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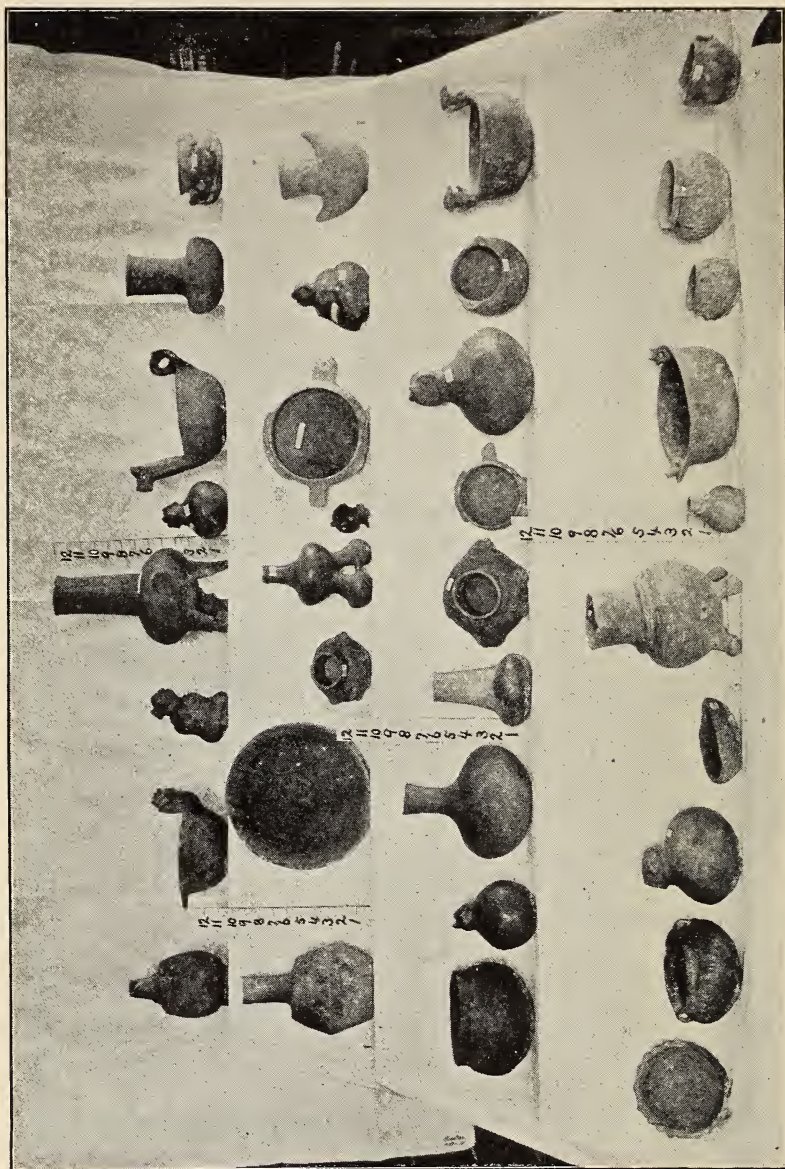


Plate I.

MISSOURI AND ARKANSAS PREHISTORIC POTTERY.
(Selections from Wisconsin Historical Society's collections.)

Photo. by F. W. Curtiss, Dec., 1893.

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PREHISTORIC POTTERY—MIDDLE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY.

BY JAMES DAVIE BUTLER, LL. D.

[Address delivered at the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, December 14, 1893.]

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin has just added to its museum two hundred and fifty-four specimens of prehistoric pottery. Its purchase of the Perkins collection of copper implements, in 1875, rendered the Society easily first in that department of antiques. Nor was it far behind in the line of Indian curiosities, gathered by Governor Doty, and in relics of the stone age. The treasures of the ceramic art just now acquired form a new departure, and round up the circle of its exhibits. They are also more suited to spectacular display than any species of aboriginal remains which it has hitherto shown.

The new treasure-trove consists of two hundred and fifty-four pieces. They were all discovered in southeastern Missouri or northeastern Arkansas, in the Missouri counties of Scott, Mississippi, and New Madrid, and in Cross and Poinsett counties in Arkansas. All were found in graves of a depth of from two to five feet. They had usually been placed one each side of a skull. In transatlantic cemeteries similar vessels, when buried with the dead, were often purposely broken, either as a token of grief or to make them valueless in the eyes of grave-robbers. But these Mississippi memorials were laid in the dust unbroken, and probably contained food or drink. Indeed, when exhumed, so many of them were still whole, that only about ten per cent of the number needed to have their fragments glued together.

