

A culture that preserves its history and its natural history provides its people with a perspective of where they belong in the immensity of space and in the eternity of time. Unless provided with such history, we are lost, literally and figuratively.



Portsmouth Works Mural painted on the Portsmouth flood walls by Artist Robert Dafford

The cultural history of TREMPER MOUND

Acres: 622 Project Total: \$3,923,224

Of the many peoples inhabiting the Great Eastern Forest in what is now the United States, the Hopewell Culture, spanning 50 B.C. to 400 A.D. was one of the most artistic and geographically influential. The Hopewell peoples were not the only American Indians to build earthworks, but they certainly were the most consummate. Their works span everything from solitary mounds and earthwork enclosures, to immense sacred landscapes with multiple and connecting features, sometimes aligned to cosmic celestial events.

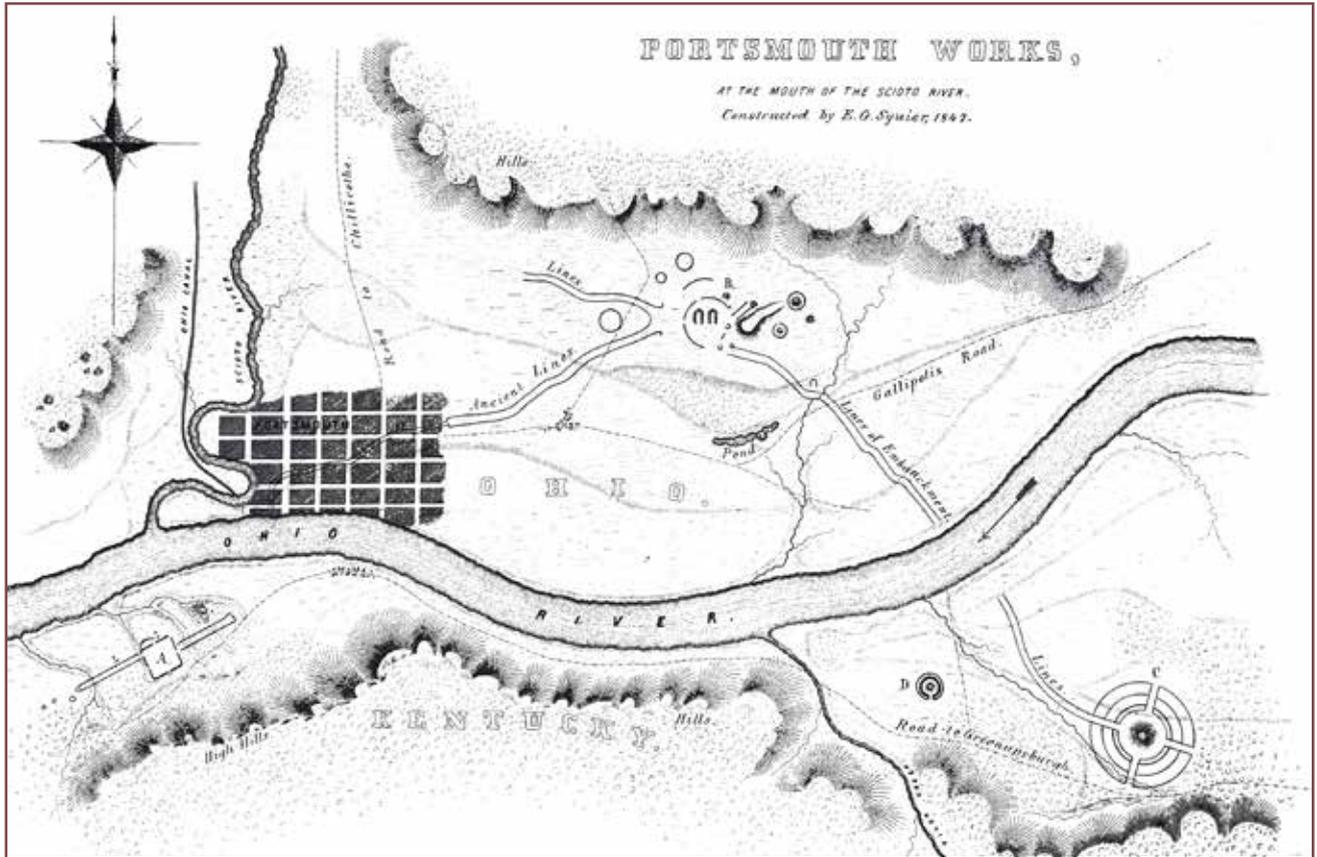
The most complex of the Hopewell earthworks covered up to 1500 acres of land. Earthen walls averaging 4-8 feet tall often enclosed collections of mounds, bordered walkways, and outlined vast geometric shapes. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the greatest complexes were the presence of one or more Greathouses. These timber pole halls were the locations of burials, cremations, and possibly other ceremonies. After they had served their intended purpose, Greathouses were burnt to the ground and mounded over with earth. Sometimes a new Greathouse was erected upon the ruins of the former. Thus a mound grew in size.

