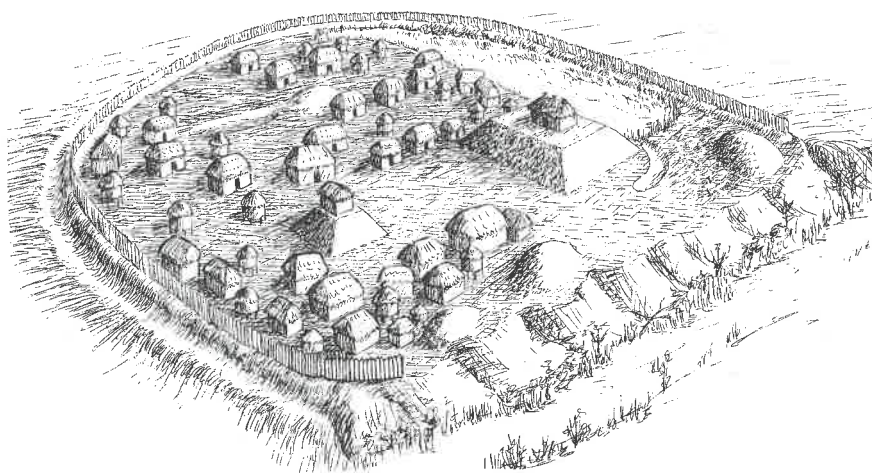


Towosahgy State Archaeological Site

By
John M. Cottier



Towosahgy State Archaeological Site is a 61 acre tract of land located on Pinhook Ridge in the southern portion of Mississippi County, Missouri. The name Towosahgy was borrowed from the Osage Indians, and means "Old Town". This old town is well named, as the site consists of what was once a fortified American Indian town. Within this village, a panorama of domestic and ceremonial life was once present. People were born in the town, lived and interacted within their community, and upon death were buried here. Today, all that is visible of these past activities are the remains of the earth mounds constructed within the village area. Located within the soil of the town is, however, tangible evidence of much of the past daily activity of the former inhabitants. The key to this story of the past is archaeology, and the Missouri State Park Board in cooperation with the University of Missouri-Columbia is working to turn this key and open a door into the past.



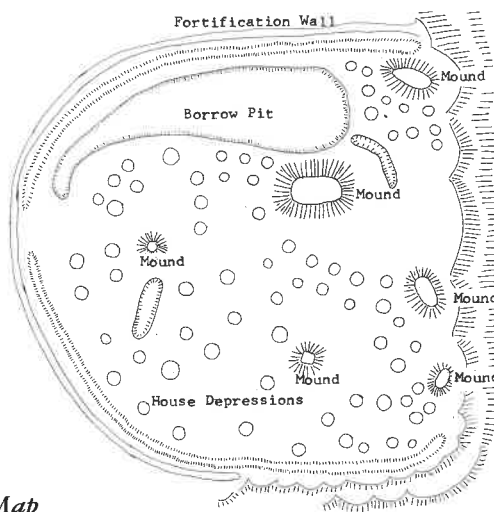
RECENT HISTORY OF THE SITE

Today, Towosahgy State Archaeological Site preserves the remains of a once fortified Indian ceremonial center. In southeast Missouri, several similar fortified Indian towns were once known by the archaeologist and the historian. At Towosahgy, the Missouri State Park Board protects the best preserved of these prehistoric monuments.

Since its purchase in 1967, the Missouri State Park Board preserves an area which includes the entire Indian town within the fortification, and a portion of the village outside the fortification. Limited archaeological investigations have been conducted at the site by the Missouri State Park Board in conjunction with the University of Missouri-Columbia. These excavations have provided some of the first necessary basic data needed for a proper interpretation of the people who once lived within this village. The addition of more information will allow the archaeologist to reconstruct and understand the Indian culture of this fortified ceremonial center. This will provide a more realistic and informative picture of a part of the American Indian cultural heritage of Missouri.

The present investigations are not the first scientific interest directed toward this archaeological site. Cyrus Thomas of the Smithsonian mentioned the site in 1891, and in 1894 published a map of the village area. On the map made by Thomas, the village is well defined by the fortification wall which once circled most of the village area. Also visible within the village are six Indian mounds, several depressions or borrow pits from where dirt was removed to construct the mounds, and about 73 house depressions. Thomas knew the site as Beckwith's Fort, as it was named for its land owner at the time of his visit.

After the description by Thomas, various interested parties visited the site for limited study of the archaeological remains. Archaeological reports by Clarence Moore of Philadelphia, Steve Williams of Yale University, and Ray Williams of the University of Missouri-Columbia contain information relating to the study of the Indian remains at Towosahgy.



