

THE FLYNN CEMETERY: AN ORR FOCUS ONEOTA BURIAL  
SITE IN ALLAMAKEE COUNTY, IOWA

by

Robert T. Bray<sup>1</sup>

INTRODUCTION

In September, 1958, information was received from Mr. John Reynolds of the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Gazette, concerning the discovery of an Indian burial site during road construction along Bear Creek in northern Allamakee County, Iowa. On September 11, two days after the initial discovery, Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Bray arrived at the site with the intentions of appraising the situation and conducting some salvage work. Mr. Reynolds had as his principal objective, the gathering of information for a newspaper story.<sup>2</sup> On September 12, Mr. Bray and Robert Kile of Effigy Mounds National Monument returned to the site to conduct a full day of salvage. The site was not visited again until the first week in November when another full day of work was conducted by Darrel Henning, H. P. Field, and Clifford Chase of Decorah, Iowa; Warren Hayes of Waukon, Iowa, and Robert T. Bray. In the interim, some controlled excavations were conducted by Dr. Reynold J. Ruppe, formerly of the State University of Iowa, and his students; and an indeterminate amount of indiscriminate digging took place by various unknown persons. The site is now, presumably, completely destroyed.

The burial site was located near the lower edge of a rather steep slope leading to the flat, narrow, valley of Bear Creek some little distance from its confluence with the Upper Iowa River (Plate 1). The exact location was SE 1/4 Sec. 34, T100N, R6W, and is designated as 13-AM-51. The slope, consisting principally of unconsolidated sand, had been cut into by earth moving equipment, and eleven skeletons were partially exposed at the time of our first investigation. By and large, the skeletons were disturbed by the heavy equipment only at the lower extremities, as most of the burials were at right angles to the road cut, roughly parallel to one another, and in a fairly straight row. Fortunately, the machinery did not cut far enough up the slope to disturb the axial and upper appendicular portions of the skeletons, which were all, except one, headed in a northerly direction.

At the time of the first investigation, several collectors had been at the burials and had excavated, partially or completely, seven of them (Fig. 1). Good information from only one of the seven (No. 5), is available at this time. The writer personally excavated burials one through four, and observed the excavation of part of number five.

Approximately six additional skeletons, undisturbed by road construction, were later found up the slope from the initial discovery and five of these (numbers six through ten) were excavated or observed by the writer at a later time during the month of November (Fig. 1).

The following descriptions, then, are of those remains which were excavated or authenticated personally. The measurements and descriptions given were noted either while the excavations were proceeding, or after the recovered materials were cleaned in the laboratory. At the time of this writing, none of the material was available for study and it has been necessary, in the absence of precise information in field and laboratory notes, to give some measurements as approximations. Such approximations were obtained from a study of photographs of the material and from field notes. The skeletal material and associations, except that gathered by collectors, were placed in the collections at Effigy Mounds National Monument.

THE FINDINGS

Burial No. 1. This was a fully extended, supine, adult skeleton. The skull pointed in a northerly direction, up the slope. Burial associations included the following:

1. Skull of raven (tentative identification) located just above right shoulder with the tip of the beak directed toward point (acromion) of the shoulder (Plate 2). Upper Right Photograph.

<sup>1</sup> Formerly archeologist at Effigy Mounds National Monument, McGregor, Iowa, now director of the University of Missouri's Archeological Research Center located at Miami, Mo.

<sup>2</sup> Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Gazette, Sunday, Sept. 14, 1958. The Cedar Rapids Gazette also furnished the negatives for Plates 1, 3, 4, 5.

JOURNAL OF THE IOWA ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY 1961  
VOL. 10, # 4, pp. 15-25 IOWA CITY

2. Two bone disk beads approximately 2.5 cm. in diameter with single perforations near the centers. There were no decorations. One bead was located above, i. e., anterior to the right shoulder and just to the right of the more proximal cervical vertebra. The second, found after returning to the laboratory, was located in the left orbit of the raven skull.

