

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Francis Thompson site is a multi-component prehistoric Indian camp site/hamlet. The site consists of an approximately seventeen acre accumulation of artifacts and anthropic epipedon (midden) occurring on a narrow ridge in Madison Parish. The densest concentration is on the southern end of the ridge. The ridge is a remnant of the Macon Ridge. Archaeological testing has determined that there are prehistoric stone artifacts and pottery dating from three major cultural occupations (Archaic, Troyville, and Plaquemine) and two minor occupations (Paleoindian and Issaquena) represented at the site. While these artifacts are generally commingled over the site area, they do tend to concentrate in different sections of the site. Features, including pits, possible postholes, and at least one human burial, were uncovered during testing in June 1989 (Gibson 1990a).

Environmental Setting

Prior to land-clearing in 1964-1965, the Francis Thompson site was wooded and relatively undisturbed. The deciduous hardwood forest on the site consisted of an oak-hickory-pecan community, surrounded by bottomland hardwoods and cypress. The 17 acre hill on which the Francis Thompson site sits is really a part of the Macon Ridge, a Pleistocene feature formed when the Lower Mississippi Valley trench became blocked with sediments released by retreating continental ice sheets as sea level began to rise (Allen and Touchet 1990). This formation is regionally called the Prairie Terrace. The last pulsation of the Wisconsin Age ice sheet lowered sea level drastically (perhaps as much as 135 meters) and the entrenching Mississippi River carved a deep channel through the Prairie deposit, leaving a bluff face along the western edge of its valley which created the eastern edge of the Macon Ridge. It is practically certain that all human utilization of the Francis Thompson hill transpired after the hill became a hill and was surrounded by alluvium of post-Pleistocene age. As a consequence, the hill was probably located several hundred to several thousand meters off any active stream (the adjacent segments of Cow Bayou and connected slough being possible exceptions) during the duration of human occupation, and this no doubt had a pronounced effect on the kind, duration, and periodicity of activities which transpired thereon.

Previous Archaeological Investigations

Very few archaeological investigations have been conducted at the site. The first recorded reference to the site was by Clarence B. Moore, who referred to the site as Mound Place in 1913. C. B. Moore did not appear to be impressed with the site as compared to some of the larger mound sites he encountered in the area. Moore, who was almost solely interested in mound sites, did not bother with any sub-surface testing. The site does not appear to have been visited by any archaeologist until 1963-64 when the Peabody Museum of Harvard University conducted a two year survey of the Upper Tensas Basin. The extent of Harvard's work at the site was confined to recording the site and collecting surface artifacts.

Current Investigations

In 1990, Jon Gibson (under a grant with the Division of Archaeology) conducted limited testing to determine if the site was eligible for nomination to the National Register. This investigation entailed controlled surface collecting, digging a series of one-by-one meter test units and two-two meter test units to determine the depth and composition of the archeological deposits and site boundaries.

The primary results of this investigation were:

1. The recovery of 9853 artifacts, and the classification, inventory, and analysis of 12,235 objects, including those from surface collections made by the landowner, Francis Thompson;
2. The discovery and description of five in situ features, including four pits of various types and a badly preserved human burial of a child, five to ten years of age;
3. The recovery of 270 faunal elements representing at least nine families and of 180 floral elements representing both charcoal and charred nuts remains;
4. The recognition that the site supported three primary occupations, Late or Terminal Archaic, Late Troyville (Marsden phase) and Early Plaquemine (Preston phase), as well as minor components from Epipaleoindian (San Patrice), Late Marksville (or Issaquena), and perhaps even Coles Creek (Balmoral phase) periods; or possibly longer relatively continual spans of occupancy which resulted in the co-occurrence of some of the presumably diagnostic artifact styles.
5. The identification of a general spatial segregation of components dating from the Late Troyville (Marsden) and Early Plaquemine (Preston) periods, as well as from the Terminal Archaic span; and
6. The confirmation that artifacts sink into the soil according to the liquid limits of those soils (Gibson 1990a) and the disturbing suggestion that heavier artifacts sink deeper than lighter ones regardless of their order of deposition.

Artifact Descriptions

The following discussion highlights some of the artifacts recovered from the site:

Prehistoric pottery makes up 76 percent of the classified artifacts. The undecorated fraction amounts to over 98 percent, so the Francis Thompson site (both Preston and Marsden and other minor components) is considered to be in the so-called "plainware" tradition that seems to reach down into extreme northeastern Louisiana from its nuclear center in southeastern Arkansas.

