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Notes on the Indian  
burial mounds

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NOTES  
ON THE  
INDIAN BURIAL MOUNDS  
OF  
EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA.

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J. A. HOLMES.

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So far as is known to me, no account of the Indian burial mounds, which are to be found in portions of Eastern North Carolina, have, as yet, been published. This fact is considered a sufficient reason for the publication of the following notes concerning a few of these mounds which have been examined in Duplin and a few other counties in the region under consideration.

It is expected that the examination of other mounds will be carried on during the present year, and it is considered advisable to postpone generalized statements concerning them until these additional examinations have been completed. It may be stated, however, of the mounds that have been examined already, that they are quite different from and of much less interest, so far as contents are concerned, than those of Caldwell and other counties of the western section of the State. As will be seen from the following notes, they are generally low and rarely rising to more than three feet above the surrounding surface, with generally circular bases varying in diameter from 15 to 40 feet; and they contain little more than the bones of human (presumably Indian) skeletons, arranged in no special order. They have been generally built on somewhat elevated, dry, sandy places, out of a soil similar to that by which they are surrounded. No evidence of an excavation below the general surface has as yet been observed. In the process of burial, the bones or bodies seem to have been laid on the surface or above, and covered up with soil taken from the vicinity of the mound. In every case that has come under my own observation charcoal has been found at the bottom of the mound.

Mound No. 1—Duplin county, located at Kenansville, about one-half mile southwest from the courthouse, on a somewhat elevated,

dry, sandy ridge. In form, its base is nearly circular, 35 feet in diameter; height 3 feet. The soil of the mound is like that which surrounds it, with no evidence of stratification. The excavation was made by beginning on one side of the mound and cutting a trench 35 feet long, and to a depth nearly 2 feet below the general surface of the soil, (5 feet below top of mound) and removing all the soil of the mound by cutting new trenches and filling up the old ones. In this way all the soil of the mound and for two feet below its base was carefully examined. The soil below the base of the mound did not appear to have been disturbed at the time the mound was built. The contents of the mound included fragments of charcoal, a few small fragments of pottery, a hand-full of small shells, and parts of sixty human skeletons. No implements of any kind were found. Small pieces of charcoal were scattered about in different portions of the mound, but the larger portion of the charcoal was found at one place 3 or 4 feet square near one side of the mound. At this place the soil was colored dark, and seemed to be mixed with ashes. There were here with the charcoal, fragments of bones, some of which were dark colored, and may have been burned; but they were so nearly decomposed that I was unable to satisfy myself as to this point. I could detect no evidence of burning in case of the bones in other portions of the mound. Fragments of pottery were few in number, small in size, and scattered about in different parts of the mound. They were generally scratched and cross-scratched on one side, but no definite figures could be made out. The shell "beads" were small in size—10 to 12 mm. in length. They are the *Marginella rosca* of Redfield, a small gasteropod which is said to be now living along the coasts of this State. The specimens, about 75 in number, were all found together, lying in a bunch near the skull and breast bones of a skeleton. The apex of each one had been ground off obliquely so as to leave an opening passing through the shell from the apex to the anterior canal—probably for the purpose of stringing them.

The skeletons of this mound were generally much softened from decay—many of the harder bones falling to pieces on being handled, while many of the smaller and softer bones were beyond recognition. They were distributed through nearly every portion of the mound, from side to side, and from the base to the top surface, without, so far as was discovered, any definite order as to their arrangement. None were found below the level of the surface of the soil outside the mound. In a few cases the skeletons occurred singly, with none others within several feet; while in other cases several

were found in actual contact with one another; and in one portion of the mound, near the outer edge, as many as twenty-one skeletons were found placed within the space of six feet square. Here, in the case last mentioned, several of the skeletons lay side by side, others on top of these, parallel to them, while still others lay on top of and across the first. When one skeleton was located above another, in some cases the two were in actual contact, in other cases they were separated by a foot more of soil.

As to the position of the parts of the individual skeletons, this could not be fully settled in the present case, on account of the decayed condition of many of the bones. The following arrangement of the parts, however, was found to be true of nearly every skeleton exhumed: The bones lay in a horizontal position or nearly so. Those of the lower limbs were bent upon themselves at the knee, so that the thigh bone (femur) and the bones of the leg (tibia and fibula) lay parallel to one another; the bones of the foot and ankles being found with or near the hip bones. The knee cap or patella, generally lying at its proper place, indicated that there must have been very little disturbance of the majority of the skeletons after their burial. The bones of the upper limbs, also, were seemingly bent upon themselves at the elbow; those of the fore-arm (humerus) generally lying quite or nearly side by side with the bones of the thigh and leg; the elbow joint pointing toward the hip bones, while the bones of the two arms below the elbow joint (radius and ulna) were in many cases crossed, as it were, in front of the body. The ribs and vertebræ lay along by the side of, on top of, and between the bones of the upper and lower limbs; generally too far decayed to indicate their proper order or position. The skulls generally lay directly above or near the hip bones, in a variety of positions; in some cases the side, right or left, while in other cases the top of the skull, the base or front was downward.

But two of the crania (A and B of the following table) obtained from this mound were sufficiently well preserved for measurement; and both of these, as shown by the teeth, are skulls of adults. C of this table is the skull of an adult taken from mound No. 2. below.

| Crania. | Length. | Breadth. | Height. | Index of Breadth. | Index of Height. | Facial Angle. |
|---------|---------|----------|---------|-------------------|------------------|---------------|
| A       | 193 mm. | 151 mm.  | 144 mm. | .746              | .746             | 74°           |
| B       | 172 mm. | 133 mm.  | 136 mm. | .772              | .790             | 66°           |
| C       | 180 mm. | 137 mm.  | 147 mm. | .761              | .816             | 63°           |

The skeletons were too much decomposed to permit the distinguishing of the sexes of the individuals to whom they belonged ; but the size of the crania (adults) and other bones seem to indicate that a portion of the skeletons were those of women. One small cranium found was evidently that of a child—the second and third pair of incisor teeth appearing beyond the gums.