Balance yet to raise as of 11/01/2021 is \$1,224,242. Check the latest project balance on our website at www.arcofappalachia.org.

Most of Ohio's earthworks have vanished from the earth, destroyed by our developing nation. Surviving remnants of the largest complexes can still be found at places such as Newark Earthworks, Mound City Group, Marietta Earthworks, Seip Mound, and Hopeton Earthworks.

Junction Works and Steel Works are smaller earthwork complexes - simpler groupings of mounds and associated enclosures. Today the two sites have been geographically reconnected within the boundaries of a single Arc of Appalachia Preserve.

Tremper Mound was constructed on the west terrace of the Scioto River late in the first century B.C., which was quite early in the Hopewell Cultural era. Tremper Mound's irregularly-shaped 8-foot tall mound was built on the ruins of a Greathouse and enclosed by an oval earthen wall that was 500 feet across - an unusually large span for a solitary



mound. Of Ohio's few surviving earthworks that are not yet protected, Tremper Mound is quite possibly the most deserving of attention, which we shall soon explain.

Tremper Mound did not stand alone. A large and majestic complex of earthworks existed just 4-5 miles south of Tremper Mound near the confluence of the Scioto and the Ohio River. Known as the Portsmouth Works, the complex spanned both sides of the Ohio River in three main centers of development. Two separate ceremonial grounds stood on the river's south bank on the Kentucky side, roughly six miles apart. A third complex stood on the north bank of the river on the Ohio side, showcasing, among other features, two large and striking horseshoe mounds.

Three walkways, each dramatically bordered with earthen walls, originated out of the Ohio complex. Two of them veered southward, each covering miles of uneven terrain to reach one of the two earthwork complexes on the Kentucky side of the river. The only major obstacle en route was the Ohio River, itself. How the Indians crossed the Ohio River, whether by swimming or canoing, and whether or not such crossings were accomplished ceremoniously or pragmatically, remains a mystery. The third walled avenue left the Ohio complex in a westerly direction, leading to destinations unknown.

Today, nearly all of the Portsmouth Works on the Ohio side of the river lie buried beneath the city of Portsmouth. On the Kentucky side, most of the earthworks were similarly destroyed by development and farming. The

nearly complete disappearance of Portsmouth Works makes the preservation of Tremper Mound even more important, since Tremper is one of the few visible reminders of the splendid architecture and monumental grandeur achieved by the Hopewell Culture in the lower Scioto.

Many relevant questions remain open for speculation. Were Tremper Mound and the larger Portsmouth Works contemporary in time, as it appears they likely were? Was the size of Portsmouth Works once so large that Tremper Mound was well inside its orbit and thus a remnant of an extensive and integrated sacred landscape? Were there other major earthworks between Portsmouth and Tremper Mound that have been lost to time? Did the third avenue leading westward out of Portsmouth Works on the Ohio side lead to Tremper Mound and beyond? Acquiring Tremper Mound gives us the opportunity to try to shed light on some of these mysteries, as well as to answer questions we don't even know enough yet to ask.

