

# Hamilton County's Spearhead Mound (33-Ha-24)

By

James L. Murphy  
Ohio State University Libraries  
Columbus, Ohio

The largest mound in Hamilton County, indeed one of the largest in Ohio, lay in Anderson Township, near the south bank of Little Dry Run, approximately one mile east of Newtown.

The earliest detailed description of this mound was given by Timothy C. Day in the *Monthly Chronicle of Interesting and Useful Knowledge* (Day 1839), just a century before the mound was completely destroyed. Speculating that the mound "is the monument of some mighty chief who lies interred in its centre," Day noted a large beech tree, two feet in diameter, on the summit, the mound slope being covered with "underwood" and several large forest trees. Day measured the Levi Martin mound, as it was then known (after the landowner) and found it had a circumference of 600 feet, height of 40 feet, and length and width of 250 and 150 feet. In 1851, Charles Whittlesey described and illustrated the mound but inaccurately located it one mile north of Newtown (Whittlesey 1851: Plate III, No. 2).

By 1878, when C. L. Metz examined the mound, No. 7 of his Group C, it had been cultivated for the last thirty years, except for the previous two, and was covered with blackberry bushes. The beech tree, now gone, had become, "on reliable authority," an oak tree four feet in diameter. Metz measured the mound as 39 feet high, with a circumference of 625 feet (Metz 1878, 1881). Martin, the landowner, would not permit excavation of the mound, because of reverence for the dead.

By 1927, however, the mound was owned by Willis F. Walker and W. H. Harber. Walker, with the help of John B. Jewett, Jr., began tunnelling into the mound in May, 1927 (Fig. 1), shoring the 6 by 7 foot tunnel with posts and oak planking. By October, some 350 feet of tunnel had been excavated (Brilmayer 1927). Fifty-five feet in from the west side, the first burial was encountered, in a bark prepared grave about three feet above the tunnel floor. Traces of animal skins and a "leather helmet" were also discerned by the excavators.

Changing the direction of the tunnel, Walker and Jewett encountered the legs of a second, poorly preserved skeleton at the level of the tunnel floor. These were removed, as they lay over a third skeleton, one buried face downward (Figs. 3, 4). The feet of this "giant" were missing. Another "giant" was uncovered nearby, apparently associated with a ground stone celt (Fig. 5), as well as a fifth skeleton, but more detailed infor-

mation is lacking. It is stated, however, that with each skeleton was a "burial token" consisting of a lump of white chalk. One such "token" is shown in Figs. 3 and 4 on the right side of the skeleton.

Several cremations were reported at different levels in the mound, the bone in "oblong piles from three to four feet long and about one foot wide." Also discovered was a "ceremonial altar or dais," at floor level, 7 by 3½ feet, outlined with logs. (It is very probable that this was part of a log crypt, as Starr (1960) reports that when the mound was eventually bulldozed away, the dozer operator noted "many log tombs." From the dozer operator's accurate description, according to Starr, it is evident that the most common type of tomb was the simple, two-dimensional log structure, constructed by laying two logs on each side of a rectangle around the body.

What was probably another such log tomb was encountered in the tunnel roof near the middle of the mound (Fig. 6, 7), where the excavators found two copper bracelets and a stemmed flint blade, the latter of which suggested to Walker the name Spearhead Mound. As indicated in Fig. 2, Walker illumined the tunnels with electric lights. Intent on preserving the mound as a museum, he charged sightseers a nominal admission fee, enough, according to Starr, "to pull himself out of the Depression." Walker planned to tunnel higher in the mound, but no information is available on excavations subsequent to 1927. C. B. Galbreath and H. C. Shetrone of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society visited the mound in 1927 and obtained a set of photographs of the excavations. Those accompanying this article were kindly copied by James L. Morton from the prints in the Hamilton County File at the Department of Archaeology, Ohio Historical Society.

According to Genheimer (1974), the Spearhead Mound was destroyed in 1940 by gravel operations. (The site is currently owned by the Dravo Co.) Starr (1960) reports that much material from this mound (his 33-Ha-126) was then in the Perry Collection, Miami, Ohio, but the only artifact definitely ascribable to the Spearhead Mound was "an unusual tubular pipe inscribed with a bird-like pattern."

Clearly, the Spearhead Mound was an Adena structure, as evidenced by the log crypts, bark-covered burials, copper bracelets, and stemmed point, as well as the tubular pipe. The presence

of a skeleton buried face down is of particular interest, as this trait has been reported previously only from the Darby Creek area (Potter 1967). Also unusual is the elliptical outline of the mound, though it appears to have still had the generally conical form typical of Adena mounds.

Despite the commercial aspects of Wilson's excavation and some fanciful interpretations, his work was comparatively painstaking and, in some areas, considerably advanced for the time. Noticing that wild lettuce grew from the fill excavated from the mound, he planned to test mound soil samples in greenhouse germinating beds. Unfortunately, results of the testing are not known. It is only within relatively recent years, however, that archaeobotanists have begun testing archaeological seed samples in this manner to eliminate recent "seed rain" contaminants. Walker also had mound soil samples chemically tested by the State Department of Agriculture, without revealing the source of the sample, learning that the samples were "high in potash but deficient in other elements of plant food and would have to be reinforced with chemical fertilizers, if he wished to grow potatoes." Though inconclusive, Walker's attempt to have the soil analyzed demonstrates a certain amount of archaeological sophistication. Unfortunately, his attempt to both excavate and preserve the site was likewise a bit ahead of his time, and shortly over a decade later the site was completely destroyed by gravel operations.

