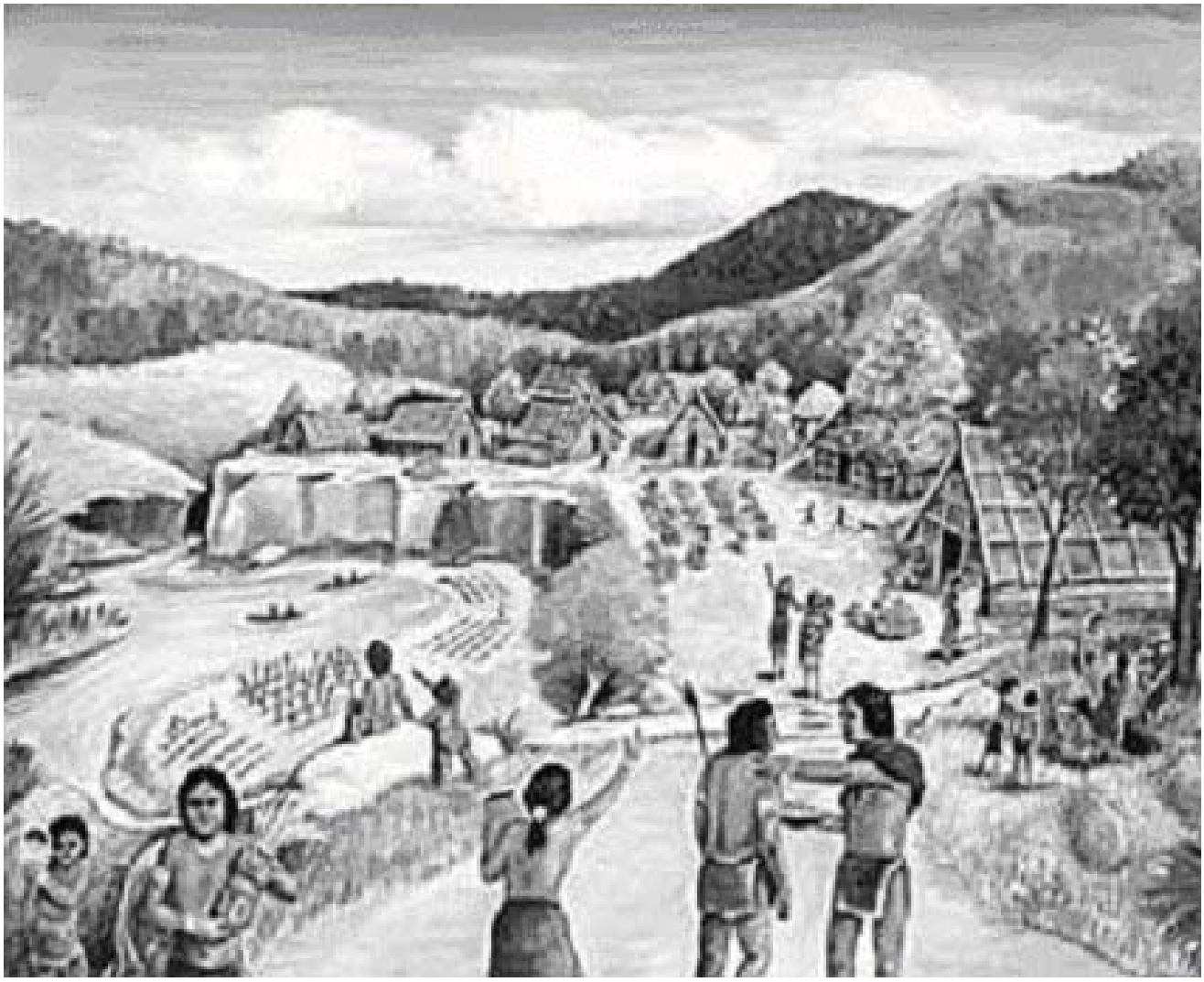
Native Americans
Along the Mississippi River



US Army Corps
of Engineers®
Rock Island District

Objectives:

- To increase the students' knowledge of the Native Americans who lived in the Mississippi River Region.
- To increase the students' awareness of the area's rich cultural resources.
- To understand the importance of preserving the clues that help us uncover the mysteries of the Native Americans' ways of life.

