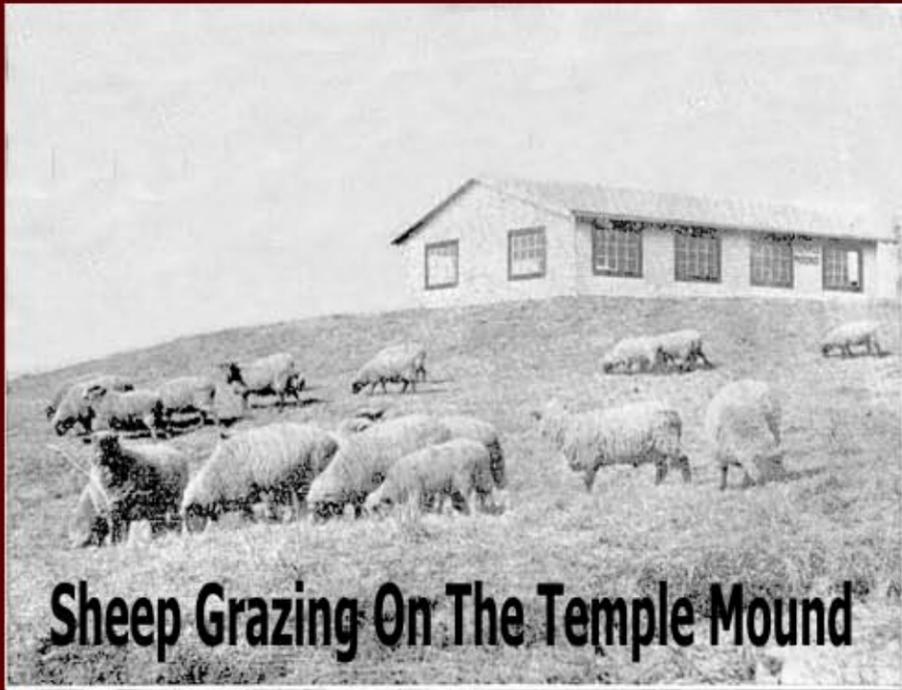




WICKLIFFE MOUNDS



1932 EXCAVATION MOUND A: TEMPLE MOUND



Sheep Grazing On The Temple Mound



Post Mold Patterns
Mid Level

3 Burnt Clay Dome Altars

Burned Building

ANCIENT BURIED CITY
WICKLIFFE, KY

m-11



Temple Mound
2 Structures Exposed
Mid and Lower Levels



Fire Pit

Lower Level

Burnt Timbers &
Cane Matting

Basket Loading



Lower Level Thatch Roof



Thatch Roof & Timbers
Lower Mound Level

Burnt Clay Dome Altars



Purple Martin Bird House

"A.B.C. King Bird Refuge", 1934



Artifacts on
Middle Level
Floor



Outside
Wall



Cars Parked Next to Temple Mound

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"It's Never Too Late To Discover America"

One of the early published articles about the Wickliffe Mounds excavation was entitled: KENTUCKY'S "ANCIENT BURIED CITY" by T. M. N. Lewis and appeared in the Wisconsin Archeologist Volume 13 No. 2 pages 25-31 (1934). Lewis, a World War I Navy veteran and Princeton graduate, had witnessed the Wickliffe excavation in progress and his job was to restore most of the broken pottery found in the mounds [P8]. The excerpt in the following paragraphs from Lewis's article gives his first hand insight into what was revealed in the Temple Mound "A" excavation. The written publicity, flier and brochure, interpreting the new Wickliffe excavations were jointly authored by Thomas M. N. Lewis and Fain W. King. Both Lewis, in the Wisconsin Archeologist, and King, in the Tenn. Academy of Science (IX No1. 8-17), separately authored journal articles published in 1934 about the Wickliffe excavations. Thomas McDowell Nelson Lewis in late 1933 was hired by William S. Webb to be the field supervisor of the archaeological reservoir, Norris Basin projects, for the Tennessee Valley Authority in Tennessee, see Grit-Tempered: Early Women Archaeologists in the Southeastern United States (2001) by Nancy Marie White (Ed.), Lynne P. Sullivan (Ed.), Rochelle A. Marrinan (Ed.). When that field work was completed Lewis was hired (September 1934) as Associate Professor in archaeology at the University of Tennessee charged with supervising the archaeological work in that state until his retirement in 1961. The few words in brackets and the photo numbers were added by the author. The introduction of the Wickliffe site and the detailed description of the Temple Mound remain in Lewis's own words and give insight into how the direct historical approach, using ethno historical accounts, were used in the archaeological interpretations of Wickliffe. Nearly everything found at Wickliffe, artifacts and features, were readily explained by Lewis and King by ethnographic analogy to historical Native American practices.



