Alabama Archaeological Society

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STONES & BONES
NEWSLETTER

Editor
Amos J. Wright
2602 Green Mountain Rd.
Huntsville, Alabama 35803

MEMBER OF THE EASTERN STATES ARCHEOLOGICAL FEDERATION

CONFERENCE ON PREHISTORIC POTTERY

Mr. Mike Wells, Vice President-Program Chairman, reports that plans for the Alabama Archaeological Society's Conference/Seminar on Prehistoric Pottery at UAB on July 16, 1977, have been finalized. Response has been very enthusiastic and is even acquiring a regional flavor with registrations having been received from several out-of-state members.

The conference will be held in Rooms 130, 131, 132 and 133 of Building One on the Campus of the University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB). Sign in between 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m.; enjoy coffee while you meet friends and other attendees. Welcome, Conference Overview and Session Organization will be from 8:30 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. First session will begin at 8:45 a.m.

As announced in the June Newsletter, four individual sessions on different topics will run concurrently and will be repeated four times. Ordinarily a group (limited to 10 members) will complete one session and move on to the next - through all four sessions. However, every effort will be made to accommodate individual preferences and/or special problems with arrival or departure schedules. The last set of sessions will conclude at 3:45 p.m. The period from 3:45 to 4:45 p.m., for all attendees, will be devoted to a review of all topics and questions. Your tape recorder is welcome. Topics and Chairmen are as follows:

"North Alabama Pottery": Dr. John Walthall - AAS - Univ. of Alabama."
"South Alabama Pottery": Mr. Steve Wimberly - AAS - Birmingham
"Central Alabama Pottery": Mr. David Chase - AAS - Auburn Univ./Mont.
"Ceramic Types": Dr. Roger Nance - AAS - UAB

NOTE: Registration is \$10.00 and should be sent to Mrs. Bettye T. Henson, Secretary-Treasurer, AAS; 7608 Teal Drive, S. W.; Huntsville, Alabama 35802. (Make check payable to the Alabama Archaeological Bociety.) As previously announced, attendance will be limited to 40; i.e., 10 per session. See June Newsletter for additional details.

STONE BALL REVISITED

When I first joined the Alabama Archaeological Society back in 1967, my interest was quickly drawn to the question of the "Stone Ball" that, as a child, I had tossed around in the back yard. My grandfather

had several years before found it on the side of a street in Cullman, noting particularly its nearly spherical shape and white color. But of its origin and purpose, nothing was evident. It lay around the garage collecting dust for many years with only an occasional stop by someone to ponder upon its value or origin.

Then in the May 1967 "Stones & Bones" Newsletter, a short mention of "round, spherical" balls found by Horace Holland succeeded by an "I don't know" statement from Steve Wimberly, brought the "Stone Ball" out of its respected place of residence in the garage into much conversation and prospection. The August 1967 "Stones & Bones" Newsletter had more information on the "Mystery of the Stone (?) Balls". A higher epidemic level was reached with more concrete (?) description of the curious "white, opaque exterior somewhat resembles cast ceramic but a fracture on one looks like cherty quartz". Dimensions given in the article put the stone balls in the approximately 3 inch diameter size. Mine was approximately 3 inches in diameter; it was white; (perhaps even resembling cast ceramic) and had small fractures on it. At the time, with my fever of archaeology beginning to reach astronomical proportions, I naturally concluded that this possibly might have been an Indian artifact. But more evidence was needed.

Two newsletters, September 1967 and November 1967, seemed to have killed any notion of aboriginal evidence, and the latter seemed to prove that they were used in a "ball mill". Apparently, the unsatisfactory end to the unsolved mystery of the "Stone Ball". The May 1969 "Stones & Bones" Newsletter hinted at these "things" with the main topic considered being that of "Bolas". The mystery of the stone ball finally settled into the dust of all things that come as a mystery and remain a mystery; something that's probably better left alone than tampered with. Yet the shadow of doubt was still with me. If not Indian, then what are they? Personally, I wasn't satisfied with the answers presented, so I began to search for myself. When I brought the matter up with the late Horace Holland, he quickly put the matter of the "Stone Ball" into the realm of religious and/or enjoyment implement of the aboriginal that we could only ponder upon when we have nothing better to do.

Then in the spring of 1976, while on a Science field trip to the Mound Museum in Florence, one of my students seemed very curious about the round, white balls that were displayed there. My only answer was "I don't know for certain." A week later this same student arrived at school with several of these 3-inch diameter balls and several 1 1/4-inch diameter balls. (I had received a 1 1/4-inch diameter, spherical, white ball in 1969 from a student who "found it in Morgan County with some arrowheads".) Upon questioning the student, it was learned that she had received these from another student. After bringing this other student to me, I was informed that he had collected within the past week "over 200" such balls of the 3-inch and 1 1/4-inch diameter variety. Amazing! Now I would know the truth to the matter after all. When I asked "where?" he replied "at the water plant that is being torn down"!

