

Boone Mound Exploration

ISSN 0003-4827

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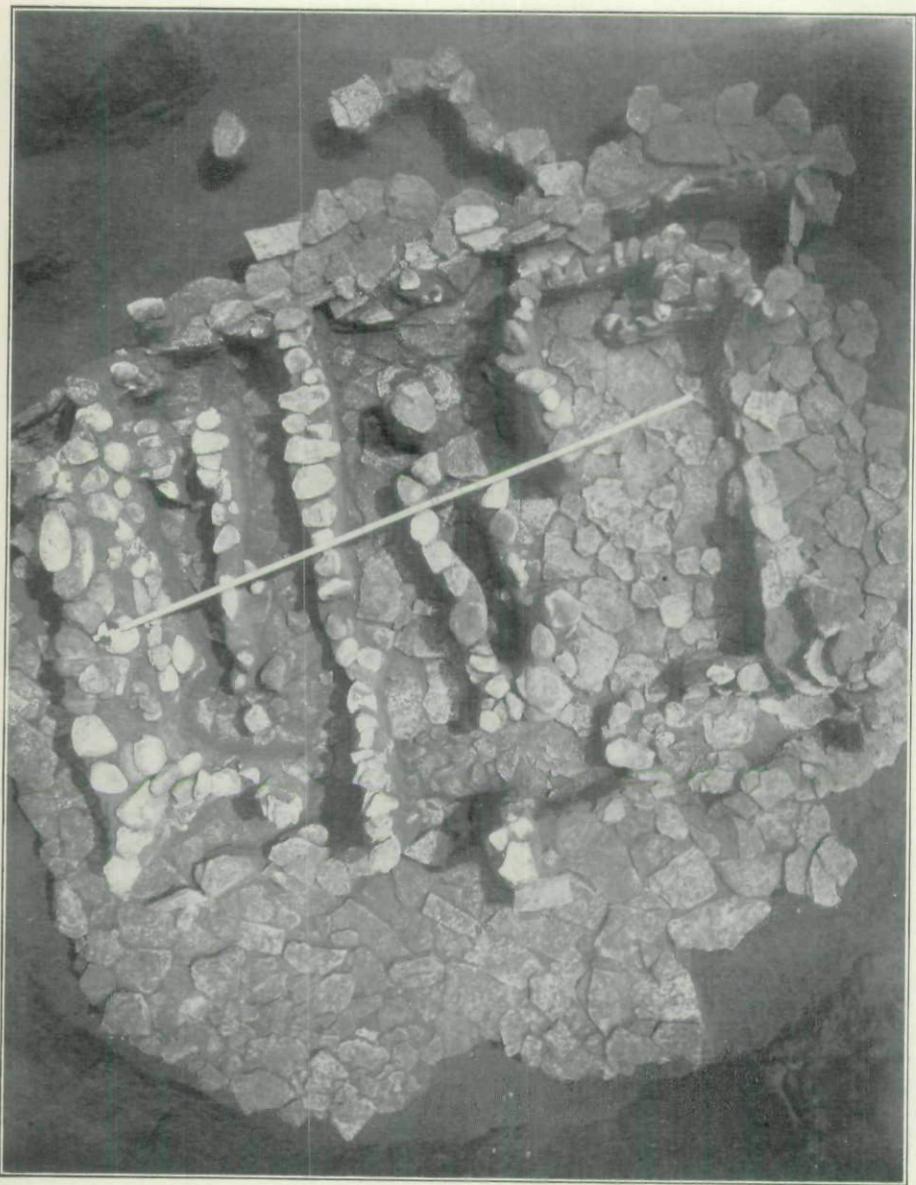
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Recommended Citation

"Boone Mound Exploration." *The Annals of Iowa* 8 (1908), 468-469.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.3475>

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Stone-work disclosed in Boone mound, from a point fifteen feet above. The fourteen-foot rod lies due north and south, the target to the north.

ANNALS OF IOWA.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

"* * * When he [Mr. Aldrich] closed his desk, for the last time, there were within it manuscripts * * * some editorials and much material undeveloped or in outline. * * * It will be the purpose of the writer, who has been appointed Acting Curator * * * to continue the form of the journal identical with that preceding the death of Mr. Aldrich, and make use of such material * * *. If any deviation shall be made it will be in the number closing the volume [which may] include all * * * communications * * * incident to Mr. Aldrich's death.

EDGAR R. HARLAN."

(Annals of Iowa, Third Series, Vol. 8, P. 385.)