"Situated at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers is the little village of Wickliffe, KY. Here, in the late summer and fall of 1932, a staff of archeologists excavated portions of a prehistoric village site which has since become known to the public as the "Ancient Buried City". Obviously the term "city" is a misnomer in so far as modern standards are concerned. Comparatively speaking, however, this aboriginal village probably maintained as influential a role in those prehistoric days as do any of our modern cities of 100,000 population. That the site was not merely a temporary abiding place for some nomadic tribe is assumed from the fact that the camp refuse extends to a depth of from three to five feet over the entire site. The abnormally high bluff at this location afforded a point of vantage from which it was possible to survey a great expanse of land and water. This was a topographical feature seldom overlooked by the Ancients in their quest of permanent sites for habitation. In the summer of 1932, Fain W. King of Paducah, Ky., an amateur archeologist, investigated the site. The interesting nature of the earthworks and the apparent long period during which the site had been occupied, as determined by numerous test pits which were made, prompted him, as a member of the Board of Regents of the Alabama Museum Of Natural History, to solicit the aid of Dr. Walter B. Jones and his staff. [David DeJarnete was the Crew Boss] To shelter the excavators from the weather a circus tent was pitched over that portion of the site which was staked out for excavation. The work continued incessantly seven days a week until the approach of winter. All remains were left in situ with the exception of that portion of the pottery which was encountered in a broken condition and which was later replaced in original positions after restoration. In all, excavations were made in three mounds... A description of the evidence thus far uncovered follows...

...In another mound located at the edge of the bluff a large, rectangular excavation was made [P3]. Five feet below the top a hard clay floor was encountered. [P2,P3] This was covered with the charred remains of a burnt structure [P2]. These remains consisted of portions of the thatched roof with its supporting timbers and the fallen timbers which once formed the walls. When the charred material was removed, three rectangular, convex ceremonial altars were exposed, indicating that in all probability this burnt structure had served as a temple building [P9]. These altars are of burnt clay and are all three in juxtaposition. Between two of the altars are seen two post molds [P9]. A charred post lying on the floor adjacent to one of these molds had secured to it a braided rope about a half inch in diameter. Parallel to these altars, at a distance of four feet, is a row of post molds indicating what may have been the front wall of the building [P9]. Another row of molds may be seen immediately in front of the altars and parallel to the wall [P9]. These molds may have held the upright supports for a rail before which the suppliants knelt and offered their sacrifices as they filed into the temple.

In as much as the number three was not held to be of any particular significance by primitive American peoples, we are inclined to believe that further excavation will reveal a fourth altar in as much as the number four is known to have had some mysterious interpretation. [4 cardinal directions, 4 corners of the Earth, 4 winds, Cahokia mirrored the cosmos with a large mound surrounded by 4 plazas, the Cahokia site layout mirrored their beliefs in a four part earth, horizontal vectors, balanced between the sky, earth, and underworld, vertical vectors] Perhaps each one of these altars [P9] was dedicated to the worship of some one deity; on them burnt offerings were made according to the religious custom of many ancient peoples. These offerings may have consisted of food, tobacco, clothing, articles of adornment and even living animal sacrifices bound to the altar by means of the above mentioned rope. These rituals may have been conducted by a priest or shaman. The objects for which offerings were made were as manifold as the desires of the supplicants.