Marsden decorated ceramics include Marksville Stamped (v. Troyville), Larto Red (v. Larto), Woodville Red (v. Woodville), Mulberry Creek Cord Marked (v. Eudora/Edwards), Marksville Incised (v. Yokena), Alligator Incised (v. Oxtox and Alligator), Officer Punctated (v. Bearskin and Willow Beach), Churupa Punctated, Evansville Punctated, and Hollyknowe Ridge Pinched.

Preston decorated ceramics include Coles Creek Incised (v. Hardy, Blakely, Mott, Coles Creek, and Greenhouse), Plaquemine Brushed, Mazique Incised (v. Kings Point, Mason, and Manchac), Harrison Bayou Incised and Avoyelles Punctated (v. Dupree).

Other ceramic artifacts include small lumps of baked clay, baked lumps with vegetal impressions, daub, pottery coils, a cane core, and a tubular pipe fragment. In addition, a fragment of a biconical Poverty Point object was recovered.

Stone objects include some which show no signs of human modification, although their presence on the site meant that people had to bring them in since there are no local cherts in the area. Such unmodified or incidentally modified materials are chert gravel, broken slabs and lumps, and fire cracked rocks. Objects of ground and polished stone are few: hammerstones, pitted stones, mortars, barweights, celts, plummets, and beads. Chipped stone artifacts are most numerous: minimally chipped rocks, bifaces, arrow points, dart points, and debris and debitage. Arrowpoint

styles (Preston component) include Clifton, Bayougoula, Homan, Scallorn, Catahoula, Alba, Agee, Bonham, Colbert, Hayes, and Friley. Dart point styles include Kent, Pontchartrain, Macon, Wells, Ellis, Palmillas, Edgewood, Fairland, Marcos, Elam, San Patrice, Bulverde, Carrollton, Dalton, Denton, Ensor, Evans, Marshall, Sinner, and lozenge-shaped.

Remains of freshwater mussels, deer, squirrel, rabbit, small carnivore, gar, turtle, large bird, and other birds reveal a variety of animals were acquired.

Structure and Formation of the Site

The nature and dispersion patterns of the artifacts from the various components indicate that the Francis Thompson hill was primarily a scene of small scale and/or temporary activities. It was never a large village occupied by numerous people. Therein lies a compelling reason for the site's importance. Basically, what was discovered when artifact distributions were studied was that the pottery classified as Troyville II, or Marsden phase (ca. A. D. 350-550), was concentrated in the southeastern and northwestern corners of the site area. Pottery identified as Early Plaquemine, or Preston phase (ca. 1100 - 1300), was concentrated in the southwestern quadrant of the site with lesser concentrations running linearly along the western and southern edges of the hill. Comparing the intrasite distributions of unmodified/incidentally modified stone, chipped stone artifacts, and native versus exotic raw lithic materials revealed other patterns which suggest a fair degree of functional separateness and organization. The unmodified/incidentally modified stone pattern closely matched the Marsden pottery distribution; chipped stone artifact patterns correspond to both Marsden and Preston pottery peaks and show another concentration in the northeastern corner of the site, a concentration which may represent either a separate Late Archaic component or an activity zone for one or both of the pottery-bearing components or perhaps a conflation of all these possibilities; raw materials peaked in different parts of the site as well, and the exotic materials peaked in spots where native gravel did not (Gibson 1990a:102-104).

Looking at these patterns in settlement terms, it has been concluded that the Marsden occupation represented a quasi-permanent habitation locale, possibly occupied by only a few families and that the Preston occupation was more of a temporary (seasonal) work location for a full social group. The Archaic component was indeterminate (Gibson 1990a).

Site Integrity

The Francis Thompson site has been plowed annually since 1965. This plowing has reached depths greater than the thickness of the topsoil (20-30 cm). Plowing, rodent burrowing and mechanical gully infilling has impacted the cultural deposits. Despite this impact, the site has integrity in two crucial contexts. Firstly, it has intact features below the plow zone which have and can yield significant information on the foodways of these various cultures. Secondly, the site does have integrity in a spatial sense. Plowing, it appears, has not scattered the artifacts very far beyond the point where they were originally deposited, or else, the historically compatible patterns recognized in the spatial analysis would not have been perceptible. The horizontal patterns of artifacts seem to still bear a relatively close resemblance to the original habitational patterns.

SIGNIFICANT DATES	
ARCHITECT/BUILDER	N/A
CRITERION D	

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Francis Thompson site(16MA112) is of state and regional significance under Criterion D. Its Archaic, Troyville, and Plaquemine components have and are likely to yield information important to our understanding of the prehistory of Louisiana and the Lower Mississippi Valley.