The material is clay of various colors, but usually blackish. It is tempered with bits of shell, which often give it a pepper-and-salt appearance, the pepper predominating. All the articles are hand-made—showing no trace of any wheel manufacture, but they are moulded in forms symmetrical and sometimes of classic elegance. None of this handiwork indicates acquaintance with the art of glazing—though some articles were rubbed smooth and reddened with ochre, or veneered with a different variety of clay. Not a few, in the shape of gourds or squashes, would seem to have been modeled and shaped on these natural moulds. Others show the forms of mud turtles, fishes, and various animals. A few imitate the human figure. One female, kneeling low, appears to be in an attitude and with a look of humble but earnest supplication.

The variety in form, size, and fashion is very considerable. There are shallow or wide-mouthed vessels which we term pans, bowls, basins, porringers, and cups, according to size and shape. One, seemingly copied from a shell, has a nose like a butter-boat. Where the mouths are somewhat narrower, we may call them pots, some of which would hold a pailful. Some pots have projections on their rims, or a sort of ears, through which thongs would slip to suspend them over a fire or elsewhere. Others run up in the style of long-necked birds, which serve as handles. The articles which are most narrow-mouthed, it is natural to call bottles. Of these some are as big-bellied as demijohns, while others are so slender that their bodies have only two or three times the diameter of their necks. At the base the bottles are either flattened, or they stand on three legs. When a neck supports the head of an animal, the animal's mouth sometimes forms the bottle mouth, but at other times that orifice is in the back of the animal's head. The ears of the human heads were pierced as if for ear-rings.

It will be observed that many styles of archaic pottery have no representatives in the collection we have now acquired. The coil pattern, for instance, so common further south and east, has here no existence. In this variety, the

clay long drawn out into a rope and rolled round, was then bent into circular layers, so as to form a base, then swelling sides, and then often the contracted neck of a jar or bottle.

A large number of our acquisitions bear some sort of ornament, as swelling bosses; or, on the other hand, sunken dimples, a sort of *repoussé* work produced by the artist's finger pressing the soft material from without or from within. Other styles of decoration are bits of clay stuck on outside here and there, like spit-balls. Sometimes rims are indented so as to resemble twisted cords or the links of a chain. At other times, there are lines straight or curved, or rising like the rafters of a house. But a majority of the specimens are totally unornamented. These relics devoid of ornament, one is at first inclined to ascribe to the most archaic era of the art. It is not, however, to be forgotten that bones of the mastodon — an animal now extinct — have been found carved with representations of hunting that animal, a find which argues that no art is more ancient than the taste for ornament.

What was the *beginning* of the potter's art? is a natural question. Herodotus tells a story concerning a Scythian custom, which may throw light on the invention of pottery. That people having killed an ox, would use his stomach as a caldron for boiling his flesh. Hung beneath a tripod and high over a fire, such a kettle of green tripe would stand much heat while the flesh was boiling. Now and then, however, it must burn through. What more natural than to stop leaks with the clay on which it may be the fire had itself been kindled? It is the first step that costs. After one clod had been stuck on, the whole stomach would be speedily covered with such fire-fenders, and at the next step would be discarded altogether when the clay pot was once well-baked, or rather would perish in the baking. Behold the possible genesis of prehistoric pottery.

American archæologists hold that our pottery originated, relatively speaking, earlier than that of Egypt. In saying "relatively speaking," they have reference to the fact that no Egyptian pottery is older than alphabetic

writing in the land of the Nile, while all our relics of that sort were fashioned among peoples who had not yet invented any sort of A. B. C.'s. Our handiwork seems then to run back to an earlier stage of development than the earliest Egyptian survivals.

The lessons we shall learn from our new discoveries of primeval art, it is impossible to foresee. Varieties in the fashion of vessels may demonstrate the lines of demarcation between tribe and tribe — each fish, bird, or animal, may give us a clue to the emblem or totem distinguishing one clan from another. Ornamental lines which we at first ascribe to capricious fancy may at length turn out to be significant, each one, of some real fact.