Cyrus Thomas Map

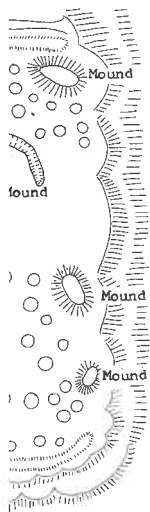
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TOWOSAHCY TODAY

To the casual visitor, the earth mounds visible at the site perhaps offer the most fascination. Of the seven recognized mounds, all but one surround a central plaza. The largest mound, located at the northernmost end of the plaza, is approximately 180 feet wide by 250 feet long at its base, and about 16 feet high. A smaller mound faces this temple mound from across the plaza, and other smaller mounds delineate the border of the plaza area. Little is presently known about the mounds at Towosahgy. Preliminary excavations have been conducted on the two largest mounds, and these investigations indicate that the Indian inhabitants of the village had once constructed structures of a perishable nature on the top of the mounds.

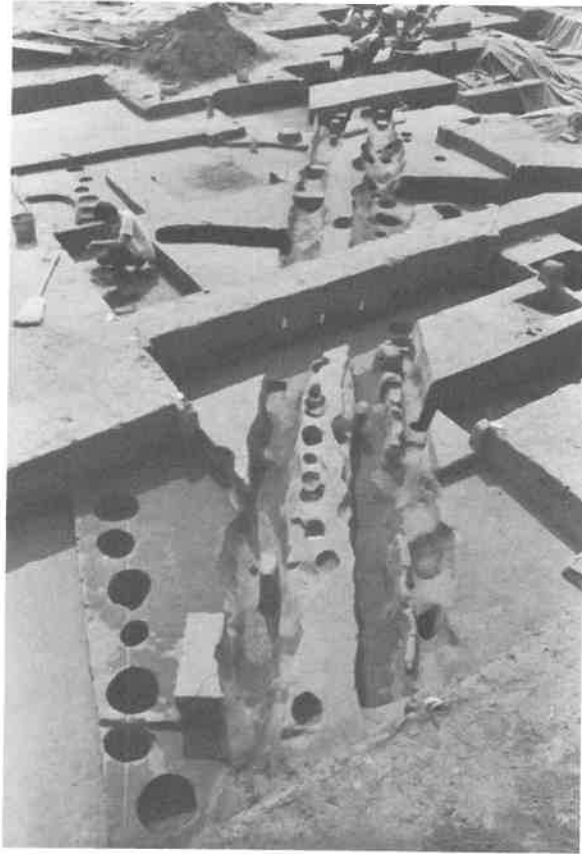
In the construction of the mounds at Towosahgy, all work was accomplished without the benefit of machinery or draft animals. Each foot of earth within these mounds was laboriously dug by hand and carried by hand in a basket or similar container. This process of construction is mirrored in the large borrow pit behind Mound 2. Perhaps much of the soil fill for Mound 2 was dug from this area.

The fortification system, which once encircled most of the ceremonial center, is now not visible at ground level. The cultivation of the site, before its acquisition by the state of Missouri, has erased some of the evidence of this wall. Recent aerial photographs do however show the line of the fortification system.



With no sign of the fortification wall visible above ground, it was necessary to excavate to uncover evidence of this system. After much planning, it was possible to excavate in an area which coincided with the prior fortification wall. This investigation provided a more complex picture than was suspected, as evidence of at least three log stockade walls was uncovered. This evidence consisted of indications of dug trenches and post holes and even a few burned ends of actual posts. Several of these post fragments have been submitted for radio-carbon dating, which eventually will provide a close estimate on the date of these

stockades. One date of 1275 A.D. has already been obtained, but others are needed to verify it. Of interest in conjunction with the stockade walls, was a tower or bastion discovered in 1970. This was constructed by placing large posts in the ground in a specially prepared trench, a procedure which duplicates the actual construction of the stockade itself. This tower protruded out from the stockade for about 17 feet, and could have been used as a watch tower or block-house.



Modern posts have today been placed within the uncovered area of the stockade walls. This provides a line of direction as the fortification system makes one of its turns to curve around the village area. With additional archaeological work it will be possible to follow this fortification line around the village.

Just as the passage of time has erased the ground level evidence of the fortification system, the same is true for the house depressions on the map made by Thomas. In order to secure information on the domestic or household life of the former inhabitants, it will be necessary to locate and excavate house structures within the village. One house which has been located is just inside the stockade. This house had been constructed in a specially prepared pit, which left the floor of the structure below the ground surface. Walls were built of

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small posts placed in narrow trenches dug into the ground. Indications of daily activity inside the structure consisted of a fire hearth and associated packed clay floor, perhaps used as a food preparation area. Scattered over the floor level of the house were also some discarded tools and broken pieces of pottery vessels.

