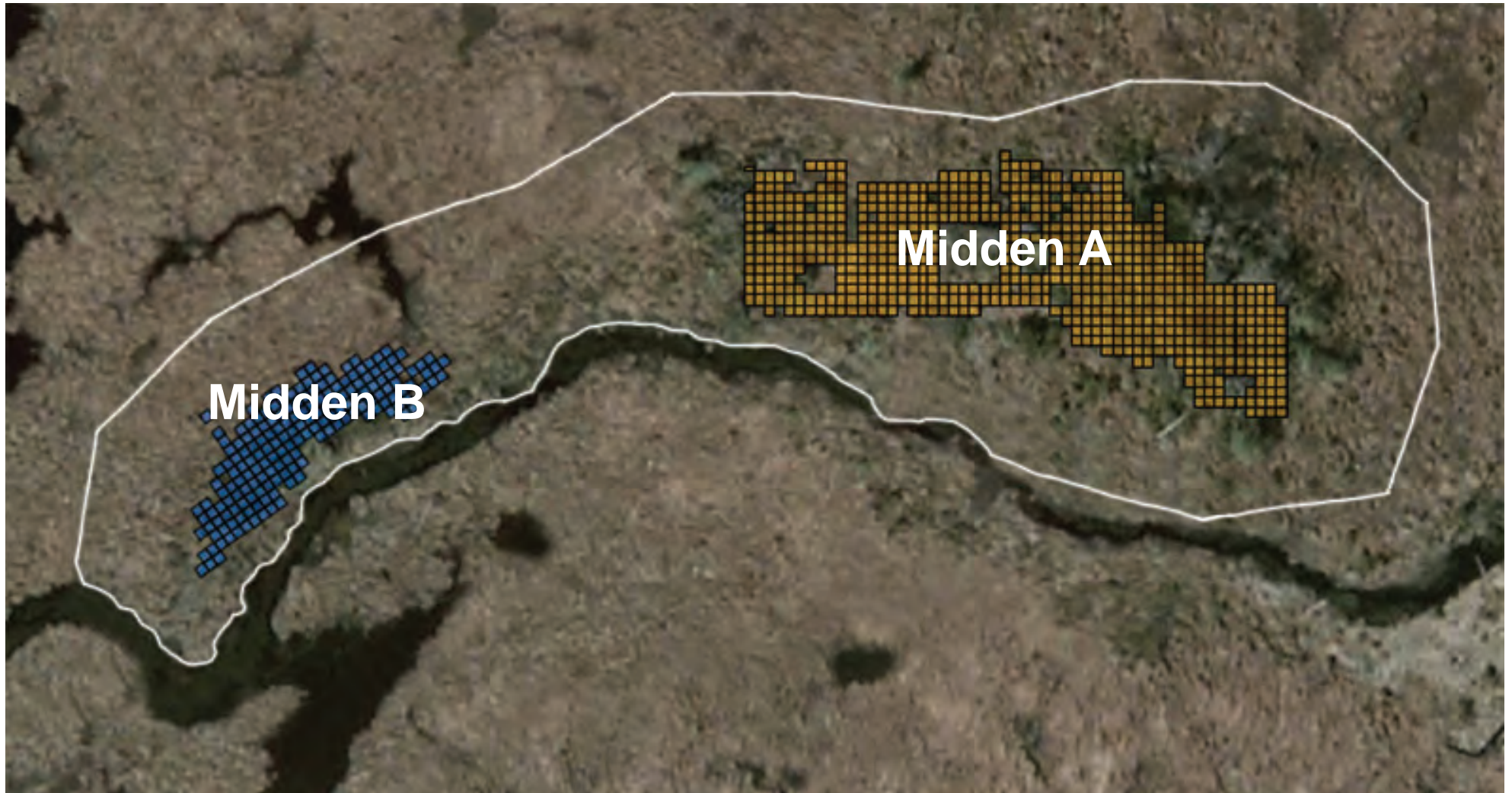


# Explore the Site

The two major excavations at the Tchefuncte site were during the 1930s and 1940s. For these two projects, large crews of workers did the digging under professional supervision. All of the work was in 5-x-5-foot square [units](#). Over several months in 1938, a Civilian Conservation Crew (CCC) excavated 53 squares in Midden B. In 1940/1941, Work Projects Administration (WPA) workers completed 760 squares. They finished digging Midden B and almost all of Midden A. The Louisiana Archaeological Society had another small excavation at Midden A in 1986. Check out the site to see what these projects found!