The site is a small hamlet and it is in this function that the site is deemed significant. There are numerous large mound and village sites along the Macon Ridge and in the Tensas Basin. Some of these mound sites are the largest of their respective time periods not just in the Macon Ridge/Tensas Basin but in the entire Lower Mississippi River Valley. For many years, attention has been focused on these more spectacular sites. Small sites have not always been evaluated and yet their simplicity often makes them far more suitable for discerning activity areas, functional association of tools, and other kinds of exploitative or domestic behaviors. Smaller sites such as Francis Thompson are just as important as the larger sites in understanding the prehistoric Indian cultures of Louisiana.

Dr. Jon Gibson minimally tested the site in 1989 (less than one percent of the surface area). The site has already produced information on the following Historic Contexts identified in the Louisiana Comprehensive Archaeological Plan:

1. Terminal Archaic. A late Archaic component was found at the Francis Thompson site. Artifacts found at the site yielded information on local exploitation of the environment.
2. Late Troyville/Early Coles Creek. One of the least understood episodes of Lower Mississippi Valley prehistory is the span from the late Troyville to Early Coles Creek period. Until recently, archaeologists had thought these periods were directly sequential, but recently because of new data, a separate culture period has been inserted between them. This culture period is called the Sicily Island period. Following the Marksville period, there was a time of change in cultural forms and practices. Something new and different culturally began to happen. Presently, we do not know what changes took place in the Macon Ridge/Tensas Basin locality. The potential importance of the Marsden component at the Francis Thompson site is that it existed at the threshold of this reorganization and therefore was part of the overall transformation.
3. Plaquemine. The Plaquemine Period in the Tensas Basin/Macon Ridge appears to be characterized by population dispersion and reaggregation at new sites in previously little used or unimportant localities. Populations seem to have been shifting and new politically prominent centers were springing up. However, in the Macon Ridge/Tensas Basin area dispersing populations seem to have largely abandoned the area and/or returned to a simpler, possibly more semi-nomadic existence. The Francis Thompson site dates to this period when such conditions and trends seem to have been accelerating, and thus it offers the possibility of looking at the process through the lens of a small fleeting occupation.

Data recovered from the Francis Thompson site such as seeds, animal bones, artifacts and various features can provide information on settlement, subsistence, social organization, trade networks and so forth.

Specific research goals identified in the Louisiana Comprehensive Archaeological Plan that have been, or can be addressed at the Francis Thompson site include the following:

1. Archaic
 - A. Define the range of dates for the early, middle, and late Archaic in Louisiana.
 - B. Identify the Archaic artifact assemblage. What are the differences in the distribution and appearance of diagnostic Archaic projectile points in Louisiana? Is there regional variation in the tool assemblage?
 - C. Examine the settlement system of Archaic peoples. What type of sites did the Archaic people have?
 - D. Examine the subsistence system of Archaic peoples. Did Archaic peoples domesticate or use native plants?

2. Troyville/Coles Creek
 - A. Define the range of dates and phases for the Troyville/Coles Creek period.
 - B. Define the settlement system for this culture.
 - C. Investigate the functional variation of sites within this timeperiod.
 - D. Examine non-mound Troyville-Coles Creek hamlets, campsites, etc., to find out about non-ceremonial sites.
 - E. Define the subsistence system for this culture. What led to agriculture? How did it affect the settlement system?

3. Plaquemine
 - A. Define the range of dates for the Plaquemine culture in different areas of the state.
 - B. Examine the relationship between Plaquemine and Mississippian cultures.
 - C. Define the artifact assemblage for Plaquemine Culture
 - D. Define the settlement system for the Plaquemine Culture.
 - E. Define the subsistence system for the Plaquemine Culture. How dependent were the Plaquemine people on agriculture?

These general research questions can also be examined:

1. What part did these occupations play in the larger settlement patterns on the Macon Ridge and the Tensas Basin?

2. Did these various cultures have particular adaptive strategies to their environments and how these may have differed given their technologic and economic backgrounds.

3. What was the relationship of the Francis Thompson site (small hamlet) to the larger mound sites. For example, the large Mott Site (16FR11), with its fourteen mounds and extensive village area, is only a few miles away. The Mott site was at least partly contemporary with the Preston components at the Francis Thompson site. How does a small apparently temporary work camp like the Francis Thompson site fit into a cultural system having such a massive ceremonial-civic center like Mott, as well as to the other small mound sites, and villages?

This site offers the potential to provide information which could help answer these research questions.

Major Bibliographical References

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