

---

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF FREDERIC WARD PUTNAM TO OHIO ARCHAEOLOGY<sup>1, 2</sup>

RALPH W. DEXTER

*Department of Biological Sciences, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio*

### ABSTRACT

Frederick Ward Putnam (1839-1915) carried out and directed archaeological research in Ohio primarily between 1880-1895 as part of the program of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University. He was especially concerned with the mounds of Little Miami Valley, Scioto Valley, Fort Ancient, Fort Hill, and the Great Serpent Mound. He developed the standard methods of mound exploration, and took steps to preserve archaeological sites. He published many reports, and gave frequent lectures on his studies in Ohio. He concluded the mound builders originated in Mexico.

Professor O. C. Marsh of Yale University wrote to Frederic W. Putnam, Director of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, on the 25th anniversary of the Museum, explaining its origin as follows, "The first idea of the Peabody Museum at Cambridge occurred to me in October, 1865, while digging in an ancient mound near Newark, Ohio; and that evening I wrote to my uncle, Mr. Peabody, at London, urging him to establish such a museum. He had already told me of his intention of making gifts to Harvard and various other institutions, and had requested me to look over the ground and give him information on the subject" (Anon., 1912). As a result of the suggestion by Marsh, George Peabody gave in 1866, \$150,000 to establish the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University. Not only did the germ of the idea for such a museum originate in Ohio, but Putnam, who served as Curator and Director of the Museum from 1875 to 1909, devoted much of his time and energy to the development of archaeology in Ohio. Exhibits in the museum have included artifacts from the mounds of the Little Miami Valley and the Scioto Valley, and a model of the Great Serpent Mound in Ohio. This

---

<sup>1</sup>This paper was read by the Academy Historian before the section of Anthropology and Sociology at the annual meeting of The Ohio Academy of Science held 26 April 1963 at Central State College, Wilberforce, Ohio. Acknowledgment is made for aid given to this study by a Summer Research Appointment awarded by Kent State University in the summer of 1962, to the late Miss Alice E. Putnam for her permission to study her father's papers, and to Dr. J. O. Brew, Director of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, for a critical reading of the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript received June 22, 1963.

paper will trace historical events in Putnam's research on Ohio archaeology, but will make no attempt to evaluate the scientific value of his studies.

At the 18th meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) held at Salem, Massachusetts, in 1869, Putnam arranged an "exhibition of a few interesting implements collected by R. W. Haskins from Indian graves on the bank of the Ohio, with special reference to the boring of holes in stone implements." In 1881, Putnam published an account of "Archaeological



Dr. Frederic Ward Putnam (1839-1915)

explorations at Madisonville, Ohio," which was subsequently reprinted in several different publications. The next year, Putnam began a series of lectures to acquire funds for archaeological research in America. Among these lectures were "Exploration of altar mounds in Ohio" and "Fort Ancient, Ohio." The altar

mounds were in Anderson Township, 20 miles from Cincinnati. The latter lecture also included brief descriptions of mounds at Newark, Portsmouth, and Marietta, and during this lecture, Putnam announced that "preliminary steps have been taken to secure this most extensive of ancient American works (Fort Ancient) for a public park." These lectures were given at the Peabody Museum and proceeds from them enabled Putnam to carry out further field explorations. At the Montreal meeting of the AAAS held that year, Putnam read a paper entitled "Account of three mounds explored in Ohio and Tennessee."

In 1883, Putnam reported on his studies of the mounds in the valley of the Little Miami River in a series of lectures on American Archaeology given to the Lowell Institute Lecture Series in Cambridge. Evidence showed that bodies were burned on altars, and four of the mounds Putnam opened contained altars. Pottery, ornaments, and human skeletal remains had also been found. Some of his studies were published that year in *Science* (Putnam, 1883a, b, c). He also published at this time (1883d) "Iron from the Ohio mounds," concerned with meteoric iron and ornaments made from it found in altar mounds of the Little Miami Valley, and, secondly (1883e), "Abstract of an account of recent archaeological excursion in Wisconsin and Ohio." This latter described the Serpent Mound, Alligator Mound, and Whittlesey's Effigy Mound as well as Fort Hill, Fort Ancient, the Hopeton Works, and the Cedar Banks Works.

