

title: The Lower Mississippi Valley Expeditions of Clarence Bloomfield Moore Classics in Southeastern Archaeology

author: Moore, Clarence B.; Morse, Dan F.; Morse, Phyllis A.

publisher: University of Alabama Press

isbn10 | asin: 0817309497

print isbn13: 9780817309497

ebook isbn13: 9780585140988

language: English

subject: Indians of North America--Mississippi River Valley--Antiquities, Mounds--Mississippi River Valley, Mississippi River Valley--Antiquities.

publication date: 1998

lcc: E78.M75M66 1998eb

ddc: 977/.01

subject: Indians of North America--Mississippi River Valley--Antiquities, Mounds--Mississippi River Valley, Mississippi River Valley--Antiquities.

The Lower Mississippi Valley Expeditions of Clarence Bloomfield Moore

Classics in Southeastern Archaeology

Stephen Williams, Series Editor

Publication of this work has been supported in part by the
Southeastern Archaeological Conference Panamerican Consultants, Inc.
Arkansas Archeological Society
Arkansas Archeological Survey
A Friend of Southeastern Archaeology

The Lower Mississippi Valley Expeditions of Clarence Bloomfield Moore

Edited and with an Introduction by
Dan F. Morse and Phyllis A. Morse

The University of Alabama Press
Tuscaloosa and London

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Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0380
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The works by Clarence B. Moore reproduced by facsimile in this volume were published originally in the *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* in 1908, 1910, 1911, 1916, and 1918.

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The paper on which this book is printed meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Science-Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Moore, Clarence Bloomfield.

The Lower Mississippi Valley expeditions of Clarence Bloomfield Moore / edited and with an introduction by Dan F. Morse and Phyllis A. Morse. p. cm.(Classics in southeastern archaeology)

Reprint of articles originally published 1908-1918.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

Contents: Some aboriginal sites on Mississippi River Additional investigation on Mississippi River Additional information: Golden Lake, Evadale, Bassett, and Transylvania Certain mounds of Arkansas and Mississippi Antiquities of the St. Francis, White, and Black rivers, Arkansas.

ISBN 0-8173-0949-7 (pbk.)

1. Indians of North America Mississippi River Valley Antiquities. 2. Mounds Mississippi River Valley. 3. Mississippi River Valley Antiquities. I. Morse, Dan F. II. Morse, Phyllis A. III. Title. IV. Series.

E78.M75M66 1998

977'.01dc21

98-19292

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data available

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost we wish to thank Marvin D. Jeter, Station Archeologist, University of Arkansas at Monticello, Arkansas Archeological Survey. Dr. Jeter not only helped with site identifications and references in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, but he read the manuscript at various times during its development and read it after the second draft was completed. Mary Lynn Kennedy, Editor, Arkansas Archeological Survey, Fayetteville, Arkansas, drew figure I on her computer. Stephen Williams, Emeritus Professor, Harvard University, Santa Fe, New Mexico, read the manuscript after the third draft.

A number of individuals helped with the site identifications outlined in the appendix:

R. Berle Clay, State Archaeologist, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

Ken Carstens, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky.

Lela Donat, Registrar, Arkansas Archeological Survey, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

John H. House, Station Archeologist, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Arkansas Archeological Survey.

Suzanne D. Hoyal, Site File Curator, Tennessee Division of Archaeology, Nashville, Tennessee.

Tristram J. Kidder, Department of Anthropology, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Robert H. Lafferty III, Mid-Continental Research Associates, Lowell, Arkansas (sites in Missouri).

Sam McGahey, Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

Robert C. Mainfort Jr., Arkansas Archeological Survey, Fayetteville, Arkansas (sites in Tennessee).

Phillip G. (Duke) Rivet, Staff Archaeologist, Louisiana Division of Archaeology, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Martha A. Rolinson, Station Archeologist, Toltec Mounds, Scott, Arkansas.

Kit W. Wesler, Wickliffe Mounds Research Center, Wickliffe, Kentucky.