Activities:

Students will each receive a "Native Americans Along the Mississippi" study guide. Eco-Test questions will be taken from the guide.

Before the Eco-Test, a short presentation about the Thomson Causeway Indian Mound, with Native American artifacts, will be presented.

Study Questions:

1. Why is it important for amateurs to leave Native American burial mounds undisturbed? Who should be called if you find one?

2. That cultural time period were the Hopewell Native Americans living in? What significant developments occurred in this time period?

3. What kind of traits do archaeologists use to determine where and when a piece of pottery was made?

4. Which Native Americans had the most elaborate burial customs of any Native Americans of the eastern United States? Describe these customs.

5. What is significant about the year 550 A.D. in the Hopewell culture?

(*Material taken from "Talking Bones, Secrets of Native American Burial Mounds," by William O. Steele, 1978.)

In Illinois a farmer is plowing his field. His tractor goes back and forth. In the middle of his field is a great mound of earth. It must have been there a long time, for big trees and bushes are growing on it. The farmer has never plowed across the mound. Neither has anyone else. No one knows what is inside this strange hill, but its shape suggests it was made by humans. There are thousands of such mounds, from the Mississippi River Valley east to the Atlantic, and from Wisconsin south to the Gulf of Mexico.

Most farmers have ignored such mounds on their land. However, one farmer was curious. His name was Thomas Jefferson. He was a plantation owner in Virginia who later became the third president of the United States. Around 1780 he dug into a large mound on a neighbor's farm on the Rivanna River in Albemarle County. He dug carefully and made notes of what he found. Inside the dirt heap were skeletons of children and grown people. Jefferson had found a graveyard. He did not know why the mound was on his neighbor's field or how long it had been there. But he felt the skeletons he had uncovered were those of Native Americans. He had been told by many Native Americans that such mounds were the burial places of their ancestors. He had been told how the bodies were placed, and he had found the skeletons placed just that way. Not everyone agreed with Jefferson that the mounds were raised by Native Americans. These scoffers thought that the earthen mounds were constructed by a mysterious race of mound builders. They believed these mound builders came to America from strange, far distant lands like Phoenicia, Egypt, Scythia, and the Lost Continent of Atlantis.

In the early days of the American Republic men often hacked open the mounds with picks and shovels. They did not dig carefully. They often ruined the pots and skeletons and weapons they dug up. These amateur diggers did not solve the mystery of the builders of the mounds. It took trained diggers to do that. These men and women are called archaeologists. Archaeologists have been taught the proper way to uncover a mound. However, they know that not all mounds are worth excavating. They do not want to waste time and money on digging into ones which will not yield many artifacts, such as tools and ornaments. To tell which mound they should excavate, they usually use one of two methods. A test pit of any shape and depth is dug. From this they can usually see whether there are bones and tools and ornaments, or log tombs.

Another method of exploring a mound is to dig two trenches at right angles to each other down to the bottom of the mound. Then the archaeologists can see what to expect if they continue to excavate. If they decide to excavate, then the archaeologists decide whether to strip away the earth in six inch square blocks or twelve inch blocks. They will dig with great care to uncover the artifacts layer by layer, as they were first covered up. There are other methods which may be used. It is up to the archaeologists to decide which method is best. They use shovels and trowels and toothbrushes and even their hands and fingers to remove earth from the bones and tools and weapons in the mounds. They are very careful. They want to see exactly how the mounds were made so many, many years ago. They do not want to damage anything in the graves.

Archaeologists often need help. Though they know how to dig up bones and skulls, they cannot tell much about what these people were like when they were alive. They ask medical

specialists. Jaws and teeth tell these experts if gums had been infected and teeth diseased. The way teeth are worn down helps to tell what kind of food the Native Americans ate. Arthritis can be detected from fused vertebrae in the spine. Badly formed bones may indicate a poor diet. Thus the medical specialists can learn much about prehistoric Native American life.