3. Two shell, barrel-shaped, beads and four blue and green glass trader's beads located behind and on right side of skull. Bottom of Lower Right Photograph of Plate 2. ✓

4. Copper or brass ornament in the shape of conventionalized cross or, possibly, a bird. It was located at the right side of the rib cage between the ribs and the distal right humerus. The ornament was approximately 12.5 cm. long, 2 cm. wide at the cross arm, and 1 mm. thick. A single perforation, presumably to facilitate suspension, was located near the upper portion. Center of Lower Right Photograph of Plate 2.

5. Copper or brass coiled "ear bob" about 4 cm long located on top of right forearm. Heavy stains were present on both radius and ulna. Top of Lower Right Photograph of Plate 2.

6. Broken end of polished bone bracelet or pendant 6 cm. long and 1 cm. wide. A smooth perforation was near the unbroken end.

7. Scapula of small animal located just to the right of the raven skull.

Burial No. 2. This was the fully extended supine, skeleton of an adult located in approximately the same orientation as number one, and was about two meters west of it. The following associations were recorded:

1. A walnut sized lump of pumice with several small artificially produced striations.

2. An almond sized lump of soft, red ochre with small facets produced by grinding.

3. Several rolled copper or brass tubes approximately 7.5 cm. in length located around the left shoulder and skull. Top and center of photograph, Upper Left of Plate 2.

4. Several smaller rolled tubes and one piece of flat sheet copper or brass. (right and left center, and bottom) of photograph, Upper Left of Plate 2.

5. Cache of four small chert flakes near the red ochre.

6. A 16 cm. wide belt or "gridle" of very small (4 mm to 2 cm. long) rolled copper or brass beads lying atop the waist from approximately the first lumbar vertebra to the mid portion of the sacrum (lower center). Photograph Upper Left of Plate 2. Many of these tiny beads seemed to be aligned as if they had formed part of a garment. Many beads were found underneath this region when the bones were removed but it could not be determined whether they had merely "fallen through" or whether they were once part of a belt that actually encircled the waist. Also found underneath the waist area, with the beads mixed among the fibers, was a quantity of what appeared to be shredded juniper bark. This, however did not appear to be a portion of a belt, rather did it resemble a kind of mat or grave lining. No evidence of it occurred outside the area of copper beads.

Burial No. 3. The notes concerning this individual are incomplete. It was a fully extended, supine, adult located just west of No. 2. Two small, un-notched, triangular projectile points and a few bones of a small animal were located near the right shoulder. No mention of any other associations appears in the notes.

Burial No. 4. This was apparently a fully extended, supine adult. The bulldozer had removed the skull, right arm, clavicles, some costals, and the scapulae. The remainder of the skeleton was intact although slightly disturbed. The burial differed markedly from any of the others in being located about ten meters southwest of the main group, in its orientation east and west (at right angles to the others), and in being one of only three of the total investigated which had no copper, brass, or glass offerings. The following associations of aboriginal manufacture were noted:

1. Photograph Lower Left of Plate 2. Near the proximal end of the left femur, laterally, and inferior to the bones of the left hand, were two bone whistles made from wing bones of large birds, perhaps swans or cranes.

The whistles were similar but one was somewhat longer and larger than the other. The small specimen measured 20 cm. long and 1.2 cm. outside diameter. There was an oval hole 1.5 cm. in length placed 7.7 cm. from one end. The bone was smoothly polished but there was no decoration. The second specimen measured 26.3 cm. in length and 1.9 cm. in diameter.

2. Lying on top of the left femur at its proximal end was the beak and part of the skull of a bird tentatively identified as a heron. The beak plus the skull were 18 cm. in length. The specimen showed no sign of alteration by man.

3. A polished bone tube 10.2 cm. long, which may have been a broken whistle, occurred with this burial but the notes fail to give its location. It was probably not found in situ. There was an incised line encircling the shaft near one end.