Individuals who helped in other ways include:

D. Glen Akridge, Ph.D. candidate, Chemistry, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

John Ferguson, Director, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Bill Gatewood, Curator, Old State House Museum, Little Rock, Arkansas.

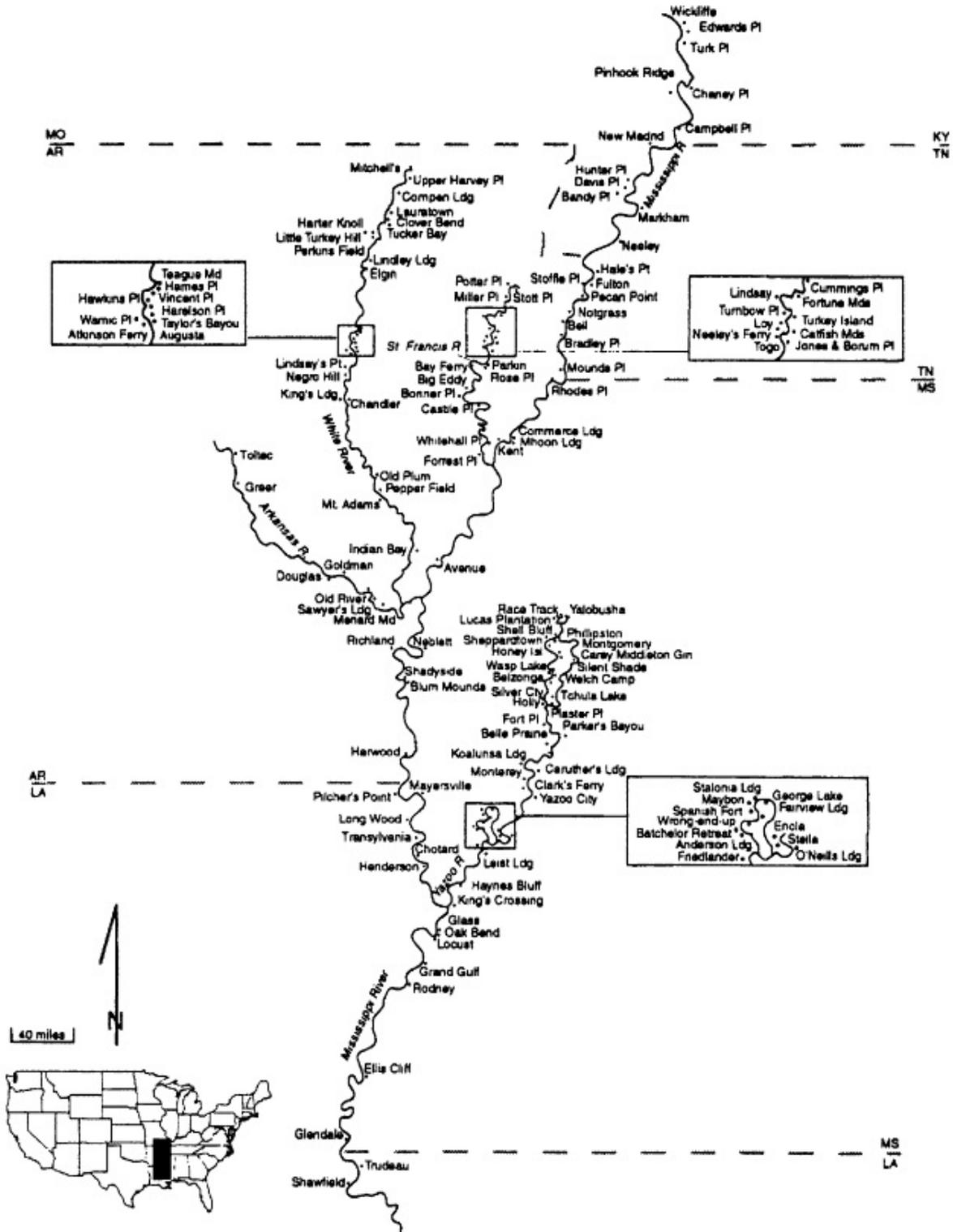
Mark Rees, Ph.D. candidate, Anthropology, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

Frank F. Schambach, Station Archeologist, Southern Arkansas University, Magnolia, Arkansas Archeological Survey.