Other man-made disturbances have been found near the house. Most were pits or holes dug by the Indians for storage purposes or as a depository for their household garbage. A wealth of information was available from some of the garbage pits. Some pits contained the charred remains of corn, beans, persimmon and wild plum. Charred acorns, pecan, black walnut, and hickory nuts were also found, along with seeds of Virginia creeper, ragweed, marsh elder and passion flower. Some of the plant remains perhaps represent meals that were accidentally burned and then discarded.

Bone preservation was very poor in the areas previously excavated. The few animal bones which were found in some of the garbage pits indicate that deer were sought by the aboriginal hunters.

Pottery food bowls and water bottles had been placed with the few Indian burials that have been found at the site. The bones of the burials were poorly preserved.



Within the plaza or ceremonial area of the village is an unusual disturbance which is visible from aerial photographs. This disturbance appears to be a concentric circle about 70 feet in diameter. Its placement within the plaza seems to indicate some form of activity other than one related to a domestic situation. As the Indians who built Towosahgy were living in a highly organized society, with perhaps some developed concepts of mathematics and astronomy, this circle could perhaps be closely related to their system of village alignment. It could also have been used in connection with ceremonial activities. Information concerning the purpose of this circle would perhaps allow a better understanding of the organization of Towosahgy.

THE MISSISSIPPIAN TRADITION

The Indians who lived at Towosahgy were late arrivals in the prehistory of the present State of Missouri. They perhaps constructed their village as early as 1000 A.D. American Indian groups had lived in this area prior to that time, but their development did not reach such a highly organized society as is represented by the Indians at Towosahgy.

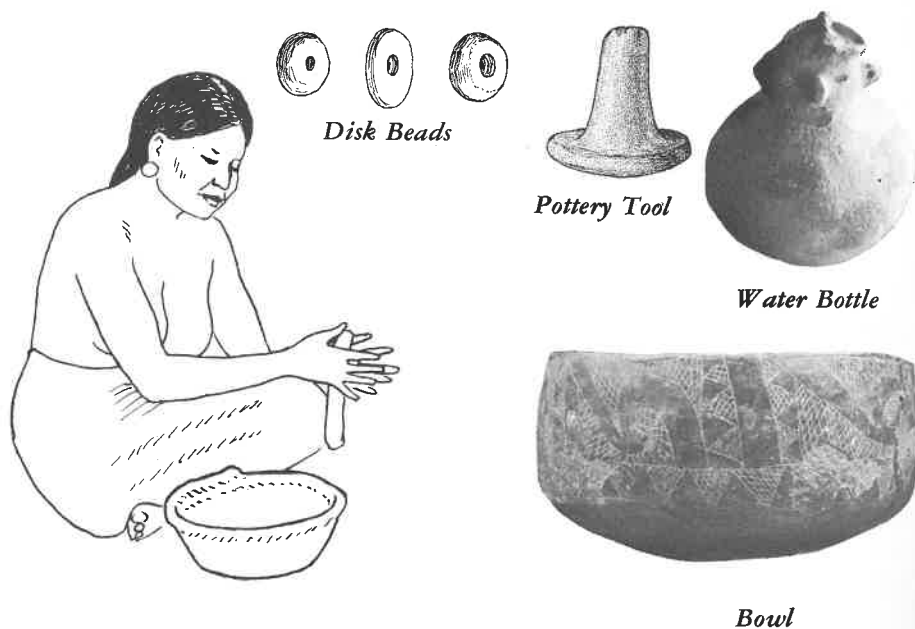
The Indian inhabitants of Towosahgy are today nameless, as they left no

record of what they called themselves. For the lack of a true name, archaeologists refer to the Indians who built mound sites similar to Towosahgy as belonging to the Mississippian tradition. These groups are called Mississippian because many of their sites are concentrated in the Mississippi River Valley.

The Mississippian is well represented in southeast Missouri. In this area, several great fortified ceremonial centers once existed in about the same general time period. Centers, such as the Lilbourn site near New Madrid, were perhaps closely related by a variety of ties. Outside the ceremonial centers, smaller towns and hamlets flourished. These provided some of the necessary wealth for the ceremonial center, and were also perhaps a source of manpower for community projects at the great ceremonial centers.