Since this floor was encountered at a depth of but five feet below the top of the mound [P2], the excavators reasoned that additional remains would be found beneath. Accordingly a section of this floor of hard clay was removed and the excavation continued to a depth of five more feet. [P2,P3] Here again a hard clay floor was encountered completely covered with the charred remains of another burnt structure. [P5,P6] As in the case of the superimposed structure, the excavators encountered an uneven layer of burnt clay resting upon the charred timbers. This burnt clay does not appear to have been wattling which had been applied to the walls of the structure, but rather appears to have been loose clay which was dumped upon the collapsed timbers while they were still aflame. The fact that sections of the thatched roofs of both structures were found in a good state of preservation would seem to indicate that the roof had been reinforced with wattling at the time it was constructed. The presence of this clay wattling prevented the thatching from being entirely consumed before the building collapsed. Further evidence in support of this latter deduction was the discovery of some of this wattle work in close association to the thatching. The heaping on of clay immediately following the collapse of the structure smothered the burning timbers and converted the mass into charcoal, thus making it possible to offer these interpretations [P5]. It seems probable that the lower structure was burnt intentionally. Had it been an accidental burning, one would assume that they would have removed the ashes and rebuilt the structure. On the contrary, a mound of clay five feet in height was thrown up over the remains. [Robert McCormick Adams said of the lower structure, "It is one of the best preserved structures from the Mississippi Valley " , Hobbies Magazine (August 1937:96-98).] Now if we have read the evidence correctly, we are obliged to assume that the burning was premeditated. Just exactly what the motive was is impossible to say. A fire pit, which may have contained a perpetual fire, [P4] was found just beyond the wall of both structures. In Central America perpetual fires were renewed every fifty-two years. Some similar rite may have been practiced here accompanied by the burning of their temple. Other Indian tribes had the custom of burning the dwelling of the deceased. Perhaps here this was done to destroy the evil spirit which had caused the death of their priest or shaman. Still another motive may have been their eagerness to placate an angered god who had invoked some catastrophe upon them.

When every remnant of the lower structure had been covered to a depth of five feet, these people again reconstructed their temple immediately, or nearly so, over their former one. Here again is mute evidence of a deliberate burning, [P2] and again the remains were covered to a depth of five feet [P3]. No evidence was found on the top of this mound in the nature of post molds that a third temple was erected. Possibly upon completing this earthwork the populace decided to erect mounds over their more important structures and evacuate the site in order to flee from some curse which they believed hung over them.

It is to be understood, of course, that such deductions as herein rendered are purely imaginative, but at the same time they are offered in the light of recordings [Natchez eye-witness accounts] made by early historians who observed the odd religious fantasies practiced by the descendants of these earlier people. We do not wish to appear to have been bred in the school of exaggeration. Our imagination has been employed in an effort to fill in the gaps of what might be otherwise regarded by some as a rather meaningless record of prehistoric evidence."

Paul Runyon in a March 23, 1934 Lexington Leader newspaper article said the walls of the Wickliffe mounds had been razor blade sliced with such care that light and dark colorations gave a vivid cross-section of the individual basket loads of dirt [P4] as they were dumped to build a mound to its peak. Fain King (Journal Tenn. Academy Of Science 1934:16) estimated that basket loads of dirt observed in the mound walls ranged from 30 to 35 pounds per basket [P4]. Blanche Busey King, Fain W. King second wife, (Under Your Feet, 1939:36) estimated that 12,000 cubic feet of dirt was taken from the Temple Mound excavation and the mound was only one-twentieth excavated [P3]. The lower burned structure [P5] has a radiocarbon (C14) date of circa 1218 AD and the mid level structure [P2] of about 1279 AD, Barry Lewis (Ed.) (Miss. Towns Of The W. KY. Border:, 1986). The Wickliffe Mound community flourished (1100-1350 AD) during the heyday of Cahokia (950-1350 AD), see Kit Wesler, (Excavations at Wickliffe Mounds, 2001).