As a possible aid to future interpretations of what is as yet hieroglyphical, we have procured from William J. Seever, of St. Louis, from whom our purchase was made, both a general description of the St. Francis valley, the head-centre of mound-builder burials, and a list of all the several localities there in which our relics were from first to last gathered up. This article, appended to the present paper, has appeared indispensable for the profitable study of the collection now garnered in our museum. It will also be invaluable as a guide in making and appreciating further researches.

My own hope is sanguine, that within a decade our museum will be enriched — thanks to our collections from states south and west — with a prehistoric treasure-trove of Wisconsin pottery. No specimen of that sort has indeed hitherto come into our possession. But we know that some of them exist, indeed we have seen and handled them. Among the fifty thousand visitors who annually walk through our show-room we trust that some, now unknown to us, will prove to be owners of these rarities, and will be disposed to place them where they will do most good. In juxtaposition with types from a distance — each class lending and borrowing light by mutual reflection — they will aid, more than can be foreseen, comparative research "in the dark backward and abysm of time."

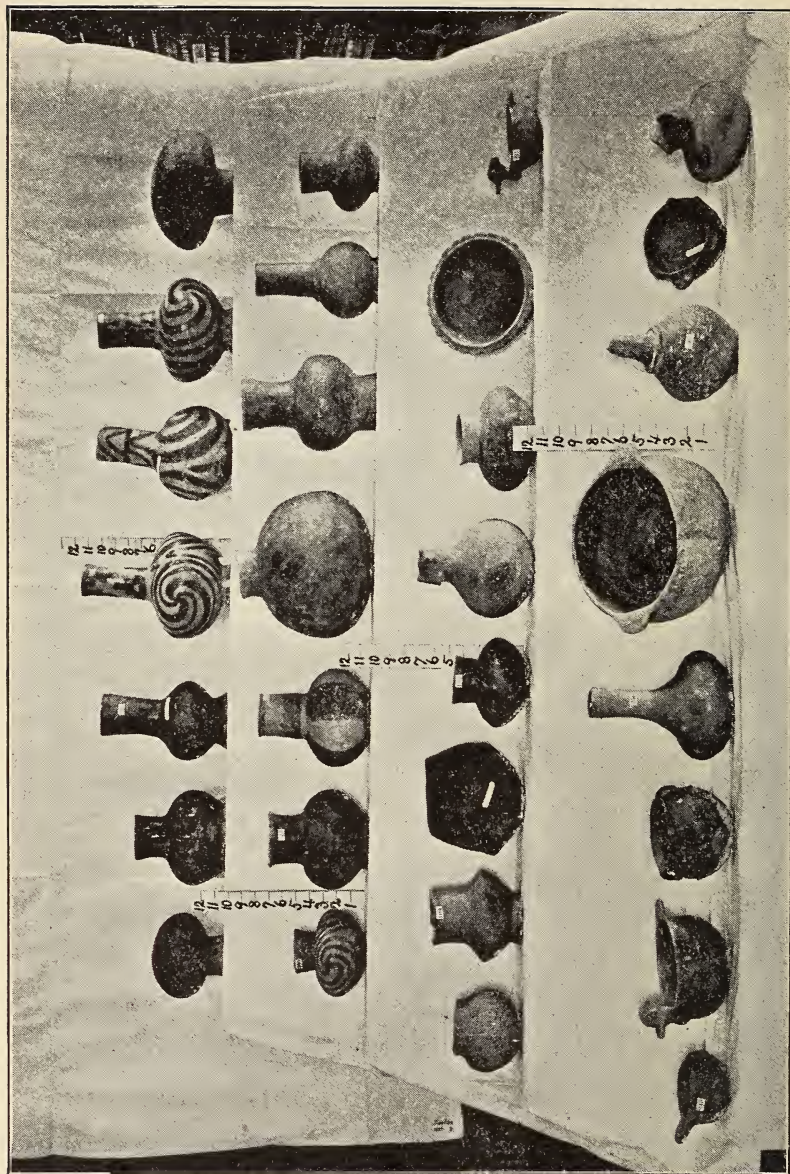


Plate II.

Photo. by F. W. Curtiss, Dec., 1893.

MISSOURI AND ARKANSAS PREHISTORIC POTTERY.
(Selections from Wisconsin Historical Society's collections.)

PREHISTORIC REMAINS IN THE ST. FRANCIS VALLEY.

BY WILLIAM J. SEEVER.

[Paper submitted at the Forty First Annual Meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, December 14, 1893.]