It became evident that the old water filter plant, located behind the Cullman Museum, was finally being torn down and that the demolition crew had found these balls (all being of two sizes, 3-inch diameter or 1 1/4-inch diameter) within the structure of the building, and were loading them up by the hundreds to carry home for whatever purpose they had. A quick call to my father, Eulis King, resulted in his collecting some 40 to 50 of these spherical balls. He soon contacted Mr. Robert Burks, retired superintendent of the water filtration plant, who quickly explained that these spherical balls were used to filter the water: the larger balls being placed on the bottom, then the smaller on top of them, then fine gravel on top of them, etc. And he seemed to think that they were found in quantity in a river located in South Carolina.

The use of these balls in the filtration process made sense, but "river action" producing these nearly perfect spherical balls by the thousands was a little too much to believe. I was told to call a Mr. James Dovel, who resides in Cullman; that he worked for a company that builds water filtration plants across the Southeast. A quick telephone call to him ended a nearly ten-year search into the "mysterious stone ball". According to Mr. Dovel, these "balls" were manufactured from clay at a china factory "up North". They were cast as ceramic without the glaze that is usually put on china ware. He referred to the balls as "ceramic balls". The filtration setup was called a "Wheeler bottoms", meaning that a network of inverted pyramids was formed using concrete. The large 3-inch to 3 1/2-inch spherical balls were placed in the inverted pyramids to help support the gravel and sand that would be placed on top. The smaller 1 1/4inch balls were used to fill out the corners of the pyramid base. This type of filtration system was first used between 1925-1930, with the peak usage coming between 1940-1950. Many of the balls showed "shrinkage cracks" caused by the baking process of the clay. He also stated that "thousands" of these balls were used in the filtration setup.

Well, at last I had finally found the answer to this "mystery". For those of you that have found these "balls", I hope that this has answered your questions about them. If your city or town is updating its water filtration process, then you may have a chance to recover several hundred of these. If you have any comments, I would be glad to hear them.

Note: After finishing this little article, another student of mine came to school with some "arrowheads" and a spherical ball about 3 inches in diameter that she had found on an Indian site some five miles from town. Oh, no! Here we go again!

Howard King Cullman

1977 DIG DONATIONS

Again your Research Association happily reports increasing donations since those included in the June Newsletter, a total of four

having been received from faithful contributors - all most appreciated and welcome:

- Mr. and Mrs. Robert R. Reid, Jr., Birmingham; their 8th over recent years
- Dr. Albert M. Fisher, Decatur; a charter donor making his 18th consecutive contribution
- Mr. and Mrs. Tom W. Cornell, Huntsville; their 22nd monetary assistance over the years
- Mr. and Mrs. Jack D. McSpadden, Birmingham; their 16th consecutive generous donation

Here's hoping more of you good folks will send in a donation for support of our archaeological endeavors.

Milt Harris Birmingham

CHAPTER NEWS

Tuscaloosa Chapter: The next meeting of the Tuscaloosa Chapter will be at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, July 14, in the Anthropology Department, TenHoor Hall, University. The speaker will be Dr. John Walthall, who will give a talk on Moundville. Also, a date will be set for the chapter field trip to the current excavations near Aliceville.

East Alabama Chapter: At the June meeting, President Ralph Strength and Harold Huscher suggested projects which the chapter could undertake this summer. Several surveys to record significant information which is in danger of being lost were discussed at length by the members. Details of the Board Meeting and the Summer Pottery Conference were reported. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, July 13, in Thach Auditorium at 7:30 p.m. This meeting will be relative to the summer field projects.

Muscle Shoals Chapter: State President Howard King presented a slide program at the May meeting on the Ryan Creek Watershed project. At the June meeting Carey Oakley gave a report on some of the current projects in progress throughout the state. The meeting was preceded by a Chapter picnic on top of the Indian Mound in Florence.

Birmingham Chapter: The Chapter meets the first Wednesday of each month at the Red Mountain Museum - 1425 22nd Street South. Call Tom Hutto for further information at 956-1895.

Noccalula Chapter: At the June meeting, Bart Henson gave a presentation on Mississippian Culture Manifestations in the Tennessee Valley.

Huntsville Chapter: The June program was given by Mr. Houston Wright, who narrated a slide presentation on paleo man. (Mr. James Farrior, who was to have been the June speaker, was called out of town on business. Mr. Farrior's talk on Yucatan will be rescheduled.)

TVA CONFERENCE ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

On May 17-19, the Tennessee Valley Authority, in cooperation with the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, sponsored a conference on historic preservation held in Knoxville, Tennessee. The major purpose of the conference was to inform TVA personnel and consultants about various aspects of current requirements and procedures for historic preservation. The program covered a wide range of topics over the two days.