4. The notes mention the skull of a squirrel or other small rodent as found just above, superior to, the left knee, but no descriptions were made and the specimen was not available for study.

Burial No. 5. One of the first, and perhaps one of the most significant, of the burials found at the site was excavated on September 10 and 11 by Gavin Sampson of Decorah, Iowa. This was an adult skeleton, oriented north and south, accompanied by an unusual number of offerings. Plate 3. Mr. Sampson is in possession of this material, and it was not available for precise description at the time of this writing. Since the materials are pertinent to an interpretation of the site, however, it is, perhaps, desirable to list here the kinds of offerings which occurred, pending a more exact description by Mr. Sampson. The following list was compiled from field notes and an 8 x 10 inch photograph of the material:

1. Pottery vessel, unusually well made for the Orr focus. Globular shape with slightly flaring rim. There were two opposite strap handles decorated with vertical incised lines.
2. Large valve of mussel or fresh water clam, with smoothly polished border.
3. Approximately 100 copper or brass beads of various sizes.
4. Approximately 12 copper or brass bracelets. This was rolled sheet metal bent into bracelet form.
5. Two or three pieces of flat, unworked sheet brass or copper. These were no more than 3 cm. square.
6. Two steel knives which had, apparently, riveted wooden handles. The one illustrated in figure 4 is approximately 18 cm. in length.
7. A steel awl or file. This specimen was so badly rusted it could not be positively identified. However, it appeared to be a 3-cornered file.
8. A number of flakes of chert some of which had been worked into scrapers.
9. A small number of glass beads. ✓
10. A beaded "girdle" much the same in appearance as those from burials one and six. Pieces of a similar bark mat were also recovered from underneath the belt area.

Burial No. 6. This was the fully extended skeleton of an adult which was located up the slope some five meters away from the nearest disturbance by the road equipment. The orientation was north-south with the skull north. The skeleton was supine. The surface depth was approximately 1.2 meters. The burial was located by Gavin Sampson but was excavated, in part, by Robert T. Bray. The following associations were recorded:

1. Eight blue and green glass trader's beads in a neat row behind the skull almost contacting the forward portion of the occipital bone. ✓
2. A quantity of blue and green glass trader's beads under the mandible and contacting the cervical vertebrae. ✓
3. A polished and worn incisor of a small beaver (tentative identification) on the lower left side of the rib cage. Plate 4.

4. Approximately 100 small flakes of chert in a group, apparently in the left hand (Plate 4).
5. Bi-perforated, polished rib of a bison on top of, and paralleling, the lower left arm. The specimen had a line incised around it near one end (Plate 4).
6. An extra adult human skull, without the mandible, was found at the left knee. The distal femur and proximal tibia contacted the back part of this skull at just about the center or sagittal suture. There was no indication of post mortem alteration of the skull (Plate 5).
7. A beaded "girdle," similar to that found with burials one and five, occurred with this individual. The notes fail to mention any bark mat fragments or other perishables such as occurred with the other two. (Barely discernible in Plate 4).

Burial No. 7. This burial differed radically from any of the others. It was located near the northeast corner of the burial plot. The grave was covered by two distinct layers of flat stones, some of which protruded above the ground surface. Both layers of stones accounted for a depth of some .5 meter. Underneath the stones, an oval pit outline was vaguely discernible. Contrary to the usual depth of 1.0 to 1.3 meters for the burials in general, this one was encountered at a depth of approximately 1.6 meters. The contents of the pit consisted only of the skull of a child, minus the mandible, and two mandibles of small carnivores. It hardly seems possible that this grave had been disturbed. On the contrary, there was every evidence that it had not been.

Burials No. 8 and 9. These consisted of the badly disturbed, incomplete skeleton of an adult and the mandible of an approximately 30-month old child. There were no associations. They were probably disturbed by a relic hunter at some previous time.