From the city of Cape Girardeau on the Mississippi river, a well defined line of bluffs extends in a general southwesterly direction across the corner of the state of Missouri, and on into Arkansas. This line of bluffs forms the boundary between the high and low lands of Missouri and Arkansas. An offshoot called Crawley's ridge sets out in Stoddard county, Mo., passing through the Missouri counties of Stoddard and Butler, and continuing through Arkansas into Clay, Green, Craighead, Poinsett, Cross, St. Francis, Lee, and Phillip counties, terminating near the city of Helena, just below the mouth of St. Francis river. This ridge forms the watershed of the St. Francis and White rivers, and is the dividing line between the valleys of these two streams. The region to the east and north of Crawley's ridge is termed the Swamp ridge of Missouri and Arkansas. It attains in places a width of forty miles, and a length north and south of about two hundred and fifty miles. The general surface is but little above the mean stage of water in the Mississippi river, and is yearly subject to overflow.

It is in this valley, principally along the banks of the Mississippi, St. Francis, and Little rivers — the two latter of which extend through it from north to south — that the most extensive remains of the mound builders are found. On the banks of the St. Francis and its tributaries, at a distance of every few miles, are found large groups of mounds which were once the seats of an extensive population. Three, four, and often a dozen or more mounds

are found grouped together, covering an area of from one to over twenty acres.

These mounds vary in height from a foot or two above the general surface to twenty-five and thirty feet, and in diameter from a few yards to several hundred feet. They are usually circular in outline, with rounded sides and tops. Occasionally the larger ones have flat tops; terraced or truncated mounds are rarely met with in this region. Off from the main mounds, at distances varying from an eighth of a mile to three miles, single mounds are met with — probably the outposts of the central station.

Whether these earthworks were built for village sites, for ceremonies, or for places of sepulture is still undetermined. Certain it is that for a long period of time they were used as dwelling sites by our aborigines. This fact is abundantly proven by the charcoal beds where these people built their fires, by the remains of the animals, birds and fish which were used as food, and by broken utensils and implements used in their daily life, all of which articles are found scattered over the surface of these earthworks or slightly below their general surface.

Many of these mounds were undoubtedly built solely for use as cemeteries, and from these are exhumed vessels of pottery, together with human remains. A large number of these ceramic relics were collected by me, and are now to be seen in the museum of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin at Madison.

It is known to have been the custom of all peoples, at times, to deposit with their dead, articles of use and value. It is to this custom among the mound builders that we owe the preservation of so many specimens of their pottery. These antiques were taken principally from burial mounds — occasionally from isolated graves on some prominent point of land. Usually two, rarely three or four, vessels were placed with each body, near the head or shoulders — for the most part a bottle-shaped vessel, or a pot or bowl containing drink and food.

The material used in making this pottery was usually a fine-grained clay, tempered with mussel shells, pulverized or ground, both of which ingredients were always at hand in the streams skirting the dwelling sites of the potters.

The color of these vessels presents two varieties: a dark and a light hue, ranging from a rich black to brown and gray. The finish is rude, they being usually smoothed by hand, or with some implement similar to a trowel, the marks of which can plainly be seen on many specimens.

The forms are many and varied. The mound-builder potter attempted to imitate in a general way the various forms of animal and vegetable life, and also the human figure. Vessels moulded to represent the human form are met with, with the legs doubled up under the body, and often the arms folded across the breast; in others, the human head has been imitated, to finish the neck of a bottle or urn; again, a human or animal head is sometimes made to serve as a handle for a bowl or dish. Fish and animal-shaped vessels are uncommon; by far the greater number are plain, with globular bodies, together with long or short necks; there are many bowl or dish-shaped forms, plain or embellished, with handles or ears. Others are curiously ornamented by designs or marks done with some sharp instrument, or with the fingers and thumb-nail.

Nothing can be said with certainty concerning the age of these vessels. When the white man came, with his metal utensils and glass beads, he set up the dividing line between historic and prehistoric times. A large number of graves were opened to obtain the several collections of pottery in the St. Francis valley, but in no single instance among the graves containing this primitive ware was found any article of European manufacture. No doubt the manufacture of this ware began many centuries ago, and was carried on to a limited extent until recent times. Early European writers mention witnessing its practice among the southern and southeastern tribes.¹

¹ See especially Bartram's *Travels Through North and South Carolina*, etc. (Philadelphia and London, 1791, 1792.)—R. G. T.