Kent Westbrook, M.D., Little Rock, Arkansas.

Note on This Edition

In the original publications by Clarence Bloomfield Moore, three of the works collected in this facsimile edition (*Some Aboriginal Sites on Mississippi River, Certain Mounds of Arkansas and of Mississippi*, and *Antiquities of the St. Francis, White, and Black Rivers, Arkansas*) had beautiful color plates, and each plate was tipped in near the mention of the artifact in the text. For this edition the plates are reproduced as halftones. These illustrations are placed at the end of the relevant sections of this volume. The list of maps and plates following the table of contents shows the placement of the sections of plates.



Sites Investigated by C. B. Moore in the Lower Mississippi Valley

Introduction the Lower Mississippi Valley Expeditions of C. B. Moore

Dan F. Morse and Phyllis A. Morse

Clarence B. Moore systematically tested major sites on the navigable streams of the southeastern United States from 1892 until 1918. From autumn 1907 until spring 1911 he visited and often excavated sites on the Mississippi River (1907, 1910-1911) and its major tributaries from thirty-five miles north of Memphis south almost to New Orleans. The major tributaries surveyed for sites as recorded in this volume were the lower Arkansas (1908), the Yazoo and Sunflower (1908), the White and Black (1908, 1909-10), and the St. Francis Rivers (1909-10). Not covered here are the expeditions made on the Red and Ouachita Rivers and their tributaries in Louisiana and Arkansas. In 1916 he completed this survey of the Lower Mississippi Valley in that portion of the valley between Wilson, Arkansas, and the mouth of the Ohio River. Revisits to the Wilson area and northeast Louisiana were reported in 1918. In total almost a full year of fieldwork was accomplished. All the results were published almost immediately after fieldwork ceased each season. These publications are still among the most referenced today in archaeological writings concerning the Lower Mississippi Valley. However, the current cost for the two largest publications is \$300 if they can be located. Undoubtedly, part of this cost is due to the superb illustrations, which include 28 high-quality color plates. But the popularity of these volumes is largely because of the early, often excellent, descriptions of sites that within the next few years would be impacted severely by flooding and modern agriculture.

Moore explored the Lower Mississippi River Valley in much the same way that he investigated the other navigable streams in the southeastern United States. Captain J. S. Raybon and a companion first made a preliminary reconnaissance of the regions to be explored in a smaller boat and obtained names of landowners for Moore to get permission to excavate at locations thought to be fruitful. For instance, the *Gazette* of Marked Tree, Arkansas, reported on March 25, 1910, that "Capt. J. S. Raymond and Dr. M. G. Miller of Philadelphia, Pa., were here one day last week... hunting Indian relics ... and made an inspection of the mounds as they came up St. Francis river" (Hoffman 1997). Raybon's preliminary explorations extended beyond the

actual areas visited by Moore. For instance, Raybon searched 812 river miles, whereas Moore only looked at 566 miles in northeastern Arkansas. On the Arkansas River, there was no preliminary search.

Moore viewed his explorations on the Yazoo and Sunflower Rivers as unsuccessful; that is, his effort was "inadequately rewarded." Almost forty years later the Lower Mississippi Survey's (LMS) involvement in the Yazoo Basin was initiated by

