

OLD TOWN SITE ON BIG HARPETH RIVER

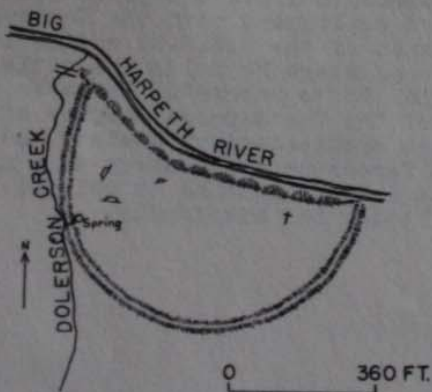
W. G. Polk

During the summer of 1928 I was told that while constructing a bridge at the junction of Dolerson Creek with the Harpeth River six miles northwest of Franklin, county road machinery had encountered a large Indian burial grounds.

The cemetery was associated with a large prehistoric village site known locally as Old Town. Many years previously, General Thruston and others had dug at the site in search of Indian remains. A rather heavy midden is scattered over about twelve acres and there are present some rather spectacular earthworks.

An earthen embankment encloses the twelve-acre area in the form of a crescent, the ends of which meet the edge of the steep river bluff. This fortification is 2470 feet in length and was probably surmounted by a stockade; or it may represent a rampart which was constructed against the inner side of a stockade to enable the defenders to shoot arrows at the attackers.

A fine spring on the creek bank appears to have been slightly within the fortified inclosure. The very heavy concentration of potsherds and other midden indicates occupation by a large aboriginal population over a long period of time. Two pyramidal mounds lie within the inclosure, the larger having basal dimensions of 65 by 120 feet, and a height of 11 feet.



I was permitted to examine about eighty stone box graves before their destruction by machinery. In one of these was a rather unusual object in the form of a man's head, cut from sandstone. The ornament seems



to have been worn in an upside-down position, since the neck was pierced for suspension, but I understand that this is characteristic for this type of ornament in this region. It is expertly carved. The headdress is elaborate, and the shape of the forehead suggests the practice of skull deformation by binding during infancy.

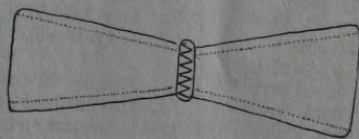
Five marine conch shell vessels in a bad state of decay were present in another grave, indicating trade contact with Gulf Coast Indians. Several pottery vessels of Mississippi design were present in graves. A small square grave contained a small effigy bottle 3 inches high, as shown below, and two skulls, no other bones



being present. Another stone box was of unusual size, being 7 feet in length by 2 1/2 feet in width; the bottom was paved with broken pottery. An adult male and an adult female skeleton were present, and a sandstone celt 10 inches long, 2 1/2 inches wide and 1/2 inch thick.

Among numerous objects found upon the surface was a discoidal 3 1/2 inches in diameter and only 1/2 inch in thickness. The rim was flat rather than rounding. Another object was a chert blade 9 inches long and of excellent workmanship. I have also from this site a polished hour-glass pipe or "medicine tube" of steatite which had been plowed up many years earlier. This is shown below.

Editor's comment: This site apparently contains the remains of a prehistoric Indian group which professional archaeologists classify with the Mississippi culture pattern. It is possible that more than one distinct Mississippi group occupied the site successively, rather than a single group. Careful investigation might show that the group represented by the burials in the stone box graves was a later Mississippi group than the people who were responsible for the erection of the pyramidal mounds. On the other hand, it is equally possible that the builders of the mounds and those contained in the stone grave cemetery were the same people.



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