LOCALITY LIST OF THE SEEVER POTTERY COLLECTION, IN
THE WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S MUSEUM.

Specimens numbered 1 to 28 inclusive — Taken in 1880 from mounds in Northcot's swamp, 6 miles west of Charleston, Mississippi Co., Mo., T. 26 N., R. 15 E. One mile N. of Bertrand, a station on the Cairo branch of the St. L., I. M. & S. Ry.

Nos. 29 to 80 inclusive. — Found in 1890, in Stanley mounds, 40 miles W. of Memphis, Tenn., in Cross Co., Ark., T. 8 N., R. 5 E. A very large group of mounds, covering 20 to 25 acres.

No. 81 — Taken in 1892 from Miller mounds, Poinsett Co., Ark., in S. 10, T. 10 N., R. 5 E. A large group in which several mounds are 20 to 35 feet high. They are 4 miles S. of Edwards station, on K. C. & Gulf Ry.

Nos. 82 to 112 inclusive — Taken in 1890 from Stanley mounds, Cross Co., Ark., T. 8 N., R. 5 E.

Nos. 113 to 142 inclusive — Taken in 1890 from the Jones mounds, Cross Co., Ark., T. 9 N., R. 5 E. Cherry Valley, 12 miles west, is the nearest post office.

Nos. 143 to 145 inclusive — Taken in 1892 from Miller mounds, Poinsett Co., Ark., S. 10, T. 10 N., R. 5 E.

Nos. 146 to 151 inclusive — From various mounds in T. 8 and 9 N., R. 5 E., Cross Co., Ark.

Nos. 152 153 — Taken in 1892 from Miller mounds, in Poinsett Co. Ark., S. 10, T. 10 N., R. 5 E.

Nos. 154 to 157 inclusive — Taken in 1891 from various mounds in Cross Co., Ark., T. 8 and 9 N., R. 5 E.

No. 158 — From mound near Hatchie Coon, Poinsett Co., Ark., T. 12 N., R. 6 E.

Nos. 159 to 184 inclusive — From various mounds in Cross Co., Ark., T. 8 and 9 N., R. 5 E.

No. 185 — From mound near Hatchie Coon, Poinsett Co., Ark., T. 12 N., R. 6 E.

No. 186 — From Miller mounds, Poinsett Co., Ark., S. 10, T. 10 N., R. 5 E.

Nos. 187 to 193 inclusive — From Fortune mounds, at Neely's ferry, on St. Francis river, Cross Co., Ark., T. 9 N., R. 5 E. Cherry Valley is the nearest post office.

No. 194 — From mound near Hatchie Coon, Poinsett Co., Ark., T. 12 N., R. 6 E.

Nos. 195 to 219 inclusive — From the Fortune mounds, Cross Co., Ark., T. 9 N., R. 5 E.

Nos. 220 to 223 inclusive — From Sandy Woods settlement, near Diehlstadt post office, Scott Co., Mo., T. 27 N., R. 15 E.

No. 224 — From Cross Co., Ark.

No. 225 — From mound near Diehlstadt, Scott Co., Mo., T. 27 N., R. 15 E.

Nos. 226, 227 — From Cross Co., Ark.

No. 228 -- From mound near Diehlstadt, Scott Co., Mo., T. 27 N., R. 15 E.

No. 229 -- From Cross Co., Ark.

Nos. 230, 231 -- Same as No. 228.

Nos. 232 to 236 inclusive -- Taken in 1887 from Landers's mounds, in New Madrid Co., Mo., T. 25 N., R. 13 E. Six miles south of Little River station, on the St. L., I. M. & S. Ry.

No. 237 Taken from Miller mounds, Poinsett Co., Ark., S. 10, T. 10 N., R. 5 E.

Nos. 238, 239 -- From Cross Co., Ark.

No. 240 -- From mound on the Madrid ridge, New Madrid Co., Mo., T. 25 N., R. 14 E.

No. 241 -- Same as Nos. 238, 239.

No. 242 -- Same as No. 240.

Nos. 243, 244 -- Same as Nos. 238, 239.

No. 245 -- Same as No. 240.