## References

- Brilmayer, W. L.  
1927 Exploration of Spearhead Mound. *The Cincinnati Enquirer Sunday Magazine*, October 9, 1927, p. 3, 9, 11.
- D[ay], T[imothy] C.  
1839 Mounds or Tumuli of the Miami Valley. *Monthly Chronicle of Interesting and Useful Knowledge*, 1:381-382, 527-529.
- Genheimer, Robert  
1974 *33-Ha-24, Spearhead Mound*. Ohio Archaeological Inventory form on file at Dept. of Archaeology, Ohio Historical Society.
- Metz, Charles L.  
1878 The Prehistoric Monuments of the Little Miami Valley. *Journal of the Cincinnati Society of Natural History*, 1 (1):119-128.

Metz, Charles L.

1881 The Prehistoric Monuments of Anderson Township, Hamilton County, Ohio. *Journal of the Cincinnati Society of Natural History*, IV (4):293-305.

Potter, Martha A.

1967 Exploratory of the James Chase Hambleton Mound. *Papers in Archaeology of the Ohio Historical Society*, No. 4.

Starr, S. F.

1960 The Archaeology of Hamilton County, Ohio. *Journal of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History*, XXIII (1):1-130.

Whittlesey, Charles

1851 Descriptions of Ancient Works in Ohio. *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge*, III (7):6-20.

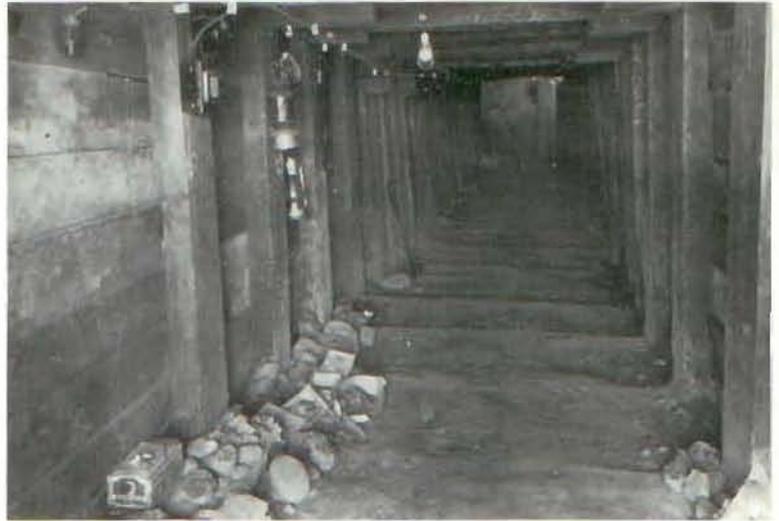


Fig. 2: Interior of the main tunnel. Note electric lighting and boxes of excavated material along the left wall.



Fig. 1: Entrance to the Spearhead Mound, looking east.



Fig. 3: Burial III. Willis Walker is on the left.



Fig. 4: Another view of Burial III. Note "white chalk burial token" to the left of the pelvis.



Fig. 5: Burial IV, with what appears to be a ground stone celt near the skull.



Fig. 6: View of the ceiling of the tunnel, showing log and bark molds and associated copper bracelets.

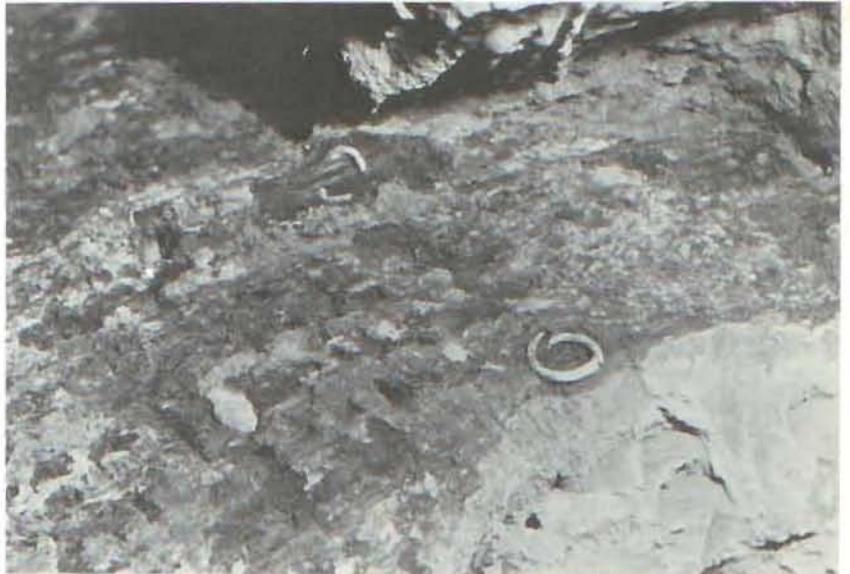


Fig. 7: Close-up of Figure 6, showing copper bracelets and stemmed point.