Burial No. 10. This was the complete skeleton of a fetus or tiny infant. It was excavated by Dr. H. P. Field. There were no offerings.

#### DISCUSSION

It is not clear just how many burials were in this cemetery, presumably now completely destroyed. Eleven, in various stages of disruption, were counted on September 11, two days after the discovery. Later, at least six others were located farther up the slope undisturbed by the road builders. There may have been others completely destroyed and reburied by the machinery. Of the seventeen authenticated burials, we have been able to say something of ten -- seven adults (one with a second associated skull), one infant, and two small children. It remains to evaluate the material and reach some conclusion as to its meaning. In this regard, there are several points which should be of value in further studies of the Orr focus, and perhaps, other foci of the Oneota.

The true cemetery nature of the site was apparent in the almost complete absence of midden material, the "rowing" of at least ten of the interments, and their close juxtaposition without accidental disturbance. It is entirely possible that these graves were marked in some way, although no evidence of it remained.

The burial of incomplete skeletons (No. 7) as discrete units and as associations (No. 6) with complete ones has not been previously reported from the Orr focus. The most likely explanation for these occurrences would seem to be secondary burial after the bones had been kept for some time by relatives. Prior exposure of the dead in trees or scaffolds, or the retaining of skulls as trophies are not without possibility.

The occurrence of a raven skull with white shell beads in (at least one) eye opening and the scapula of a bird with Burial No. 1; and the skulls of a heron and a squirrel with Burial No. 4 are significant points. Skins and/or bones of birds were prominent parts of the medicine bags of some historic Plains tribes. Bone whistles, similar to those with Burial No. 4, also are found in Plains Indian medicine bags. This sort of thing would seem to substantiate the fairly definite Plains orientation of this manifestation of the Orr focus Oneota.

The peculiar beaded belts or "girdles" occurring with Burials one, five, and six, have not been previously reported from any of the Oneota foci. It is tempting to think of these as parts of garments but no remnants of garments were found, even though there were literally hundreds of copper or brass tubes comprising the belts. The



fact that a great many of these tubes were aligned one with another makes it almost a certainty that they were fastened together in some manner.

The iron knives and file found with Burial No. 5 indicates an interment made after the Indians had begun to receive utilitarian materials from the traders. However, other offerings with the burial, e. g., the chert flakes and the pottery vessel, might indicate that some aboriginal cultural items during the trading era, did not disappear or deteriorate in quality quite so rapidly as is commonly thought.

### CONCLUSIONS

Oneota chronology is an historical, as well as archeological problem and further significant contributions will need to take up the historical aspect in considerable detail. It is not the purpose of this paper to go into an intensive study of sources and times of historic contact. However, a brief discussion is pertinent.

The earliest date that trade materials are likely to have been available among the Indians who used the cemetery was about 1634. In that year, Jean Nicollet encountered the Winnebago, who were relatives and possibly occasional visitors, of the Ioway, in the vicinity of Green Bay. It would seem probable that the Ioway received copper, brass, and glass through intertribal trade considerably before they, themselves, were in a favorable position to carry on direct trade. We have no historical suggestion, however, that the Ioway were in northeast Iowa at that time. Not until the year 1656 do we have information that such was probably the case. In that year, Nicolas Perrot, in his Memoire sur les Moeurs, Coustumes et Religion des Sauvages de l'Amerique Septentrionale, alludes to "a river which is named for the Ioways," and locates it as flowing from the west into the Mississippi above the Wisconsin (Mott, 1938, pp. 236-237). Perrot's information supposedly came from Huron and Ottawa Indians who had visited the Ioway in their village. By 1656, then, it is probable that the Ioways were in the locality where their remains are found today. They were in the same area in 1685 when Perrot visited their village and recorded it as being some nine leagues from the site of his post on the Mississippi in present day Wisconsin (Mott, 1938, p. 239). It is probable that this location was on the Upper Iowa River. By 1703, it appears that the tribe had moved to northwest Iowa to the vicinity of Lake Okoboji and Spirit Lake as they are shown on the Delisle map of that year in that locality (Tucker, 1942, pl. XIII).