Early historians believed that Tremper Mound's unusual shape was meant to portray an animal. However, an archaeological excavation that took place in 1915 revealed that the mound's conformation mirrors the shape of the large timber hall buried beneath it. When the Greathouse was actively used by the Hopewell, it was divided into chambers, each alcove's outer boundaries defined by vertical wooden poles. Walls were likely filled in with natural fibers to provide privacy and to create defined space. Whether or not the building was roofed is still unknown.



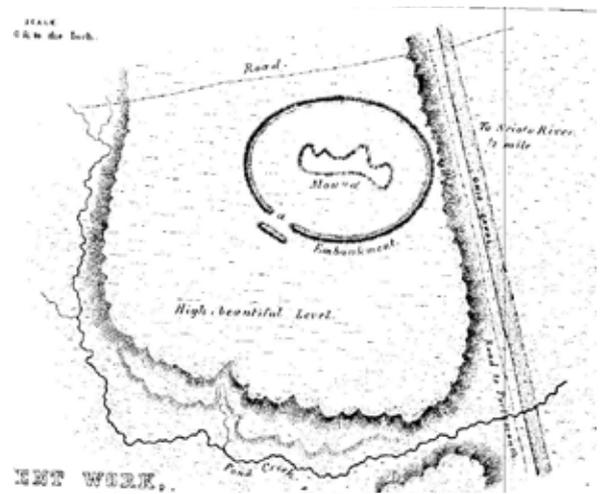
Photo above: An overlay of Portsmouth Works on the city of Portsmouth, showing what features (in red) remain in modern times. Photo generously provided by Shawnee State University.

Some of the chambers were dedicated to cremating the deceased, others had specially-constructed basins that communally held the ashes of hundreds of community members. There was even a chamber that seemed to have primarily served as a kitchen, presumably to feed the attendees and workers. The Greathouse included fire pits, possibly for ceremonial fires, and a large communal cache of over 500 articles, surmised to have been left behind in honor of the dead. Many if not most of these articles had been ceremonially broken.

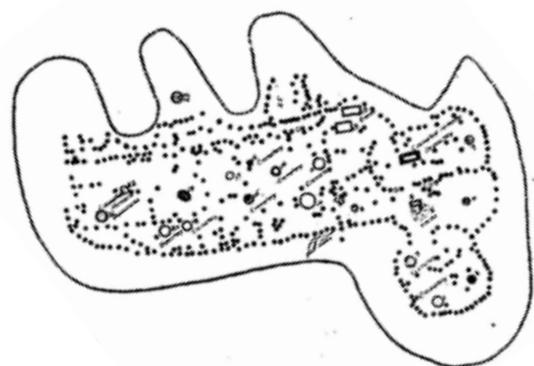
As was the tradition, the Greathouse was eventually burnt to the ground and then heaped over with layers of earth to form Tremper Mound as we know it today. Later yet in time, as many as 16 burials took place on Tremper Mound by digging graves into its surface. These were the only non-cremated burials ever found at Tremper Mound and they represent a later indigenous era.

Most of the above information came out of a 1915 excavation of Tremper Mound by William C. Mills, an archaeologist employed by one of the forerunners of Ohio History Connection. Archaeology is an evolving field, and the excavation techniques engaged by Mills were much superior to those of the previous century. Mills kept careful records, made accurate maps, and returned the soil to the approximate shape of the original mound once the excavation was complete.

Although the 1915 excavation was extremely thorough and provided a wealth of archaeological data, it did come at a cost. Because most of Tremper Mound's archaeological record was destroyed in the process of studying the mound, the opportunity for meaningful studies in the future are limited. The excavation also deeply offends many American Indians, who believe it is the ethical obligation of all cultures to honor and protect the sacred sites of earlier peoples.