Mound No. 2, located  $1\frac{3}{4}$  miles east of Hallsville, Duplin county, on a somewhat elevated, dry, sandy region. Base of mound nearly circular, 22 feet in diameter; height, 3 feet, surface rounded over the top. Soil similar to that which surrounds the mound—light sandy. Excavations of one-half of the mound exposed portions of eight skeletons, fragments of charcoal and pottery, arranged in much the same way as described above in case of mound No. 1. The bones being badly decomposed, and the mound being thoroughly penetrated by the roots of trees growing over it, the excavation was stopped. No implements or weapons of any kind were found. There was no evidence of any excavation having been made below the general surface, in the building of the mound, but, rather evidence to the contrary. The third cranium (C) of the above table was taken from this mound.

Mound No. 3, located in a dry sandy and rather elevated place about one-third of a mile east of Hallsville, Duplin county. In size and shape, this mound resembles those already mentioned. Base circular, 31 feet in diameter ; height  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet. No excavation was made, other than what was sufficient to ascertain that the mound contained bones of human skeletons.

Mound No. 4, Duplin county, located in a rather level sandy region, about one mile from Sarecta P. O., on the property of Branch Williams. Base of mound circular, 35 feet in diameter; height  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet. Soil sandy, like that which surrounds it. Around the mound, extending out for a distance varying from 5 to 10 yards, there was a depression, which, in addition to the similarity of soils mentioned above, affords ground for the conjecture that here, as in a number of other cases, it is probable the mound was built by the throwing on the soil from its immediate vicinity. Only a partial excavation was made, with the result of finding human bones, and a few small fragments of charcoal and pottery.

Since the above mounds were visited, I have obtained information as to the localities of mounds similar to those described, in the eastern, southern and western portions of Duplin county; and I can hardly doubt but that a closer examination of this region will prove

them to be more numerous than they are now generally supposed to be.

In Sampson county, the localities of several mounds have been noted; but one of these, however, so far as I am informed, has been examined with care. This one (Mound No. 5), examined by Messrs. Phillips and Murphey of the Clinton School, is located about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles west of Clinton (Sampson county), on the eastern exposure of a small hill. In general characters it resembles the mounds already described. Base circular, 40 feet in diameter; height  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet; soil sandy loam, resembling that surrounding the mound. Contents consisted of small fragments of charcoal, two bunches of small shell "beads," and the parts of 16 human skeletons. These skeletons were not distributed uniformly throughout the portion of the mound examined. At one place there were 9, at another 6, and at a third place 5 skeletons, lying close to, and in some cases on top of one another. In this point as in the position of the parts of the skeletons ("doubled-up") this mound resembles those described above. The bones were generally soft from decay. The small shells were found in bunches under two skulls; they are of the same kind (*Marginea roscida*, Redfield) as those from Mound No. 1, and their ends were ground off in the same way. No bones were found below the surface level, and there was no evidence of excavations having been made below this point. No stone implements of any kind were found in the mound. One-half this mound was examined.

In Robeson and Cumberland counties several mounds have been examined; and for information concerning these, I am indebted to Mr. Hamilton McMillan, of Dora, Robeson county. Five mounds are reported as having been examined in Robeson county, averaging 60 feet in circumference, and 2 feet high, all located on elevated, dry ridges, near swamps or water-courses; and all contained bones of human skeletons. One of these mounds, located about two miles east of Red Springs, examined by Mr. McMillan, in 1882, contained about 50 skeletons. Many of these bones near the surface of the mound, in Mr. McMillan's opinion, had been partly burned—those nearer the bottom were in a better state of preservation. There was an "entire absence of skulls and teeth" from this mound—a somewhat remarkable fact. A broken stone "celt" was found among the remains; but with this one unimportant exception, no mention has been made of implements having been found.

In addition to the above, Mr. D. Sinclair, of Plain View, Robeson county, has informed me that he has seen four mounds in the southern portion of this county—two near Brooklyn P. O., and two be-

tween Leesville and Fair Bluff, about five miles from the latter place.

In Cumberland county, two mounds are reported by Mr. McMillan as having been examined. One of these located about ten miles south of Fayetteville, was found to contain the crumbled bones of a single person, lying in an east and west direction. There was also found in this mound a fragment rock rich in silver ore. The other mound, located ten miles southwest from Fayetteville, near Rockfish Creek, was examined by Mr. McMillan in 1860, and found to contain a "large number of skeletons,"—"bones were well preserved and, without exception, those of adults." The mound was located on a high sandy ridge, its base about 20 feet in diameter; height  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet.

In Wake county one mound has been reported as being located on the northeast and several on the southwest side of the Neuse River, about seven miles east from Raleigh; and from the former it is stated that large numbers of stone implements have been removed. But I have been unable to examine these or to obtain any definite information concerning them. One mound in this county, examined in 1882 by Mr. W. S. Primrose, of Raleigh, is worthy of mention in this connection, as it resembles in general characters the mounds of Duplin county. This mound is located about ten miles south of Raleigh, on a small plateau covered with an original growth of pines. Base of mound circular, about 14 feet in diameter; height 2 feet. The contents of the mound consisted of small fragment of charcoal, and the bones of 10 or 12 human skeletons, much decayed, and arranged, so far as could be determined, without any reference to order or regularity. No weapons or implements of any kind were found.





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