the Peabody Museum at Harvard University and culminated in a two-volume work (Phillips 1970) that is an essential reference for anyone working in the Lower Mississippi River Valley today. Moore's emphasis was on burial associations, whereas Harvard's emphasis was on building a solid foundation for cultural history. Ideally, burial associations, representing as they do a single depositional event, could provide a much tighter dating of those events as well as quickly obtained artifacts for the discerning of geographical traditions that constituted a major aim of yesterday's archaeology. Except for noting that some sites had historic artifacts, Moore seems not to have recognized temporal differences in these assemblages. Yet the Moore expedition recovered artifacts representative of the Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian periods. Indeed, in most cases Moore literally "skimmed off the cream" in the form of the best artifacts available from sites in a very short time period. One notable exception was at Trudeau, where his tests produced no graves, despite the knowledge that a brass kettle, a catlinite pipe, and iron or steel objects had been found at one location within the site. If Moore had found the "Tunica Treasure" there, we would have known a lot more today about the specific associations and a lot of painful litigation would have been avoided (Brain 1979). Other artifacts recovered by Moore would have been scattered in private collections throughout the world with only minimal provenience, if any, had Moore not been so determined to document and donate these objects to a museum.

The Moore expeditions were planned with almost military precision. His trial holes were a standard size. At Winterville they were usually six by three feet in extent and four feet deep (Moore 1908:598). "Sometimes, but not often, the holes exceeded the standard size" (Moore 1908:598). If disturbed ground was revealed, the hole would be shallower. In the Yazoo Basin, "All trial-holes ... were designed to be 6 feet by 4 feet, by 4 feet deep. These dimensions, however, were not always strictly maintained" (Moore 1908:569, footnote).

His vessel, the *Gopher*, was a fiat-bottomed steamboat measuring 100 feet long and 20 feet at its widest point (Moore 1910:256). Boat personnel consisted of a captain, a pilot (Hugh W. Nixon of Memphis), an engineer, and a crew of five men. The boat was "amply equipped" for excavation. The excavation crew on the St. Francis numbered nine, which included three of the steamboat crew. On the Mississippi the crew varied from eleven to thirteen (Moore 1908:487). At Pecan Point nine men were supervised by four (1908:448).

Moore mentions that many of the crew members had worked for him in previous years (1908:566). The diggers were evidently African American; Moore mentions that he dared not proceed beyond Lepanto, Arkansas, on Little River because blacks were not tolerated there (1910:256). Race relations remain strained in that region. Mr. Raymond Melton, who owned Little Turkey Hill (where Moore did not dig) in Independence County, Arkansas, told John House on February 28, 1973, that a recently deceased neighbor, Mr. Dagget, had visited the Moore dig at Harter. A man (probably Moore) was "digging and sifting with a bunch of colored men helping him." Bones were being thrown out, but when anyone visited, the man would cease digging and visit "as long as you pleased." He (presumably Moore) would not dig while anyone was watching (House 1973).

Other personnel who consistently accompanied the expedition were Dr. Milo G. Miller (companion and secretary) and Mr. Arthur W. Clime or Mr. S. G. Weir (assis-

tants). Moore thanks a number of scientists for their help in identification, notably Frederic W. Putnam (pottery), Charles C. Willoughby (pottery), F. A. Lucas (bone), H. A. Pilsbry (shell), E.G. Vanatta (shell), R. A. F. Penrose, Jr. (rocks and minerals), F. J. Keeley (rocks and minerals), H. F. Keller (chemical analysis), Ales Hrdlicka (human remains), and Stewart Culin (games). He also thanks Mr. F. W. Hodge, ethnologist-in-charge for the Bureau of American Ethnology, for editing help and Miss H. N. Wardle, assistant curator in the Department of Anthropology at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, for indexing. The drawings in his publications were done by Mary Louise Baker (Wardle 1956:11). Dr. Miller supervised the publication of all reports (Moore 1908:256). Moore did his own photography, but his original negatives have not been located.

Equally impressive is his knowledge of sources. It is obvious that Moore was well read in the regions he was to investigate. He often refers to Smithsonian Bureau of (American) Ethnology reports of sites he investigated or could not find. References include Swanton, Holmes, Margry, French, Thruston, Evers, Willoughby, Peabody, Thomas, and Ashe. Moore was aware of previous work and tried to build on it. For instance, he stated he wished to report on grave lots and "burial customs" because that had not been done in previous works. Another problem was determining the composition of copper to ascertain whether it was "pre-Columbian." In a footnote Moore distinguishes between "mounds" and natural rises (1911:369). Confusion over this distinction had posed a major problem for at least a century and continues to this day for laymen in this region.