## Midden A

The 1940/1941 project created a 5-foot grid across Midden A, and then the crew dug 632 squares of that grid. This let archaeologists know where every artifact came from. Using the grid, they could examine patterns in the distribution of artifacts. Groups of artifacts showed the activity areas at the site.

Midden A extended for at least 270 feet along the bayou bank and up to 100 feet inland. Most of the midden was dark soil, but clam shells were concentrated on the edge of the bayou. Why would people discard shells only along the bayou rather than across the entire area? This pattern suggests that people used most of the midden for activities other than processing clams. Perhaps people did not want to walk on shells all the time or have them around their living areas.

*Midden A. Credit: LSU Museum of Natural Science.*

The WPA crew excavated Midden A in 6-inch levels, and recorded the level where each artifact was found. Like at most sites, the oldest level was at the bottom, and the most recent one was at the top. Therefore, archaeologists could look at changes over time. For example, at the bottom of the site, in the oldest levels, smoking pipes were rare. In the later levels, they were more common.

Archaeologists also could see trends in the styles of pottery at the site. Incised designs were more frequent in the earlier levels than in the later ones. Stamped decorations increased in popularity through time. The types of pottery found at the bottom of Midden A show that the first people at the site lived at Midden A. Later, people lived at both Midden A and Midden B. These trends remind archaeologists that the traditions and styles were changing during the 400 years people lived at the site.

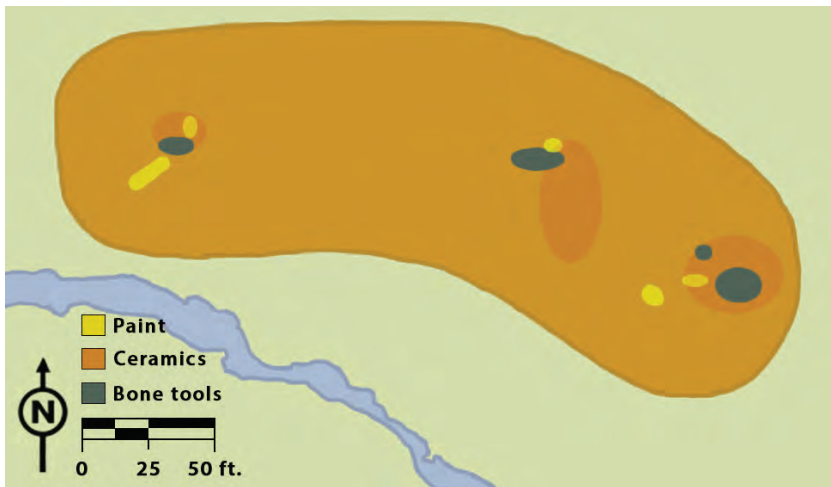


At least 34 human burials were in Midden A. All of them were in pits and none had objects buried with them. Most burials were in the western part of the site away from the living areas. Interestingly, they were placed across a broad area and were not grouped in a cemetery.

