

Hill's Valley, Williamson Co. Tenn. Oct 1<sup>st</sup>, 1856.

E.M. Nance

Dear Sister

It has seldom, if ever before; been my curiosity to meddle with the remains of the dead but in passing a place on Harpeth river, some six or seven miles below the town of Franklin and belonging to Mr. Thomas Brown Esq called Old-town – my attention was attracted; by the singular structure of quite a number of graves which were cut through by the road. And my curiosity was immediately excited to investigate their character, structure and if possible ascertain something of the character and usage of those who inhabited – the very first opportunity. For which purpose I consulted Mr. Brown who politely told me that he would furnish utensils for digging &c – and I might make such investigation as I saw fit, and at pleasure.

For which purpose I soon repaired to the scene of action and began by a slight survey of the place; the result of which I will briefly describe – I found the principal part of it to consist of a semi-circular embankment or ridge of some two or three hundred yards in length which closed in to the river near the upper and lower end of a small bluff which over looks its waters. Besides this, there are several detached places of probably less importance, except a kind of mound in a northerly direction at a short distance from the main part which rises higher than the rest, and upon the two of which stands a large tree (I think a walnut). All of these structures seem to be formed almost entirely of human graves which bear indisputable marks of great antiquity, -- and display a degree of taste and knowledge of construction certain not known to any known race of aboriginal inhabitants of the country.

On examining the graves of the semicircular ridge I found that they were constructed by placing the body on the ground and forming as small a rectangle as possible around it, placing thin slabs of stone varying from 3-4 to an inch and a half in thickness, edgewise in the ground and then with similar slabs inclined inside, the body was covered & then earth thrown in & around to fill up spaces, & the grave is complete. I should have noted that when the body was placed, that seems to have been common to place with it an earthen vessel (made of a material and workmanship unknown to the present age) and some fancy dress of instrument or war the owner might have possessed.

The graves thus made are one above another till the immense pile is made. The slabs of stone before spoken of were procured from the bluff by some mechanical process unknown to the present age of enlightenment as they are remarkable for the sameness in their thickness & regularity of shape, for rough stone. I opened one grave which contained, besides small fragments of bone, the remains of an earthen vessel and a beautiful tomahawk, made of marble stone of a very durable kind, which I prized the higher for it being the only one of the kind to my knowledge ever discovered. And I herewith present to you as I know of no other more worthy of a brother's consideration, hoping it may yet be the source of some utility to the human race. I find that the teeth of these long since decayed bodies are in a remarkable state of preservation, being perfectly sound & white I was told by Mr. Brown that dentists resort here occasionally for teeth, which I think a good idea for it there are pure & good teeth outside ones mouth, it must be these teeth – and there are vast number of them. And thus lie the mouldering thousands with regards to whom, fancies slight and fictitious ideas wane in tracing out their existence.

Yours truly,

J. Nance