Moore found 1,415 pottery vessels in the St. Francis River valley. He noted they were shell-tempered, lacked the surface polish found on pottery nearer the Mississippi River, and were normally undecorated or minimally so treated. He comments on the "pot-hunters" (Moore's quotes) who used sounding rods to find burials and usually only dug a hole to the skull area, where most pots were to be found. Moore noted that incised vessels were more characteristic south of the Arkansas River and that painted vessels and human effigies were more common north of the Arkansas. He discusses the distribution of the "teapot" (Moore's quotes) and the nature of the pigments.

Moore used sounding rods and trial holes to locate burials. We cannot tell how many individuals were found because "bunch burials" held as many as fifteen to thirty people but were only counted as single "burials." Variations in

the size of the crew from site to site, when recorded, indicate that more than one site was dug at any one time. Artifact identification is fairly good in the sense that the same kind of general terminology (but not typology) was used as today. On the other hand, this similarity may indicate that we have not progressed as far as we think.

In his sample of sites Moore emphasized large burial locations, especially those marked by large mounds. They were easily found and provided the data Moore wished to collect. His emphasis was on Mississippian culture, the last prehistoric expression. It took him about five years to complete his mission. It can take five years to discover, test, and write up a single site or group of closely spaced sites today, but of course many more kinds of data are now involved. Moore recorded about 160 sites. Shortly before 1970 the Lower Mississippi Valley Survey had recorded approximately 1,000 sites. The number of known prehistoric sites just in east Arkansas now exceeds 11,000. Of those, 310 sites with known mounds are located within a mile of the

rivers traveled by Moore. He discovered about 45, or 15 percent, of those sites. Just as the earlier Smithsonian sites were located near railroad tracks with concentrations near stations, Moore's sites were located near major rivers with concentrations near steamboat landings.

Unfortunately, Moore did not record precisely the locations of the sites he visited, and he located those he did not excavate in very general terms. In some cases it is possible that sites were completely excavated by Moore himself, but many sites were simply destroyed after his visit by a combination of erosion and agribusiness. His very general descriptions, usually an approximate mile and/or fraction of mile in an approximate 90- or 45-degree compass bearing from a landing or town, and his often inaccurate map of a whole river drainage can get a modern observer to within four to sixteen sections using an older 15-minute USGS Quadrangle map. Nevertheless, many of the landings named by Moore are not on those quadrangles; either those were local, unrecorded names or temporary landings, or they were named after owners who were bought out. In a few cases we have found sites with the same landowners' surnames when we recorded them as when Moore dug them. In too many cases, despite very diligent searching in the field, Moore's sites could not be located. One problem is that sometimes many sites existed in the localities where Moore recorded a site. Another is that some of Moore's "sites" actually include two or more distinct sites. In at least one case, discussed further below, Moore evidently relied so much on Edward Palmer's 1882 description of a site that he believed he had to explain what happened to the mound he could no longer perceive. It is very frustrating to try to use Moore's publications to full value, but it would be folly to ignore these works. The accompanying "Rosetta Stone" table in the appendix attempts to help the student maximize the Moore accounts. On that table are references to more modern major research at sites visited by Moore.

Although Moore had the constant services of an "anatomist," he made no attempt to identify burials beyond "child" or "adult." "Thirty-eight boxes and cases of skulls and of other skeletal remains" from the St. Francis, White, and Black River expedition were donated to the United States National Museum (Smithsonian) to be written up by Hrdlicka (1940) at a later date. Another "sixty-five skulls... and a considerable number of other parts of the skeleton" from the Mississippi River expedition were similarly donated. Otherwise, only four skulls from Menard and six from Greer, both sites on the Arkansas River, were written up by Hrdlicka (1908). He makes reference to long bones