A period of some 47 years (about 1656 to 1703) during which the Ioway probably were in the northeast Iowa and southeast Minnesota area is a surprisingly long time for intermittent trade contacts to have gone on without the accumulation of more evidence for it in archeological contexts. In general, the trade materials found in Orr focus are ornamentals and non-utilitarian. This is the kind of material that appealed to most Indians in the earlier days of the trade but was not what was demanded so much in later years. It would seem that either the French were reluctant to place valuable items in Indian hands, or that the Indians were careful to carry such items with them when they moved.

To summarize, the Flynn site was fairly typical of the Orr focus Oneota extra-village type of cemetery area. Some elements, such as animal and bird bones as intentional offerings, beaded "girdles," and the Plains type of arrow shaft wrench, not ordinarily found in Orr focus, occurred here. The fair abundance of trade materials, including iron objects, would seem to place the time of use as rather late in the Ioway-French contact period (1656-1703) in this area.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hall, Robert

1960. Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation. University of Wisconsin.

Mott, Mildred (Wedel)

1938. "The Relation of Historic Indian Tribes to Archeological Manifestations in Iowa." The Iowa Journal of History and Politics. Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, Iowa City.

Tucker, Sara Jane

1942. "Indian Villages of the Illinois Country." Vol. II Scientific Papers Illinois State Museum, Part I, Atlas. Springfield.

Wedel, Mildred Mott

1959. "Oneota Sites on the Upper Iowa River." The Missouri Archaeologist, Vol. 21, Nos. 2-4, Columbia.