Representing organizations of a national scope on the program were: Richard W. Haupt, Director of Education Services, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Erhest Holtz, The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; Benny Keel, Interagency Archaeological Services, National Park Service; William J. Murtagh, Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places; and Sally Oldham, Architectural Historian National Register of Historic Places. William J. Murtagh spoke on the development of the national program of historic preservation and its future. Benny Keel discussed the responsibilities of TVA with respect to national policies of preservation, and in turn, the responsibilities of contracting consultants in helping TVA meet its obligations.

The rest of the speakers concentrated on explaining the role of their particular organization in the preservation process. In addition to those named above, the program included representatives of several divisions of TVA and of the State Historic Preservation Offices of Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee. In addition to these presentations, there were discussion groups on topics of special interest and two excellent movies concerning the preservation of historic buildings and other structures.

Eugene Futato Tuscaloosa

ESAF

The next ESAF Bulletin will be a combination issue for 1975-76. Ronn Michael, the Editor, reports that he has submitted the final copy to the publishers. It should be ready for distribution by August.

From the Newsletter - "Program Chairman Reports -

The 1977 ESAF meeting on November 3rd to 6th in the Hilton Hotel, Hartford, Conn., in taking shape." (This is the program outline:)

Friday morning: General Session. Friday afternoon: "Open Season on Sacred Cows: Conceptual Schemes in Northeastern Pre-History", Dena F. Dincauze, U. of Mass., Chairman. Saturday morning: Historic Archaeology, which will deal with Historic Preservation and with Military Sites, David A. Poirier, Conn. Historical Commission, Chairman. Saturday afternoon: Tours. Saturday evening: ESAF Dinner, Michael D.

Coe, Yale, will speak on "Classic Maya Ceramics and the Maya Underworld". Sunday morning: the State Research Review Session will be chaired by Alice C. Noecker, Archaeological Society of Michigan. If you wish to participate, write to the program chairman immediately as very little time is still available. David H. Thompson, 444 Sperry Road; Bethany, Connecticut 06525.

At the 1976 Eastern States Archeological Federation Meeting in Richmond, Virginia, the constitution was changed to include individual memberships. For \$10 a year, any person, State Society member or not, will receive the ESAF Quarterly Newsletter; the major ESAF publication for the year; the ESAF Bulletin and a membership card. Send to ESAF, c/o Island Field Archaeological Museum and Research Center; RD #2, Box 126; Milford, Delaware 19963.

Marjorie Gay
Standing Rock

The Archaeological Carinel Carine The Archaeological Society of North Carolina. The summer meeting will be in Marion, N. C., at the McDowell County Technical Institute on July 23, 1977. A visit to an active excavation of a proto-historic Cherokee-Catawba site is planned. Membership in the society includes a subscription to the Newsletter and "Southern Indian Studies". Dues, Individual \$5; Family \$7; Student \$1; Institutional \$3; and Sustaining \$15. Mail check to The Archaeological Society of North Carolina; Box 561; Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

Alabama Historical Commission - Tenth Annual Preservation Conference, August 12-13, 1977, Huntsville, at the Hilton Inn; There will be sessions of interest to archaeologists. For information and registration forms, write to: Alabama Historical Commission; P. O. Box 1611; Montgomery, Alabama 36102.

> Marjorie Gay Standing Roc PUPLICATION Standing Rock

Kent State University Press is publishing the Mid-Continental Journal of Archaeology, which is published twice a year, 100-128 pages per issue. Subscription is \$7.50 per year. It reports significant excavations, reviews of relevant publications, new techniques in excavations with studies of the ethno-history and ethnography of the area. It concentrates on work being done in the area bounded by the Appalachians and the Great Plains, from the Boreal forest to the Gulf. It should be of much interest.

Margarez rennymun smann Atlanta

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Following are the objectives stated in our Constitution, slightly modified for emphasis: To promote informed interest in the study of Archaeology in Alabama and neighboring States; to encourage careful scientific archaeological research in such ways as surface scouting, mapping, marking, studying and especially reporting; to promote and support professionally directed excavations and discourage unsupervised "digging"; to promote the conservation of archaeological sites and to favor the passage of laws prescribing such; to oppose the sale of antiquities, and the manufacture and sale of fraudulent artifacts; to encourage and develop a better understanding of archaeology through providing Newsletters, Journals, Chapter and State meetings, helpful associates and good fellowship; to serve as a bond between individual archaeologists in the State, both non-professional and professional; and perhaps most importantly, to give everyone the opportunity to "do something about archaeology" through the accomplishment and enjoyment of these high aims.

The Society needs and welcomes as members, all persons whose ideals are in accord with the objectives set forth above. Active members receive the JOURNAL OF ALABAMA ARCHAEOLOGY, devoted to articles on the archaeology of Alabama and nearby States, and also receive the STONES & BONES NEWSLETTER, published monthly, containing news of members and their activities, also State, national and worldwide events of archaeological importance.

The Society is a non-profit corporation and all contributions are deductible when making your income tax return.

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Stones and Bones Newsletter

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Stones and Bones Editor / Amos J. Wright

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Alabama Archaeological Society

Mr. Amos J. Wright Huntsville, Alabama 35803

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