This information in turn helps the archaeologist in his or her detective work. Archaeologists themselves study tools and learn how they were made, and whether they were used to chop meat or crush plain seeds or scrape animal skins. They use new scientific tests to date objects they find to tell when they were made. It is slow, hard work to dig into a mound. It took many of these carefully trained diggers a long time to excavate many, many mounds. They agreed with Jefferson that the mounds had been raised by the first Americans the Native Americans. The Native Americans lived in America long before Columbus arrived. It was Columbus who called these people Indians.

The archaeologists learned that different groups of Native Americans had built different types of mounds over thousands of years. The mystery of the mound builders was solved by these digging detectives we call archaeologists. There are mounds all over the world. The mound here at Thomson Causeway is that of "Hopewell" culture. The Hopewell culture was part of the "Woodland" Native American time period. Archaeologists have divided the Midwest's Native American history into the time periods shown in the chart called: "Prehistoric Cultural Chronology". The chart is only a general guide because these dates can vary somewhat from place to place. Between what years then was the Thomson Causeway Mound probably constructed?

Prehistoric Cultural Chronology (Time Periods)

PALEO INDIAN---------- ----------→ 15,000 B.C.

(Big Game Hunters)

EARLY ARCHAIC----------→ 8,000

(Population Increase)

MIDDLE ARCHAIC----------→ 6,000

(Climate Changes)

LATE ARCHAIC----------→ 3,000

(Settled in One Area)

EARLY WOODLAND----------→ 1,000

(Agriculture & Pottery)

MIDDLE WOODLAND----------→ 400 A.D

(Increase Population Along
Rivers Extensive Trade Networks)

LATE WOODLAND----------→ 900

(Bow and Arrow)

MISSISSIPPIAN----------→ 1,450

(Large Villages)

Native Americans in each time period are known for certain characteristics that made them unique or different from their ancestors.

PALEO INDIAN

Small, scattered groups of people that moved across a tundra landscape. They hunted large game (mammoths) and collected wild plant foods during post glacial times. Large spear points and hearths are all that remain in most cases.

ARCHAIC

The three subdivisions of this period define the major cultural changes which occurred as their population increased, the climate became alternatively wet-dry-wet, and people began to stay in one place for longer periods of time. Almost all modern deciduous forest replaced the tundra environment in the Midwest by Archaic times. Projectile point styles change dramatically in size and shape. Ground stone tools (axes) begin to be made and formal burials reflect an increase in social interaction and belief in ritual. Dependence on plant foods and fish/mussels rises. Smaller game is sought more often than large game.

WOODLAND

These three subdivisions represent the origin of agriculture, an increase in the number of large villages located along rivers, and the extensive trade networks initiated during Archaic times are expanded and elaborated. Exotic raw materials (shell, sherts, galena, copper, mica) are exchanged as well as finished goods like pots and jewelry. This time period also marks the emergence of elaborate burial (mound) practices, the development of the pottery industry, and the invention of the bow and arrow. The "Hopewell" culture of Middle Woodland times affected most of the eastern United States. Many Native American groups adopted varying degrees of "Hopewell" culture, while also remaining distinct as geographical variants (Thomson Causeway Mounds).

MISSISSIPPIAN

In many ways, this culture was similar to Hopewell. Most of the eastern United States was affected, trade networks were reestablished. Large towns sprang up, and huge ritual and burial mounds (house-sized) were common. Jewelry and decorations are fine quality shell-tempered pottery which suggest that these Native Americans had powerful religious and political leaders. Many groups of Native Americans adopted new Mississippian culture while keeping most of their Woodland culture. This situation is much like present day farmers in Illinois who are distinct, but who play important roles in the economy of the city and in "being" American. The Mississippian people were heavily involved in agriculture and warfare. Their demise by about 1450 is an enigma, possibly due to warfare, disease, economic or political collapse, or climate change. Archeologists are still trying to find the answers to this question.