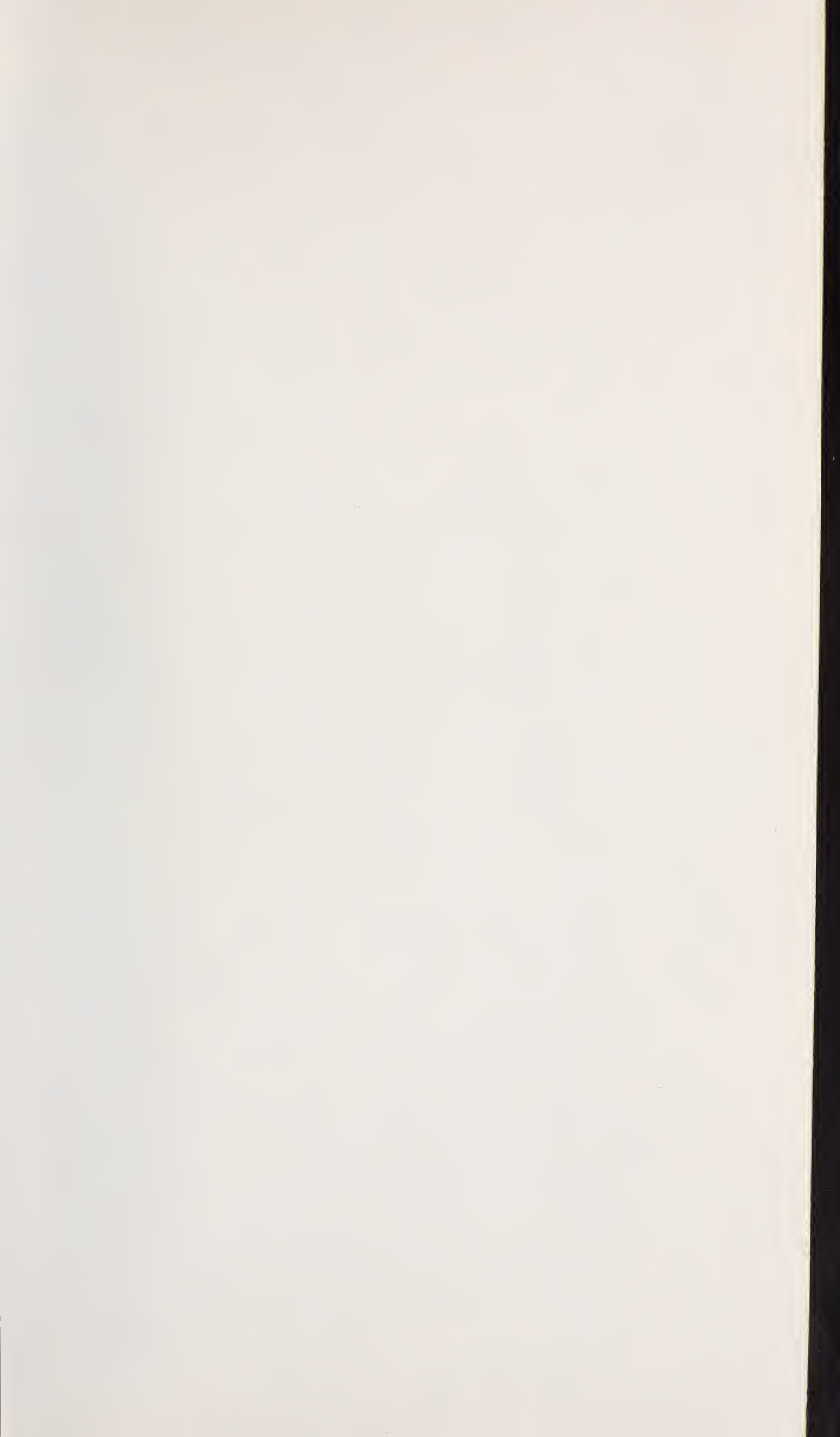
No. 246 -- From Cross Co., Ark.

Nos. 247, 248 -- From Miller mounds, in Poinsett Co., Ark., S. 10., T. 10 N., R. 5 E.

Nos. 249, 250 -- From New Madrid Co., Mo., T. 25 N., R. 14 E.

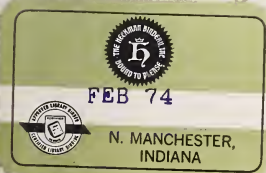
Nos. 251 to 254 inclusive -- From mound one mile west of mouth of Tyronza river, in Cross Co., Ark.

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