



### The Indian Mounds—I

Who were the mound builders of western Michigan is a question that has often been asked but never fully answered.

The works of the mound builders were found all over eastern America. Although simple in form they convey by their contents and structure more in regard to the habits and art of their authors than can be learned from all their other works combined.

The burial mounds and their contents tell us of individual traits, something of the social life, their tastes, and something also of the diseases to which they were subject.

In 1874 a committee consisting of Edwin A. Strong, Capt. W L. Coffinberry and Dr Joel C. Parker explored many of the forty-seven mounds then remaining in and about the Rapids. These mounds varied from three to fifteen feet in altitude and in diameter from ten to more than one hundred feet.

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Early missionaries and traders said the Indians of their day had no knowledge of the origin of these mounds. They only knew they were the work of men and had great veneration for them.

On the mission land along the river south of what is now Bridge-st. stood many of these mounds, which were leveled in the grading of streets in the fifties. For several summers I was water boy for the men who did this grading and had ample opportunity to gather the flint arrowheads and other implements that were unearthed in nearly every burial mound along with the bones of the vanished race.

There were three very ancient mounds at the present corner of Allen and Court-sts. In one of them was a stacked mass two feet in diameter and twenty inches high of jet black flints and arrowheads of the finest workmanship. No flint of this kind was found in any other mound. Below the original surface of the ground was found a strata of human remains and with these bones were earthen vases, pieces of clay pottery, bears' teeth with holes drilled for stringing as ornaments and many stone smoking pipes of fine design.

In digging a sewer trench a few years later two nuggets of pure silver weighing thirteen pounds and one flake of copper weighing fourteen pounds, were found. These, with a great accumulation of other curiosities, were sent to the Peabody Museum in Massachusetts and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.

Alfred Preusser, the jeweler, bought from me quite a bit of silver ornament that I had collected, which he melted to use in his shop work, neither of us realizing its historic value at the time. By the time of the Civil war I had accumulated so many relics from the mounds that the attic of our home was full of skulls with grinning teeth, arrowheads, bits of pottery, smoking pipes of clay, and stone implements.

This stuff, with the paddles I had used in my canoes, the bead work moccasins and snowshoes—souvenirs of many an Indian's good will—went up in the smoke one windy night. If there is a relic of this collection left it is well covered by the walls of the Star mills south of Bridge-st., for our home

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was located there on the bank of the river at the time I was called to war.

Every state has had its students of the mound builders and among the most interested here, I had personal acquaintance with Capt. W. L. Coffinberry, Dr. Joel C. Parker, Dr William H. DeCamp and Thomas Porter.

The Civil war called Coffinberry and DeCamp to service in the army. Every one of these men would have been a treasure if paid a salary and kept in the state's historical service. They did leave traces of their work in many of the museums of the country, but in their days there were no stenographers and no funds provided for this exploration. These men followed the laborers who leveled the mounds and frequently found use for a boy who should have been in the old stone schoolhouse, but who found ancient history more satisfactory if studied on the ground.

When Capt. Coffinberry unearthed a skull Dr DeCamp explained how old its owner must have been. Dr Parker judged by the teeth, the kind of food he lived on, and Mr Porter by the contour how much brain power he had developed. Having the last word I put the trophy in the wagon and so the group worked in harmony

### Leveling the Indian Mounds—II

When there was no longer use for the Mission land on the west side, it was sold by the government to eastern parties who platted it for residential and commercial purposes, with no regard for its scenic beauty.

It was a project of cutting down or filling up, and so the Indian mounds, with their historic contents, were carted away to fill the low places.

There was no regret over this leveling of the mounds. Even the men who gathered the curios reaped considerable financial benefit from their sales to museums.

There was little real money in circulation and the silver coins that came from Boston to meet the pay-rolls for the labor was appreciated by the business interests of the city.

This work, which gave employment to many men, was di-

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rected by two brothers, Boston men—William Hovey, a fairly tall man, and Albert Hovey, a very small one, whom the employed men tagged “Little Britches.” He was very popular on pay day

There was no school in the summer and the writer had the job of carrying drinking water to the various gangs of workmen. Microbes had not yet arrived in the valley, so there was but one water pail and one long-handled dipper from which every one drank.

The first laborers were Irish. One hardly need read the pay-roll to discover this for they kissed the “Blarney Stone” every day, they talked and sang, and every Saturday night a Donnybrook fair was held along Canal-st.

Two-wheeled dump carts, wheelbarrows, picks and shovels, made up the contractors’ outfit. A short clay pipe and an iron tobacco box filled every morning, with a bit of fresh punk in one corner, constituted Pat’s kit.

Arrived on the ground, Pat sat down, filled his pipe, took from the punk a bit, that with a puff of breath became a live coal, dropped it into the pipe and with a long-drawn sigh filled his mouth with smoke. Then the lighted pipe “passed the loan of a fire,” and all the gang spit on their hands and the dirt began to fly.

These men enjoyed their work. With pipe stem clinched between the teeth, they sang through their nostrils in a way to charm bumble-bees out of their nests in the grass.

Half the first summer passed before they began to level the grounds on the spot where the Powers & Walker factory now stands and fill in Front-st. to the north.

These mounds must have been a resting place for many killed in a battle. Entire cart-loads of grinning skulls and ancient bones came to light and these were too much for the nerves. Pat quit the job and never came back and with him went the melodies that had come from overseas in the steerage.

It happened about that time that all Holland seemed to be climbing over the dykes and the leveling of the mounds continued, but under a different dialect.

The Dutch had about the same tobacco boxes, but each

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one carried a flint and steel with which, by patient practice they could get a light but they never lost more than ten minutes in starting a smoke. These men wore wooden shoes and corduroy trap-door trousers.

They might have remained at work had not some boys—Richard Blumrich could name them—gathered the bleached bones of a horse and assembled them about a stump on the trail to Gunnison swamp, near where some of the men were living. The ghost standing in the moonlight was one bone too many.

It was coming winter and the grading was laid by for the season. The tide of settlement drifted for a time to other parts of the town, but many fine homes were built on the Mission land, which finally has become a network of railways and busy factories.

There were forty-six mounds all told on the Mission land. One long, flat-topped ceremonial place was on the river bank at the present western terminal of the Pere Marquette railroad bridge.

Tradition says the Pottawatomies, who came here as the friends of the Ottawas, were the people of the fires. They banked in earthen pots, fire that was never permitted to die out. A fire always burned on this mound up to about 1840. When it was carted away to fill a place in a street I watched the diggers for days, hoping to find something of interest to my good friend Capt. Coffinberry, but aside from clamshells, ashes and charcoal, it contained little of value. Scattered bones of animals that were found well toward the bottom, were thought by some to be the bones of a mastodon.

At the east end of the Lake Shore railroad bridge there is a group of Indian mounds still standing. They were partially explored on several occasions and the relics of very ancient origin taken from them. Some of these treasures are in our Kent museum and others in the Smithsonian at Washington, D. C.

### The Indian Plum Orchard

Not until the early seventies did the last trace of the Indian plum orchard, on the west side of the river below the pres-