Above: A beautiful pre-excitation survey of Tremper Mound by Charles Whittlesey, prepared for the Smithsonian Publication: *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*.



Above: Drawing from the 1915 excavation showing the location of the wooden poles that supported the Greathouse and defined its chambers.



Tremper Mound Artifacts (not to scale): Mica Bear and stone pipe with tall bowl.

Tremper Mound produced large numbers of beads, gorgets (heavy flattened and drilled ornaments), copper and bone adornments; mica and galenite crystals, plugs of stone for ear ornaments; hollowed out stone "boats" that were probably rattles, a 6-inch mica bear, myriad pieces of unshaped mica, and remnants of woven fabrics. Perhaps the most remarkable of all the artifacts recovered were 136 stone smoking pipes, most of them broken. Of those able to be restored, 46 were plain pipes, many of them with tall bowls. These are considered by many to be the most beautiful of the plain Hopewell pipes. They are certainly iconic artifacts of Tremper Mound.

Remarkably, 60 of the restored pipes were animal effigy platform pipes, a discovery that sent ripples of excitement throughout the archaeological community.

Prior to Tremper, only one other cache of Hopewell effigy pipes had ever been found. It was discovered in 1846 by Squier and Davis when they were excavating Mound

#8 of the Mound City Group, just forty miles to the north of Tremper Mound near present day Chillicothe. It was later determined that Tremper Mound was the older of the two caches. Some of the Tremper Mound pipes and the Mound City pipes were nearly identical.

Squier and Davis excavated many mounds in Ohio and beyond, partly to compile information for the Smithsonian Institute's first book: *The Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley* (1848). When Squier and Davis finally submitted the manuscript after decades of backbreaking work, the two surveyors had 6000 native artifacts in their possession.

In 1864 Davis packaged up the artifacts and offered them for sale on the American market. It would be generous to say that American interest in native antiquities at that time was lukewarm. When he failed to attract a buyer, he then placed the artifacts on the international market. Eventually the whole lot sold to a London dealer



for the sum of \$10,000. The artifacts ended up in the British Museum where they remain today. That large sale included the animal effigy pipes that had been excavated at Mound City - now an ocean away from their home of origin. Even as soon as 20 years after the sale, the Smithsonian regretted the loss of so many native treasures to foreign soil, but by then it was too late.

Mounds that were not explored by Squier and Davis were often stripped by private citizens. Many of these artifacts remain in private hands, often without records of origin. The pleas of Squier and Davis for earthwork preservation and their forewarnings of the impending loss of America's native treasures fell on deaf ears. Today, only a few of the hundred-plus earthworks surveyed and/or recorded by Squier and Davis have survived. All that is left of most of them are Squier and Davis' beautifully drawn survey maps, and their artifacts, which, in some cases, have been scattered all over the world. The Tremper Mound pipes ended up much closer to home, retained in the archives of the Ohio History Connection.

The animals selected by the carvers of the Hopewell platform pipes were not just big game animals, nor were they only animals that were feared and admired for their power. These subjects included animals both great and small, mighty and modest - an entire rainbow of species representing the wildlife of the Hopewell culture's home biome. The effigy platform pipes of Mound City and Tremper provide us with a field guide to the past - giving us a tour of the natural world as it existed 2000 years ago in the same environs we live in today.

Species represented on the effigy pipes included: Black Bear, Cougar, Bobcat, Porcupine, Opossum, Beaver, White-tailed Deer, Mink, Rabbit, Squirrel, Snapping Turtle, Box Turtle, American and Spadefoot Toad, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Long-eared Owl, Screech Owl, Great Blue Heron, Sandhill Crane, Canada Goose, Carolina Parakeet, Bald Eagle, Bufflehead, Otter, Raccoon, Gray Wolf, Gray Fox, Domesticated Dog, and Cardinal.