In 1884, Putnam gave two reports on Ohio archaeology before the Boston Society of Natural History. One was a "Note on earth works of Little Miami Valley, 1883" and the other a "Note on emblematic mounds in Wisconsin and Ohio" (Putnam, 1884a, b). He frequently gave reports on his field studies in Ohio to many scientific societies and organizations. One such lecture in 1884 was given before the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. The following year, he announced a series of 15 illustrated lectures which he advertised for group meetings to be given as selected lectures in any combination, or as a complete course of lectures. His research on the Ohio mounds of the Little Miami Valley was included in this series. At the meeting of the AAAS held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1885, Putnam, with his field colleague Dr. C. L. Metz, gave an "Exhibition of ornaments made from pieces of human crania from a mound in Ohio."

Frank Hamilton Cushing wrote to Alpheus Hyatt that, in his opinion, Putnam was "... certainly the foremost among American archaeologists. . . . I do not think the wonderful systems of research which he has been the first to develop in mound exploration, can be too often commented upon. His work in the Ohio mounds must take rank as the first of its kind . . . above all his merits, however, I deem his absolute common sense the greatest . . . always bridling and guiding his unflagging enthusiasm as he does . . . no man ought to be allowed to push spade or pick axe into a Western mound or earth-work except as, at least, a disciple to the system of research of Prof. F. W. Putnam."

Metz and Putnam (1886a, b) collaborated on two publications on Ohio mounds. Putnam also summarized these in his official reports of the Peabody Museum (1886a, b).

In 1886 a special issue of *The American Naturalist* was published which gave an account of "The Peabody Museum's explorations in Ohio." This gave the best picture available up to that time of the life of the mound builders and was based upon five years of field studies in the Valley of the Little Miami River (Putnam, 1886c). At the AAAS meetings that year held in Buffalo, New York, Putnam listed a paper on "The method of making the bone fish-hooks found in the Ohio Valley." That same year he gave a lecture before the University Archaeological Society at Johns Hopkins, "On methods of archaeological research in America" (Putnam, 1886d).

In the report of the Peabody Museum for 1887, Putnam (1887a) published

his account of "The way bone fish-hooks were made in the Little Miami Valley." At the second annual meeting of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society (24 Feb. 1887), Putnam read, "The Serpent Mound Saved" which was subsequently published in the Society's quarterly. This same volume reprinted from the Johns Hopkins University Circulars, Putnam's directions for "The proper method of exploring earth works" (Putnam, 1887b, c).

Through the effort of Putnam and a group of women in Boston led by Alice C. Fletcher, who became interested in the Serpent Mound, funds were raised to purchase 60 acres at the site of the effigy mound which also contained three conical mounds, a village site, and a burial place. Thus was established "Serpent Mound Park." The original purchase was for the Trustees of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, but in 1900 the property was given to the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society for use as a state park. This was the beginning of the State Park system in the United States. An account of the original purchase was given by Putnam at the AAAS meeting held in New York City in August, 1887. Mrs. L. E. Holden of Cleveland wrote to Putnam 1 July 1887, "I am the pleased recipient of a paper containing an account of the purchase of the Serpent Mound. . . . my husband hopes to be free from constant business in a year or so more and with the interest you have awakened we hope to show some especial attention to your work."

G. Frederick Wright made an appeal in his native Ohio for state aid to promote Putnam's excavation of Ohio mounds. He conducted a tour for the Archaeological and Historical Society and reviewed the work of Putnam and Dr. Metz. Wright, in a report to the *Cleveland Leader* 25 Sept. 1887 wrote that, "In many respects these earthworks are the most important to the archaeologist anywhere to be found in the world." In February, 1888, Putnam gave a lecture at the Peabody Academy of Science in Salem, Massachusetts, on, "Early People of the Ohio Valley" to raise money for the purchase of "Fort Hill." In 1888, Putnam received a grant for research (\$200) from the permanent Fund of the AAAS. This was given for exploration of the Serpent Mound.

In the Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History, Putnam published (1888a, b) an "Account of archaeological explorations at the Liberty Works, Ohio—1884" and a "Note on a black flint implement from Ohio." As president of the Society, Putnam gave an illustrated lecture on the "Serpent Mound in Adams County, Ohio" at the general meeting held 17 March 1888. This was given complimentary to those who contributed toward the purchase and preservation of this monument. At that time, Dr. Henry Wheatland suggested to Putnam that he write a guide book on his explorations of the Ohio mounds in the Little Miami Valley. Apparently this was never done. However, Putnam did publish in the proceedings for 1888 an account of "Palaeolithic man in eastern and central North America" (Putnam 1888c).