Towosahgy represents an example of a fortified ceremonial center within its settlement system. The site does not reflect the complete settlement system, nor does it completely duplicate the internal settlement of similar fortified ceremonial centers. The settlement system of Towosahgy perhaps represents a universe of Pinhook Ridge and its adjacent regional area. This regional area includes many small changes within the general environmental setting. Thus ridges, swamps, and old river channels once combined to form an area which was exploited as directed by the community needs.

In general, when one views the overall situation which once existed during prehistoric times at Towosahgy, a complex society is apparent. Many community projects were directed and accomplished, such as the construction of the earth mounds and the erection of a fortification system. Ceramics flourished as not only a necessity, but also as an art. The people who once lived at Towosahgy were well organized in not only their ceremonial life, but also in their daily tasks of living.

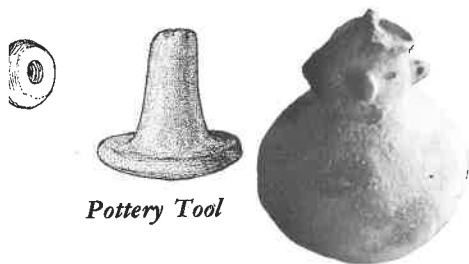


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Pottery Tool

Water Bottle

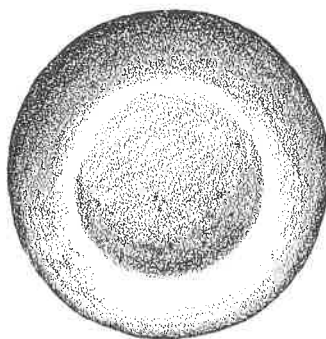


Bowl

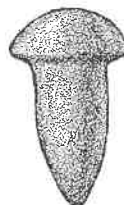
FUTURE PLANS

To understand and interpret the life of the former inhabitants at Towosahgy, it will be necessary to continue the slow process of archaeological investigations. Through this discipline, new information will become available which will allow the past to be better defined.

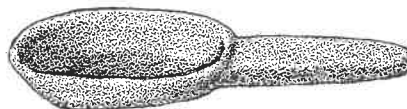
To accomplish this and to demonstrate many of mankind's past actions, the Missouri State Park Board in cooperation with the University of Missouri-Columbia will continue a program of study at Towosahgy. Eventually, plans call for the construction of a museum at Towosahgy, and the reconstruction of certain of the Indian features which once existed in the village. This program is designed to aid in the public enjoyment and understanding of a portion of the rich cultural history of the State of Missouri. Please feel free to enjoy the past with us.



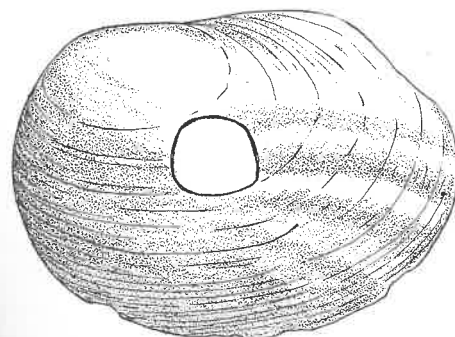
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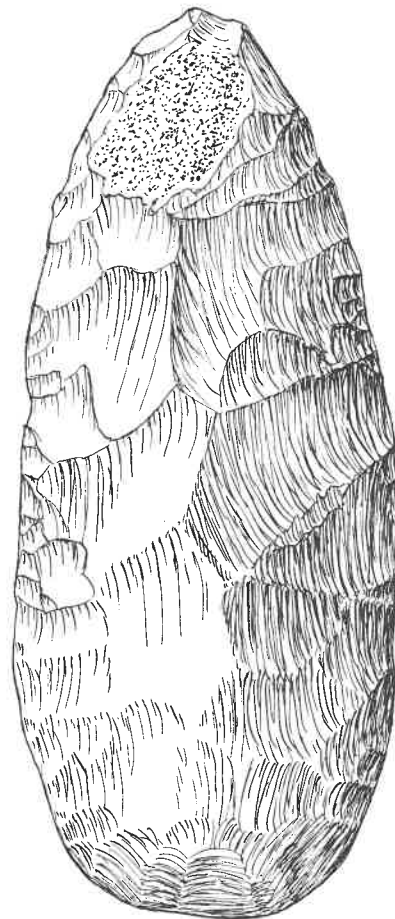
Ear Plug



Small Pottery Ladle



Shell Tool



Spade

HOW TO REACH TOWOSAHGY STATE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Towosahgy is situated east of East Prairie, Missouri on U.S. Highway 80, then 2 miles south on Mississippi County Road AA, 3 miles south on Mississippi County Road FF, then east on mile on gravel, and south one mile on gravel.