In addition to the 200,000 cataloged artifacts from the six excavated mounds labeled A thru F on display at Wickliffe in the 1940s, Fain W. King displayed his own collection of 10,000 prehistoric artifacts that he had collected over a 40 year span, mostly from Kentucky and the surrounding states. Fluorite and fluorescent mineral collections (shown under an ultraviolet light) King displayed in a separate building. A fossil paleontology collection of 12,000 specimens (many found in Kentucky) were also on display at Wickliffe in the 1940s. The Wickliffe "King Mounds" from day one were promoted by Fain W. King as both a scientific and educational exhibit, a working archaeological laboratory was part of the tour where artifacts were analyzed, cataloged, and restored, and the main attraction was the series of excavated mounds that showcased in situ archaeological features, burials, fire pits, hearths, house patterns, postmolds, mound stratigraphy, midden and basket loading that were all daily explained to tourists and academicians alike. Professional and amateur archaeologists, school groups, Scouts and children of all ages frequently toured the Wickliffe Mounds (and still do) fulfilling Fain W. King's dream of an archaeological site museum that revealed what he referred to as "a cross-section of prehistoric Native American life" (personal communication George L. Johnson, Superintendent) that could be both easily understood and appreciated by the common man. Just as the Dixon burial mound exhibit in Illinois inspired the Wickliffe burial Mound "C" exhibit, Wickliffe served as a model for the archaeological prehistoric town exhibits with similar excavations at the Chucalissa site in Tennessee by Charles H. Nash and the Town Creek site exhibited by Joffrey Coe in North Carolina. Both men had visited the Wickliffe Mounds as students of Fay-Cooper Cole's, University of Chicago field school, while excavating the Kincaid Mounds in Illinois. A generation of American archaeologists and interested students came to see Fain W. King's "Ancient Buried City". King used the tag line, that appears at the bottom on the front of this poster, "It's Never Too Late To Discover America" in both his flyers and brochures advertising the King Mounds. The brochure and signs said "Come To The Ancient Buried City, America's Great Wonder Excavation", "A Revelation Of Prehistoric Man and His Works". Blanche King said in the brochure and her book (Under Your Feet, 1939), "I look at them in their dignity, surrounded by simple amulets, tools and weapons and am reminded of these lines from a beautiful poem: I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams."

To cut grounds keeping costs during World War I, First Lady Edith Wilson brought a flock of 18 sheep to graze on the White House lawns in order to save the manpower (free gardeners for military service) required to mow the expansive grounds. Wool from the sheep was regularly sold as a fundraiser for the Red Cross. Newlyweds, Fain W. King and his first wife Lulu Reed King, lived and worked in Washington D.C. during that time and knew firsthand the story about the White House sheep. King, followed the White House example by bringing a flock of sheep to maintain the lawns at the Wickliffe Mounds [P1]. The picture of the sheep on the temple mound was used in the early brochure about the mound excavations. In December 1934 the Kentucky Ornithological Society announced the establishment of the "A. B. C. King-Bird Refuge" in newspaper stories. [P7] "Everything will be done to make this a bird city, nesting boxes and feeding stations will be erected at intervals over the refuge...". Fain W. King was quoted as saying "A child's memories should gleam with the beauties of flowers and skies and thrill with the remembered songs of birds. The one who can not look back to a childhood in which birds sang and nested has been denied a birthright...". The included Temple Building photo [P7] shows a Purple Martin box on the southern peak of the building roof. All photos are from the Blanche Busey King photograph collection, poster and description by Frank M. Bodkin, © 2009, fmbodkin@insightbb.com. To learn more, please visit the Wickliffe Mounds State Historic Site, 94 Green Street, Wickliffe KY 42087, 270-335-3681 or on the web site (<http://parks.ky.gov/findparks/histparks/wm/>).