HOW THEY ALL FIT TOGETHER

For the most part, these major cultural periods reflect distinctive changes in the way Native Americans lived and what tools were made to deal with social and environmental change. The projectile or spear points help archeologists determine the age of an archeological deposit, as well as what foods were used. These tools were made from chert, a glass-like kind of rock typically found in limestone beds. By hammering or pressing chert at certain angles, flakes can be removed. By removing a series of flakes, a projectile point can be formed. The larger Paleo-Indian points were often used on spears thrust into large animals. As time went on, later peoples made points that could be used on smaller animals or that could be used as knives. By Late Woodland times, points were very small and could be used on an arrow instead of a spear. The general shapes of these points are similar for each major cultural period even though hundreds of variations occur.

Native Americans discovered that by heating the chert in a hot fire for a specific period of time, flaking was easier and edges could be made sharper. Chert, when heated, was much like glass. It begins to melt to some degree so that the different minerals fuse together more strongly than that caused by the simple process of rock formation. Heating can be identified because most cherts change color slightly (pink, red, black), assume a polish or sheen, and often develop little pot lid fractures (places where a small chunk pops out). The heat treatment of chert is characteristic of specific tools and major cultural periods. Thus, faced with a collection of flakes or broken tools, an archeologist may still be able to determine the age of a site.

Pottery making typically marks the beginning of the "Woodland" period in the Midwest. The earliest pottery, "Marion Thick", was produced about 800 B.C. in Illinois. Over the next 1,600 years, the pottery making industry expanded rapidly, and changed substantially. As the Woodland Period progressed, decorations used on pottery changed. Not only were new kinds of decorations applied, but new combinations of older styles were used on a single pot. Archeologists look at many characteristics of clay pots such as:

Kind of Clay
Shape
Manufacturing Technique
Kind of Temper
Color
Size of Pot
Decoration

The traits listed above can be used to identify where the pottery was made, where it was used, what it was used for, and when it was made. Pottery from different parts of the Midwest and pottery made at different times in the past, have unique "signatures" which help archeologists interpret how the Native Americans lived, what trade networks they used, what food they cooked, how societies were organized, and how groups and ideas moved across the landscape.

The Hopewell people (Thomson Causeway area) produced finely made items of jewelry (shell, bone, copper, mica) and made some of the nicest pottery attributed to eastern North America. Hopewell pottery was a beautiful grayish-black color, finely tempered with very small rock or limestone, and decorated with delicate designs. This pottery is known for its thinness, nearly half that of contemporary Havana Wares. Designs were made with sharp, thin, stamps or sticks.

The Hopewell's pottery making industry of the Middle Woodland period represents one of the major cultural developments of eastern North America. Trade networks were far flung, extending to the Rocky Mountains in the west, the Great Lakes in the north, the Gulf Coast in the south, and the Appalachians in the east. Various minerals (galena, hematite), cherts for tool making (Obsidian, Cobden, Dongola), and natural resource items (conch shell, bear teeth, sharks teeth) were brought into Illinois in exchange for Midwestern products. While the center of Hopewell Culture was in Ohio, the Illinois Hopewell culture was just as well developed.

By Late Woodland times many pottery decorations were fairly sparse. Cord roughening or smoothed over cord roughening of pottery was a common practice. The roughening occurred when a cord-wrapped paddle was used to form and strengthen a pot. Once the pot was completely formed, some Native American groups would proceed to smooth over the cord-roughened pattern to create a plain looking exterior finish, or to serve as a background for other decorations. Many Late Woodland pottery can be recognized because they have "cord impressed" designs. This means that a fairly small stick wrapped with cord, or perhaps only the cord itself was pressed into the wet clay pot. Lines of clear cord impressions can be used by archeologists to determine what material was used to make the cord, how the cord was twisted together, and what group was responsible for making a particular pot. Most cord-impressed pottery reflects a characteristic geometric pattern which helps in identification. Sometimes a net of cord or fabric was used over the wet clay pot to create a decoration called "Fabric Impressed".