In 1890, Putnam published two papers (1890a, b) in the *Century Magazine* which reviewed his work on the mounds in the Ohio Valley and especially his study of the Serpent Mound. At the AAAS meetings held that year at Indianapolis, Putnam gave reports on "Notice of a singular prehistoric structure at Foster's, Little Miami Valley, Ohio" and "On ancient hearths in the Little Miami Valley." In 1892, G. Frederick Wright reported on ancient earthworks of Ohio to the Western Reserve Historical Society. His paper was based upon Putnam's explorations (Wright, 1892). That same year Putnam placed on exhibition a model of the Serpent Mound in Adams County for the AAAS meeting held in Rochester New York. With C. B. Moore, Putnam published a note on "Copper from the Ohio mounds found in certain sand mounds of St. John's River, Florida" (Putnam and Moore, 1894).

The next year, Putnam, with C. C. Willoughby, published a brief account of "The mound builders' symbolic carvings from the mounds of Ohio" (Putnam and

Willoughby, 1895). This paper had been read at the AAAS meetings held that year in Springfield, Massachusetts. Putnam stated that in his belief the mound builders were "a branch of the great south-western people represented by the ancient Mexicans, the builders of the old cities of Yucatan and Central America, and some of the Pueblo tribes of Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico and adjoining portions of Old Mexico."

W. K. Moorehead (1896) published a pamphlet on the "Mound builders of Ohio; their village sites, graves, etc., fully illustrated." This was based upon an exhibit made under Putnam's direction for the Columbian World's Exposition in Chicago and utilized artifacts from M. C. Hopewell's farm in Ross County, Ohio. Putnam was Chief of the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology at this World's Fair of 1892-93.

Putnam collaborated over many years with Dr. C. L. Metz on the exploration of mounds near Madisonville, Ohio. Land in this area had been given to the Museum through the efforts of these two men. In January, 1897, Dr. Metz wrote to Putnam, "I have sent you a plat of the land bequeathed to the Museum by Miss Ferris, who was influenced by me to place the old cemetery in the care of the Museum. After the ground is thoroughly explored, it might be turned into a park, thus preserving the site for all time." Also, a library was established on the property in the old Ferris homestead and named the Joseph Ferris Memorial Library. Metz wrote, "I have selected one room that I wish to assign to anthropology and kindred sciences." Later complications developed, and Metz wrote to Putnam on 13 March 1897, "All of the bequests of Miss Ferris have been attacked by a disgruntled nephew . . . the will clause places you in possession (of the Museum grounds). This necessitated immediate action in the field. Putnam's secretary wrote to his daughter, Alice, on May 11, "He is trying to bring about the exploration of the Ferris Cemetery in Ohio and hopes he can spend some time there himself." Another difficulty which had to be faced was to secure the necessary funds to carry out the field work. On June 26, Putnam wrote to Dr. C. C. Abbott, "I am trying my best to get the means for exploring on the land in Ohio (covering the famous Madisonville Cemetery) which has been bequeathed to the Museum by Miss Ferris in order that I should have the opportunity to finish the exploration begun there so many years ago, but I have not yet succeeded in obtaining the funds."

In 1899, Putnam gave his presidential address as retiring president of the AAAS which met that year in Columbus. The newly elected president, Dr. Edward Orton, Professor of Geology at The Ohio State University, was scheduled to introduce Putnam, but was unable to do so after suffering an accident. Orton later wrote to Thomas Wilson of the United States National Museum, "I, too, do not cease to regret that I lost the opportunity to introduce Professor Putnam. The man who inaugurated the work of preserving the splendid records of Ohio archaeology has claims on the state that it would have been once a privilege and an honor to recognize."

When plans were made to hold the Ohio Centennial Exposition in Toledo in 1902, Putnam wrote to Col. James Kilbourne, President of the Ohio Centennial Committee, recommending Prof. G. Frederick Wright of Oberlin College to become director of the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology. Putnam wrote in behalf of Wright that, "I am sure that he is the one man in Ohio best qualified for the position of Director of the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology. . . . If Professor Wright is appointed . . . I can assure you of my readiness to aid him in making an exhibit illustrating the archaeology of Ohio . . . I shall take a special interest in the exploration and do what I can to arouse further attention to the preservation of the wonderful monuments of antiquity in Ohio. Much can be done by the Department of Exploration, and I believe that under the charge of Professor Wright a most interesting and instructive exhibit would be made."