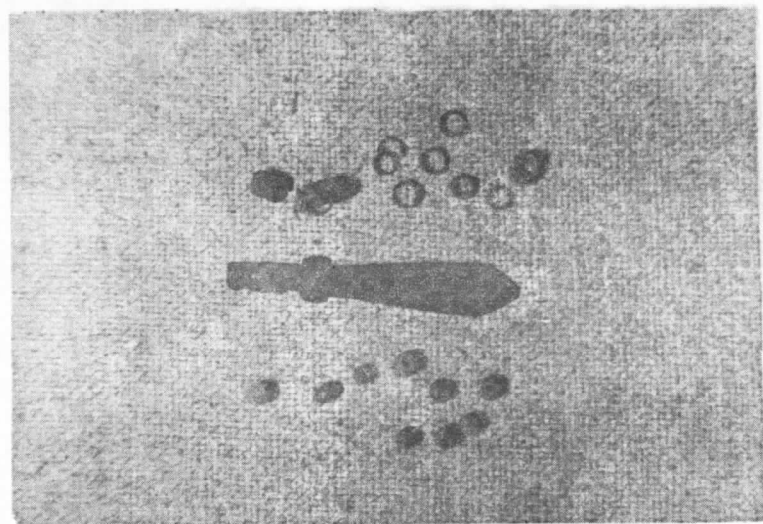
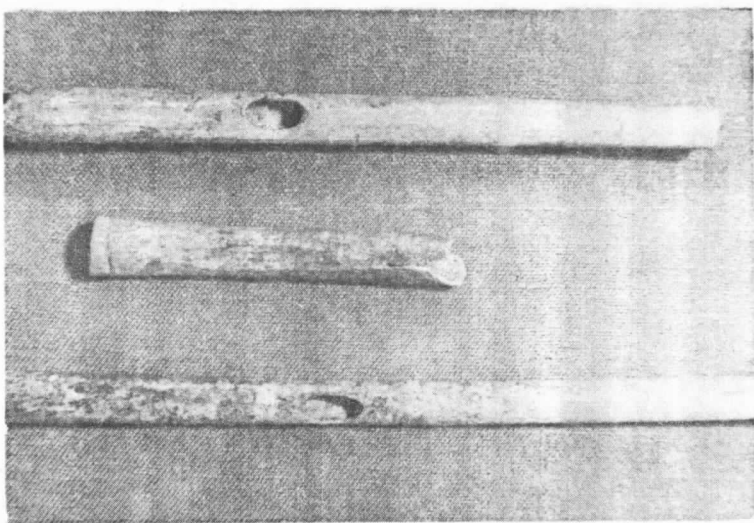
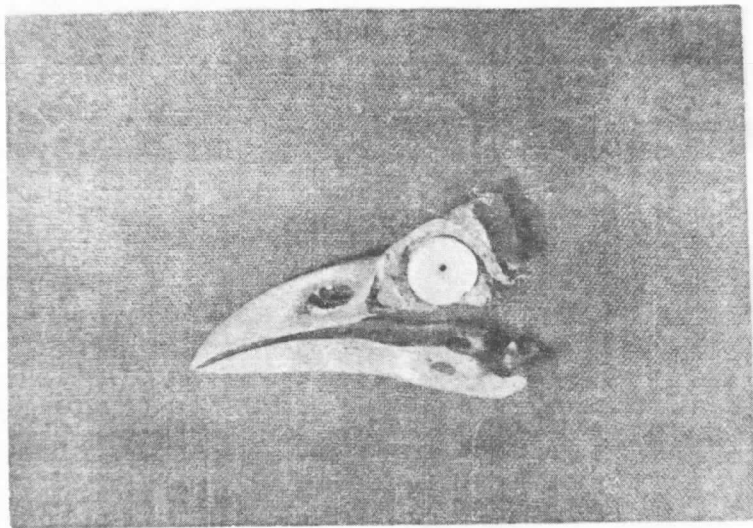
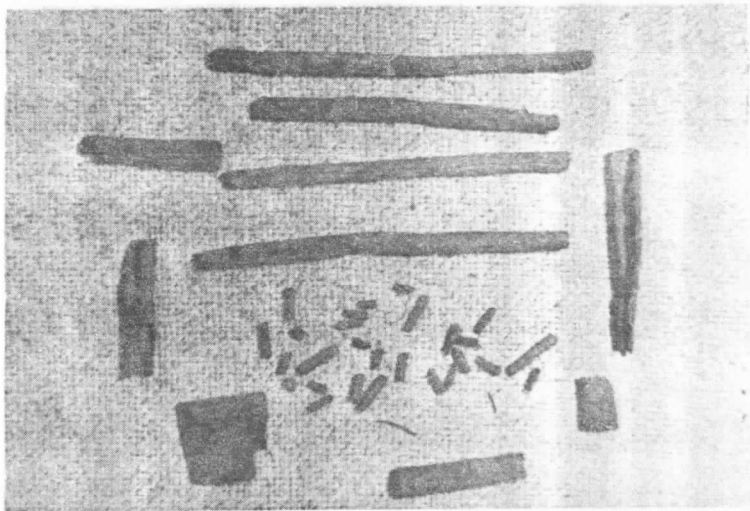


Plate 2. Flynn Cemetery. Raven skull with bone disk bead in eye orbit. Found with Burial 1. (Upper Right Photograph.) Copper or brass ornament found with Burial 1. Ear bobs or springs, and glass trade beads. (Lower Right Photograph.) Objects of copper or brass from Burial 2, consisting of rolled tubes, tiny "girdle" beads, and flat sheet metal. (Upper Left Photograph.) Bone whistles and bone tube found with Burial 4. (Lower Left Photograph.)



Plate 3. Flynn Cemetery. Associations with Burial 5. Funerary pottery vessel (Upper left). Shell spoon (Center left). Rolled tubes and flat sheet metal copper or brass (Center). Flakes of chert, some reworked for scrapers (Top center). Steel knife with riveted (wooden ?) handle (Lower left). Glass trade beads (1 center right). Photograph by John Reynolds, Cedar Rapids Gazette. Gavin Sampson Collection.