When combined with other additional artifacts like stone tools, archeologists can formulate hypotheses about Native American life and what activities took place at specific locations (archeological sites). Archeologists believe that the Hopewell Culture was a unique combination of two kinds of people. First, there were those groups of people that were entirely Hopewell; they lived in Hopewell villages that produced "Hopewell" patterned tools, pots, graves, and houses. Then there were outlying "Havana" groups. These people were part of the overall Hopewell Culture because they traded with Hopewellians, used Hopewellian tools and goods, and because they shared many Hopewell ideas. However, these peoples also maintained their own identities as hunters, gatherers, and farmers, while the Hopewellians assumed roles as large village peoples, ritualists, traders, and politicians. A unified religion is thought to have been a major part of being Hopewell.

All in all, these cultures were very much like American life. There are those Americans that live in large urban centers and those that live in small rural communities. We are all Americans and share many characteristics in terms of language, dress, economy, participation in a National political system, and so forth. Yet there are clear differences

between rural and urban life, many of which are reflected in material culture. The same can be said of coexisting groups of prehistoric peoples.

BURIAL CUSTOMS

The Hopewell people had the most elaborate burial customs of any Native Americans of the eastern United States. Archaeologists believe it was only the priests, the chiefs, and perhaps the most skilled of the craftsmen who were laid to rest with treasures. Archaeologists have found that three fourths of the Hopewell dead were cremated and the ashes placed in special houses without artifacts. Were these the less distinguished of the Hopewell people? No one knows, but it seems a logical guess.

Large burial mounds were constructed to honor the dead. Artifacts and other grave goods suggest that society was highly stratified. This means that in contrast to earlier societies where most people were equal, Hopewell people could be ranked in order of importance. Importance was determined by a combination of what one could do for the group, how much wealth one controlled, and how much status was inherited from ones parents or mate.

The welfare of the spirits of the dead leaders was the major concern of all the Hopewells. It governed the daily lives of all. It is this cult of the dead, as it is called by archaeologists, which fills the burial mounds with such a wealth of grave goods. When a chief was buried, he was laid flat on a raised platform inside a charnel house, or house of the dead. A low log wall was built around the body. Baskets of pearls and shell beads were poured into the log grave. Birds and animals were cut from sheets of mica and copper and sewn to his garments. Strings of copper beads and bear teeth were placed about his neck. On his head was a crest of copper antlers interlaced with colored bird feathers and stone beads. Copper spools went into his pierced earlobes, and a huge nose shaped from strips of copper was set on his face. Inside the log wall mourners placed many finely carved stone pipes and conch shells engraved with figures of fish and snakes and birds. Tools and weapons were arranged about the chief. Sometimes these tools and ornaments were broken, or had holes made in them. Since tools and ornaments could not physically be taken into the spirit world, they were "killed" by being smashed or damaged. This released the spirits of the objects so they could travel with the dead chief and be a help to him in his new ghost life. Powdery red paint was sprinkled over the body. Then the log tomb was covered with tree bark. The body lay in state for a long time. Finally earth was piled over the tomb.

When a charnel house became filled with earthen mounds, it was burned and earth was piled over all the burials, forming one large mound. Another charnel house would then be erected at another location. From the large quantity of the finely made belongings buried in the log tombs, archaeologist learned much about the Hopewell. They discovered their continent wide trade routes, the many skills of their craftsmen, their religious fascination with death, and their appreciation of beautiful objects made from exotic material.

But the grave furnishings do not tell what happened to the Hopewell nor why they ceased to make fine artifacts around 550 A.D. and no longer cared to place burial objects in their log tombs as they had before. It is another mystery the archaeologists have been unable to solve.

But they can speculate, as long as they tell us they are guessing. Some have guessed that the trade network failed to keep supplying the Hopewell craftsmen with raw material. Without trade goods the artists and craftsmen had little to work with. They could not provide fine articles to go into the graves. The power of the chieftains and the priests was badly damaged by this lack of beautiful ornaments. Some archaeologists have guessed that the corn crop failed and the resulting famine destroyed the Hopewell. Still another guess is that a warring group of Native Americans came into Hopewell territory and conquered them. There is evidence that some Hopewell villages built protective palisades around their towns. Had the Hopewell lived an easy and soft life too long to fight off intruding warriors?