The context of how these pipes were originally used is unknown, but it is notable that the smoking holes were oriented such that the smoker stared into the animal's eyes. And, since these pipes were only 2.5 to 4 inches long, the smoker and the animal were in intimate proximity. The animals' eyes were highlighted with small bits of turquoise, copper, or pearl.

Although the Hopewell Culture's construction of grand earthwork complexes was mostly limited to southern Ohio, their sphere of influence was geographically expansive. Some spectacular platform effigy pipes have been found outside Ohio, especially in Illinois. These pipes are usually found singly, often in association with burials.

Based on studies of each carver's signature style, Dr. Johanna Minich, Art Historian at Virginia Commonwealth, believes the tradition of using animal effigy pipes only



lasted a few generations, probably ending when the second cache of pipes was buried at Mound City. She further believes the pipes were carved by only a small number of master artists, or less likely, by tightly stylized workshops. In any case, their products were in high demand across large geographic regions.

Whenever Joanna was able to identify an artist's distinct style in the Tremper Mound cache or in the Illinois-sourced pipes, she was always able to find that same style of handiwork at Mound City. Ponder that! One artist's carvings at all three locations!

Recent analysis of the stones composing the Tremper Mound pipes revealed that 65 percent hailed from an Illinois quarry and 18 percent were from a Minnesota quarry, even though Fuert Hill Pipestone Quarry was only a few miles away from Tremper. More puzzling yet is the fact that, unlike Tremper, the Mound City pipes were mostly carved out of native Ohio stone. Were the pipe carvers itinerant craftsmen and craftswomen? Were the Tremper Mound pipes carried back to Ohio by traveling pilgrims? So many unexplained mysteries.

In any case, the people of the Hopewell Culture employed a variety of far-flung materials. Like many of

their cultural counterparts, both modern and ancient, they embraced a world that was large, marvelous and varied; and they knew how to network and move resources around. They coveted "cool stuff" from far away with which to make their art: horns from Rocky Mountain sheep, shells from the Gulf Coast, copper from Michigan, and mica from the southern Appalachians. They imported silver, galena, turquoise, pearls, aragonite, meteoric materials and iron. Loving what is rare and exotic is a universal human trait that was certainly well-expressed in the Hopewell era.

We enter into the Arc's next chapter of stewarding Tremper Mound with humility. Reflecting on the human effort it took to build monuments of earth the size of Tremper Mound and Portsmouth Works - one basketful at a time - is humbling. Staring at the remains of Tremper Mound and imagining the site's Greathouse filled with people mourning and honoring their dead connects us across the millennia. And yet, it is important to remember that what we know about the Hopewell Culture is but a thin slice of the complexity of their artistry, traditions, and life skills. It is our hope that protecting Tremper Mound will serve in a small way to expand our knowledge and appreciation of the past.

relocating lost treasures

It is rare for a Hopewell archaeological site the size of Tremper Mound to suddenly become available for research, and so it is especially exciting to have an geosurvey in progress at the preserve. The research is being conducted by Ohio Valley Archaeology under the supervision of Archaeologist, Jarrod Burks.

Archaeology has come a long way since Tremper Mound was excavated by Mills in 1915. Magnetometers now detect differences in the magnetic properties of soils, revealing such anomalies as ancient fire pits, old post molds, farm homesteads, and plowed-over mounds. Lidar imagery detects very small changes in elevation, also revealing earthworks that are invisible to the eye. Both of these tools collect detailed information without any disturbance to the archaeological record, and both are being employed at Tremper Mound.

The archives of the Ohio Historic Preservation Office show records of archaeological sites that appear to lie within the new preserve's boundaries. One is a mound of significant size. If the mound is really there, the geophysical surveys will find it. Already the studies have located a homesite probably belonging to the Fort Ancient Culture.

Photo right: copy of a card filed in the Ohio Historic Preservation Office describing a "lost" earthworks near Tremper Mound.



Magnetometry discoveries in the region south of Tremper Mound. This is just a small part of the larger study area being investigated.