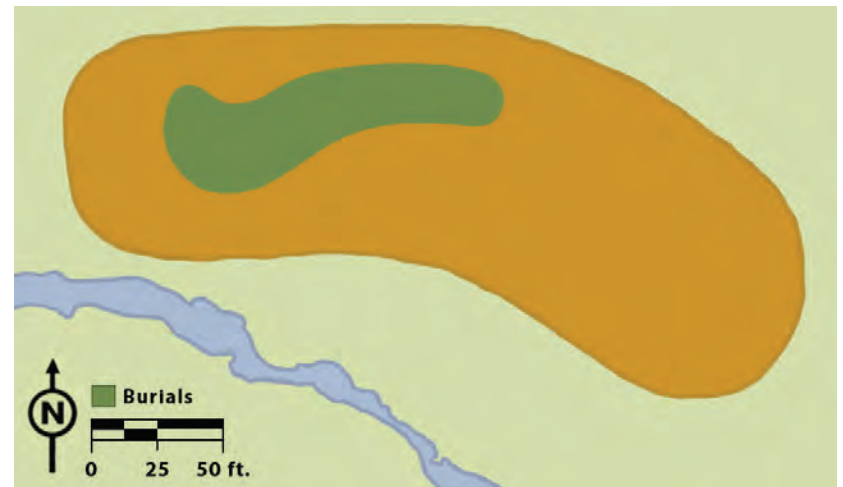
At Midden A, pieces of pottery clustered in three areas. These were probably living areas where people used and broke pots. Bone tools were in the same places. That pattern supports the

idea the midden had three residential areas. The notes do not record any remains of houses, like [postholes](#), but it is likely that many small houses once stood at the site.

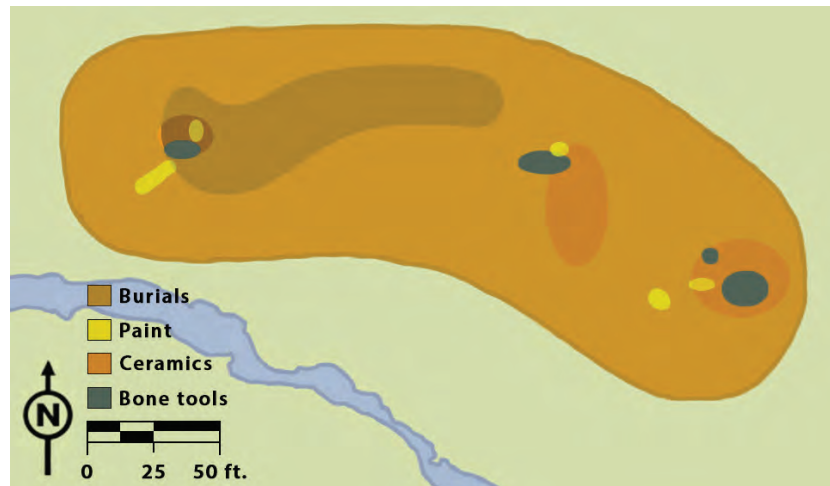
Artifacts used to produce red and yellow pigments had a similar pattern. These items, like grinding tools and pieces of [hematite](#) (for red) and [limonite](#) (for yellow), were concentrated near the living locations, as well as in one other area.



*Living space clusters*



*Burial cluster*



*All clusters*



## Midden B

Midden B was a shell deposit that formed a crescent-shaped area extending 160 feet along the bayou and up to 40 feet wide. It was first excavated in 1938, when a CCC crew dug 53 units. Nearly all of the squares were dug in a single level. The crew dug down to the top of the water table but did not reach the bottom of the site.

During the 1940/1941 project, a WPA crew returned to Midden B and completed the excavation of this midden. The men excavated 128 squares. The excavators dug the units in 6-inch levels to a depth of 4.5 feet.

*Cross-section (side-view) map of Midden B. Figure 5 from The Tchefuncte Culture, an Early Occupation of the Lower Mississippi Valley by James A. Ford and George I. Quimby, Jr., 1945; Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology No. 2, published jointly by the Society for American Archaeology and Louisiana State University Press.*

Midden B was different from Midden A. First, it was composed mostly of shell. Second, it had only three burials. Third, stone points, pipes, bone tools and pigment stones were only half as common as at Midden A. The ceramics from Midden B indicated that people began using this area after they had been living at Midden A for some time. The fact that Midden B consisted entirely of shell suggested that the area was primarily for collecting and using clams. The differences in artifacts confirm that Midden B was a special activity area for the people living at Midden A. They used many tools in the residential area that they did not need in the clam processing area.