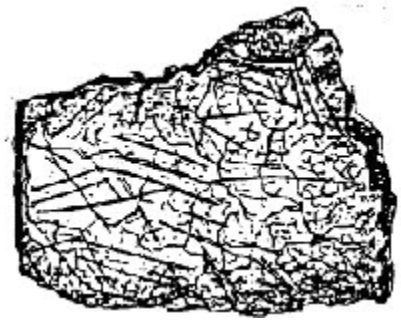
Perhaps someday we will know why the Hopewell and their way of life vanished after five centuries of splendor and greatness.

PRESERVATION

One of the main problems faced by archeologists today is vandalism. People dig up sites and pocket the artifacts they find, causing that culture to be lost forever. It is important to leave sites undisturbed and let agencies like the Corps of Engineers and the Illinois State Historical Preservation Office know when you believe you've found artifacts or sites.

Another problem is erosion caused by the swift current of the river. Banks slip away into the river with the secrets of civilization. Bank stabilization is important to preserve what's left to help us learn how our ancestors lived long ago. At one site along the Mississippi concerned citizens called the Corps' archeologists to report that the bank was eroding where they had been finding arrowheads and were afraid within a year it would all be gone. With help like this we can find our way into the past and link it with the future.

At sites somewhat later than those containing Marion Thick pottery, there occurs a second type of Early Woodland ceramics, Black Sand pottery. Sites containing Black Sand pottery are often found on sand ridges in the valley bottoms of large rivers in eastern Iowa such as the



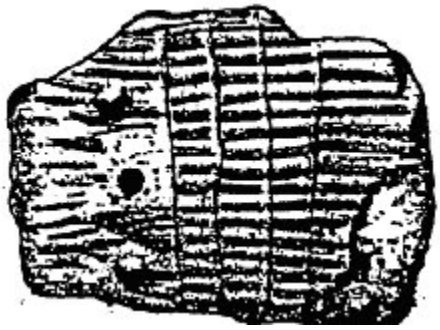
An Early Woodland potsherd

Mississippi, the lower Skunk, and the lower Iowa. Black Sand pottery is somewhat better made than Marion Thick and contains cord or fabric marking on the exterior surface only. The people who made Black Sand pottery incised or scratched designs of lines, triangles, and dashes onto the surface of the wet clay before the pot was fired using a pointed bone or wooden tool. Spring Hollow Incised pottery, which is found along the prairie streams in eastern, central, and northern Iowa, is almost indistinguishable from Black Sand, but may he later in time.

In the Central Illinois River Valley and the adjacent valley of the Mississippi River we find the development of a Middle Woodland ceramic tradition called Havana. This tradition

eventually spread as far west us Oklahoma and the Missouri River Valley of southwestern Iowa. Havana pottery, like Early Woodland ceramics, is also characterized by thick, bag shaped vessels with large amounts of grit temper. Its distinguishing features are a variety of dentate (toothed) and rocker-stamped designs and areas of geometric patterns. Rocker-stamped designs were those produced by rocking a sharp-edged implement back and forth over the clay while it was still soft.

The Middle Woodland Period begins about A.D. 1 in parts of Iowa with the appearance of large village sites containing Havana pottery such as the Yellow River Village, Kingston, and Wolfe Sites. While some of these habitation sites have been excavated, most interest in the Middle Woodland has centered on mound exploration, much of which was conducted by the Davenport Academy of Sciences in the late nineteenth century. These Middle Woodland Mounds fall within the well-known Hopewellian Complex. Hopewell represents one in a series of mortuary traditions which existed in the eastern U.S. between 3000 B.P. and the time of historic contact with Europeans.