BOONE MOUND EXPLORATION.

For a score of years a large mound near the Des Moines river, almost directly west of Boone, Boone county, Iowa, had attracted many interested in Iowa archaeology. It was first called to the attention of the late Charles Aldrich by Mr. Carl Fritz Henning of Boone. Mr. Aldrich, upon careful examination, approved the opinion that it was of prehistoric origin. He had done some considerable mound exploring during the latter years of his activities in Hamilton and Boone counties and from the size and locality of the one in question determined it was worthy the attention of public authorities. Consequently he referred the matter to the Board of Trustees of the Historical Department of Iowa. He was authorized to secure permission to explore, and to thoroughly explore it.

During the spring of 1907 Mr. T. Van Hynning, in charge of the Department Museum, submitted to Mr. Aldrich plans which the latter approved for the work. Arrangements were made to proceed under Mr. Aldrich's personal oversight, when notice was served on all concerned that in the mound was the unmarked grave of Oliver Perry Coffey, who was there interred about 1850. The advancing crop season, the failing health of Mr. Aldrich, and these objections, combined to defer the work for a year. In April, 1908, the Department secured per-

mission and transferred the remains of Mr. Coffey to the Mineral Ridge cemetery in Boone county and began the work of exploration.

The mound was oval in form, 90 by 110 feet in extreme dimensions, and 14 feet high. Mr. Karl Kastberg, city engineer of Boone, made a careful survey of the mound and locality, and prepared working plans. It was laid off in horizontal sections five feet square, and perpendicular sections one by five feet. The dirt was removed by beginning at the northerly side and shoveling a row of sections out upon the surface. The dirt of the second row of sections was in the same manner shoveled out into the space from which the first was thrown, and so on throughout the work.

From a datum point maintained throughout the work, each object disclosed was located on the plans. After the work was done the so-called "stone work" was topographically surveyed as the mound had been before it was disturbed.

Before the settlement of the country there were heavy forests of elm, hard maple and oak throughout the region of the mound. At the time of its exploration there were two oak trees and one elm standing near the top, each of twenty-four inches diameter. Three feet of the surface of the mound was soft, sandy loam. Five feet was very compact but of the same character otherwise as the first three. Its hardness was such as to suggest its having been baked together. Beneath the compact stratum the dirt was soft to the foundation of the mound. There were found on every level and practically in equal distribution throughout the mound pottery fragments, but no complete vessel or other such object. These fragments, 4,000 in number, seem to be tempered with disintegrated granite. They indicate burning on their convex sides. They show ornamentations in more than thirty patterns. At least one fragment of the rim of a vessel shows finger prints evidently made in the plastic state and preserved through the burning. Many, if from circular vessels, show the diameters of these to have been over three feet. Clam-shells in thin sheets, small heaps and singly occurred generally throughout, and especially numerous near the bottom. These are of species extant in the

river nearby. Some of these have adhering a very hard cementum. At different places and levels occurred single bones of human beings. All were fragmentary, having the appearance of having been gnawed by rodents. Four or five separate skulls, and other bones, probably from as many bodies, were found near the bottom. Only three or four implements were found and these were of flint. They were not together and had no apparent relation to other objects. A floor of irregular outline, some twenty-one by twenty-six feet in extreme dimensions, rested on a dirt stratum about fourteen inches thick. It was made of flat stones fitted closely and evenly, of a thickness of two to four inches. Ash heaps of a foot in diameter occurred frequently between the encrusted stratum and the stone work.

An irregular parallelogram of edgewise stones rested on this floor. These formed practically an unbroken wall twenty to twenty-four inches high. The enclosure was some ten by sixteen feet, and in each of the four angles were enclosures or small parallelograms about two by four feet in size. The longer walls of both the large and small enclosures ran nearly due north and south. Within the smaller enclosures were found most of the bones, including the only complete skull that was discovered. On a level with the upper portions of the edgewise stones and near the east and west sides of the parallelogram there were two decayed oak timbers running the entire length of the stone work. At right angles with these ran timbers of the same character three in number, which appeared to lie above those first mentioned. On a slightly higher level, and in the same general plane, were granite boulders six to twelve inches in diameter, in rows extending nearly due east and west. These boulders were left undisturbed until after the floor was cleaned off when the whole was surveyed and photographed. Boulders of the character found occur on the surface of the bluffs half a mile away, while the flat stones do not now crop out nearer than three-fourths of a mile north.

A detailed report of the work will be prepared by Mr. Van Hyning.

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