One of Putnam's aids in Ohio archaeology was Dr. Gerard Fowke. He wrote to Putnam on 22 July 1901, "We need never expect to make another find like that at Hopewell's; but the group near Bainbridge has the mound next in size in the Scioto Valley, to that of Hopewell's; it is within the enclosure; there is another large mound also within the enclosure: and one large mound and a number of small ones in the immediate vicinity. 'Scientific interest' will cut no favor with some of the owners; they will want cash . . . and their 'conscientious scruples' can be overcome with it. . . . I believe that group will 'pay' both for science and museum display."

Putnam was long concerned about the origin of the mound builders. His interpretation, often repeated in his writings and lectures, can well be shown by two quotations from his correspondence. On 29 July 1901, he wrote to the Duke of Loubat in Paris, "For a long time I have insisted that the civilization of Mexico and Central America must have largely derived from foreign sources, and that I regard the builders of the great earthworks of the Ohio Valley as an early offshoot of the Mexican element." On 9 July 1909, Putnam wrote to Warren Moorehead, who had carried out a topographical survey of Fort Ancient under his direction, "I have always looked on this higher culture in the Ohio Valley as an offshoot of the very old Mexican culture . . . that the Ohio Valley was populated at the close of the glacial period I think we have no reason to doubt." Putnam's interpretations seem to have stood the test of time.

Completion of exploration of the Turner mounds was long delayed. On 5 June 1902, Dr. Metz wrote to Putnam, "When will the Turner group exploration be completed? Only a few years more and exploration will be impossible. . . . one of the richest Ohio fields, this vicinity is being so rapidly built over and improved that no more in the archaeological field can be done."

Putnam kept in close contact with Dr. Metz and Earnest Volk, the two who carried out most of the field explorations at the Turner Mounds. Correspondence from Dr. Metz is well illustrated by the following two excerpts. On 23 August 1905, he wrote, "Volk is finding burials just back of the Turner Altar Mounds, the skeletons are found in stone cists covered over with large slabs of stone . . . with every skeleton some objects are found. Large shells (*Busyon*, etc), pot sherds from a crushed vase, large bone awls, flint knives, etc. . . . I shall only be too happy to see the Memoir of the Turner Group written as there is so much that differs from all other explorations of like nature and will awaken great interest in the Little Miami Valley." (Two of Putnam's student-assistants working on the Turner Group became involved in a dispute in which one accused the other of faking his finds in order to discredit him in an unsuccessful effort to get the appointment of being sent to Mexico on an expedition. Because of the claims that were made, which apparently were not true, but nevertheless became well known, Putnam never completed his third paper on the Turner Group). Then again on 6 November 1905, Dr. Metz wrote, "Our prehistoric cemetery is being torn up by parties of vandals who are hunting for relics. They should be stopped. Would advise you to place someone in charge of the grounds, or hasten the thorough exploration of the grounds."

Putnam also followed closely the work of Clarence B. Moore in Florida and demonstrated an interesting relationship between the prehistoric inhabitants of the Ohio Valley and of Florida. On 2 June 1906, Putnam wrote to Moore, "I have read your notice of the finding of an ear ornament overlaid or covered on the upper surface with meteoric iron, and am much interested in this very decided proof of the close connection of the prehistoric peoples of Florida who buried their dead in earthmounds with those of the Ohio Valley region. You have shown, by many other objects which you have found in the Florida mounds, that this connection is exemplified by the arts of the people and that there was much in common between some of the peoples of Florida and Ohio. . . . The

fact that the ancient Floridians made their copper ornaments in the same manner as did the builders of the ancient earthworks of Ohio, and that both used meteoric iron for covering the outer surface is most instructive in tracing the connection of these ancient peoples. Similarly covered ear ornaments have been found in considerable number in the Ohio mounds. . . . This shows that the ancient people must have found sources of meteoric iron which they treated by hammering as they did native copper and native silver, and the great interest of your discovery in the Florida mound is that the people who made that mound at Crystal River had either found a mass of meteoric iron which they utilized in the same manner as did the ancient earthwork builders of Ohio, or else this ornament you found must have been obtained from the latter."

While Putnam was serving as head of the Anthropology Department and Director of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, he frequently lectured on the mound builders of Ohio. He also reported on those studies to the Science Association of the University of California.