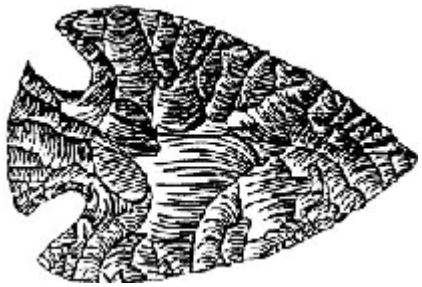
Spring Hollow Incised pottery was decorated by scratching the soft clay with a pointed implement probably of wood or bone.

Hopewellian sites are most characteristically cemeteries of mounds often containing multiple burials placed inside or outside log tombs. Some of the burials in these mounds are cremations while others are inhumations sometimes with stone slabs covering the bodies. With the burial were placed elaborate artifacts which frequently incorporated exotic raw materials such as Gulf Coast conch shell, obsidian (volcanic glass) from the Rocky Mountains, Appalachian mica, and Great Lakes copper. Such items suggest that the people with whom they were buried may have held a position of high social standing within the society, one which allowed them access to these luxury goods

Havana pottery and effigy pipes suggest the extension of the Hopewellian Complex into Iowa.

They also suggest the existence of an elaborate trade network which stretched over a wide geographical territory. The similarity of items found accompanying burials, as well as the exotic raw materials, suggest that societies participated in frequent interaction with groups thousands of miles away. While local traditions in pottery making and the manufacture of

chipped stone tools continued, burial artifacts such as mortuary pottery, ceramic and finely carved stone pipes, human and animal figurines, stone and copper axes, pan pipes, and finely chipped flint, chert, and obsidian projectile points are duplicated in sites from Iowa to New York and from Wisconsin to Florida.



Snyder points are known from Hopewellian sites throughout the United States.

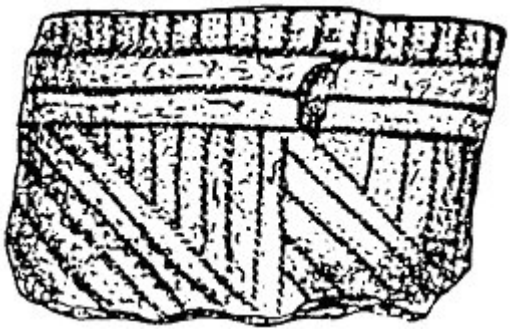
Mound groups, such as those at Toolsboro in Louisa County and the Cook Farm Group in present day Davenport, are certain evidence of the extension of Hopewell into Iowa. Related mound groups in northeastern Iowa provide additional confirmation of Iowa's participation in funerary traditions and long distance trade with societies throughout the eastern U.S. In western Iowa there is much less evidence of any participation in Hopewellian traditions although exotic trade items did find their way into this area. A.D. 500 is a convenient date for separating the Middle Woodland Period from the Late Woodland Period in Iowa.

Although little is known of the Middle Woodland Period in Western Iowa, examples of Havana Pottery have been found there. Bag-Shaped Cord marked pottery is a familiar Middle Woodland form

By this time, the large Havana villages of southeastern Iowa were replaced by smaller, less sedentary Woodland campsites. Mounds are still being used as monuments to the dead, but they are smaller and lack most of the exotic trade items found in the Hopewellian mounds. Late Woodland mounds were not confined to the generally conical shape of most of Iowa's Middle Woodland mounds; they are commonly oblong (linear) and in northeastern Iowa were frequently made into the shape of animals. These animal shaped or "effigy" mounds are found primarily in Allamakee and Clayton counties although they extend as far south as the city of Dubuque.

The Marching Bear Effigy Mounds

The bag shaped pottery of Early and Middle Woodland sites gives way to more rounded vessels by Late Woodland times. This pottery tends to have a narrower opening and was frequently decorated by impressing a woven pelt or collar around the neck and shoulder. Weaver (or Linn), Madison (or Minnott's) Cord Impressed, and Lake Michigan Wares are common types of Late Woodland pottery found in Iowa sites.



A Late Woodland Cord or Fabric Impressed Sherd