Putnam became generally recognized as the "Father of American Archaeology." His own field studies were not extensive and his own publications were not voluminous. However, he gave scientific method and direction to the developing science of American archaeology and trained most of the leading students of his day and the authorities who succeeded him.

On his seventieth birthday, in 1909, a celebration was held in Cambridge to honor him. Prof. G. Frederick Wright of Oberlin College made the following tribute to Putnam with regard to his contributions to Ohio archaeology: "We are peculiarly indebted to him in Ohio for the interest which he has aroused in our antiquities, and for the care with which he has explored and preserved our monuments."

Wright (1916), in his review of Ohio archaeology at the 25th anniversary meeting of The Ohio Academy of Science, summarized the contributions made by Putnam and his colleagues.

#### REFERENCES

- Anon.** 1912. The Peabody Museum. *Harvard Alumni Bull.* 15(7): 104-108.
- Metz, C. L. and F. W. Putnam.** 1886a. Explorations in Ohio conducted for the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology in connection with Harvard University I. The Marriott Mound, No. 1. 18th report Peabody Museum for 1884. p. 449-466.
- . 1886b. Account of continued explorations of mounds in Ohio. *Proceed. Am. Antiq. Soc.* 4: 9-10.
- Moorehead, W. K.** 1896. Mound Builders of Ohio; their village sites, graves, etc., fully illustrated. 20 p.
- Putnam, F. W.** 1881. Archaeological explorations at Madisonville, Ohio. *Harvard University Bull.* 2(6): 216-218.
- . 1883a. Altar mounds in Anderson Township, Ohio. (Turner Group). *Science* 1: 348-349.
- . 1883b. Ancient cemetery at Madisonville, Ohio. *Science* 1: 373-374.
- . 1883c. Mound exploration, Little Miami Valley. (Turner Group). *Science* 1: 496-497.
- . 1883d. Iron from the Ohio mounds; a review of the statements and misconceptions of two writers of over sixty years ago. *Proceed. Am. Antiq. Soc.* 2: 349-364.
- . 1883e. Abstract of an account of recent archaeological excursion in Wisconsin and Ohio. *Proceed. Am. Antiq. Soc.* 3: 4-20.
- . 1884a. Note on earth works of Little Miami Valley, 1883. *Proceed. Boston. Soc. Nat. Hist.* 22: 358.
- . 1884b. Note on emblematic mounds in Wisconsin and Ohio. *Proceed. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist.* 22: 432.
- . 1886a. Explorations in the Little Miami Valley. *Peabody Mus. Rep.* 3: 549-554.
- . 1886b. The Altar Mounds of the Turner Group in Ohio. *Peabody Mus. Rep.* 3: 554-562.
- . 1886c. The Peabody Museum's explorations in Ohio. *Am. Nat.* (extra issue). p. 1017-1027.
- . 1886d. On methods of archaeological research in America. *Johns Hopkins Univ. Cir.* 5: 89.

- . 1887a. The way bone fish-hooks were made in the Little Miami Valley. Repts. Peabody Museum, Amer. Anthro. and Ethno. 3: 581-586.
  - . 1887b. The Serpent Mound saved. Ohio Arch. Hist. Quart. 1: 184-190.
  - . 1887c. The proper method of exploring an earthwork. Ohio Arch. Hist. Quart. 1: 60-62.
  - . 1888a. Account of archaeological explorations at the Liberty Works of 1884. Proceed. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist. 23: 215-218.
  - . 1888b. Note on a black flint implement from Ohio. Proceed. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist. 23: 242.
  - . 1888c. Palaeolithic man in eastern and central North America. Proceed. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist. 23: 421-449.
  - . 1890a. Prehistoric remains in the Ohio Valley. Century Magazine 39: 698-703.
  - . 1890b. The Serpent Mound of Ohio. Century Magazine 39: 871-888.
  - , and **C. B. Moore**. 1894. Copper from the Ohio mounds found in certain sand mounds of St. John's River, Florida. J. Acad. Nat. Sci. of Phila. 10: 220.
  - , and **C. C. Willoughby**. 1895. The mound builders symbolic carvings from the mounds of Ohio. Boston Commonwealth 30: 2-3.
  - Wright, G. F.** 1892. Ancient earthworks of Ohio, 1887. Tract 76. Western Reserve Hist. Soc. 3: 179-184.
  - . 1916. Ohio's contributions to archaeology. Proceed. Ohio Acad. Sci. 6(5): 388-406.
-