Having taught Wisconsin Archaeology as an upper division course within the University of Wisconsin System since 1993, I am always quite excited to read new publications focusing on Wisconsin's prehistory. *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin* is a well-written and up-to-date synthesis of the development of Native American cultures in the area we now call Wisconsin.

Bob Birmingham is the State Archaeologist for Wisconsin and Leslie Eisenberg, a forensic anthropologist, is the Coordinator for the state’s Burial Sites Program. Both of the authors are employed by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and are actively engaged in local archaeology. They have collaborated on this book to provide the reader with an overview of 12,000 years of human occupation with an emphasis on mound building cultures of the last 2,000 years.

The authors begin with a historical overview of the mysteries that have surrounded the many mounds that dot the landscape of Eastern North America. In the latter half of the 19th Century, scholars as well as lay people heavily debated the authorship of these earthworks that varied widely in shape and size. Due in part to the ethnocentric views of 19th century scholars that saw Native American cultures as "primitive" in relation to Old World cultures, few credited the ancestors of modern day Indian tribes with the capability of producing such monumental works.

In 1855 the Smithsonian Institution published *The Antiquities of Wisconsin, as Surveyed and Described by Increase Lapham*. This work brought recognition to Wisconsin not only because it documented the presence of earthworks like those known elsewhere in eastern North America, but also because it showed that Wisconsin had a unique mound building episode that included the construction of mounds in the shapes of animal effigies. By the late 1800s, professional archaeologists had demonstrated that, contrary to popular myth, Native Americans had indeed built the mounds.

Archaeologists also recognized that mound building was carried out by a number of prehistoric cultures over a considerable amount of time that likely represented at least several thousand years.

The authors start their summary of the prehistory of our region with a brief overview of "Wisconsin Before the Mound Builders: The Paleo-Indian and Archaic Traditions." Paleo-Indians were the first to enter our region at the end of the Pleistocene approximately 12000-13000 years ago. They were egalitarian nomadic hunters of terrestrial *megafauna*. Paleo-Indian lifeways were gradually replaced during the early Holocene with a more diversified subsistence economy that included hunting of terrestrial fauna, fishing, and the collection of wild plants. These cultural practices, along with the burial of the dead in natural, non-man-made knolls, collectively define the Archaic tradition. Additionally, Archaic Indians began to manufacture, use and trade copper artifacts. As trade increased by the 1st millennium BC, Indian cultures became more complex in terms of social organization.

Burials from this time often included high-status artifacts made specifically for mortuary rituals. During the second half of the first millennium BC, Indian cultures began to build mounds, manufacture pottery containers, and experiment with the growing of plants, although not all at once. These patterns collectively define the Woodland tradition. During the Woodland tradition, a number of mound-building cultures flourished in Wisconsin, including the Hopewell and Effigy Mound Cultures. The Woodland tradition is divided by archaeologists into Early, Middle and Late stages. The book presents a summary of the mound building cultures associated with each stage of the Woodland tradition.

The authors point out that early mound construction (500 BC- AD 500) in Wisconsin was primarily associated with the burial of the dead and may have also been a ceremonial activity that strengthened social ties within family-kin groups and larger tribal corporate groupings. Mound building began during the Early Woodland stage and by Middle Woodland times (100 BC-AD 500), mound building cultures in Wisconsin...
were participating in a larger cultural pattern referred to as Hopewell. Hopewell Culture mounds were built in Wisconsin along major river systems and are particularly concentrated along rivers, lakes and streams. These mounds are usually conical in form and contain sub-floor tomb burials with elaborate artifacts made from materials that were imported from as far away as the Plains and the Gulf Coast. The authors point out that Hopewellian peoples appear to have lived in societies where there were noticeable differences in social inequality. Those of higher status were buried in mounds. By AD 500, this elaborate episode of mound construction and trade faded from the landscape.

During the succeeding Late Woodland stage, a new mound building culture developed in Wisconsin. Between AD 700 and AD 1200, thousands of mounds were built within the southern two thirds of Wisconsin, northern Illinois, northeastern Iowa, and eastern Minnesota. The greatest concentration of these mounds occurs in Wisconsin. They were often built in groups or chains and in the forms of avian, terrestrial and aquatic shaped animals along with small conical mounds, linear mounds, and occasionally anthropomorphic forms.

These mounds often contain burials. Archaeologists refer collectively to the builders of these animal-shaped mounds as Effigy Mound Culture. For nearly a century and a half, archaeologists have attempted to explain the purpose of these mounds. Archaeologists have interpreted effigy mounds as totemic lineage markers, territorial markers, and even astronomical markers. Additionally, archaeologists have sought to establish direct cultural connections between prehistoric effigy mound builders and specific modern historic Indian tribes.

The authors add a relatively new approach to the interpretation of effigy mounds. Like previous researchers, they believe that effigy mounds functioned in part as burial places, ceremonial centers, and territorial markers. However, Birmingham and Eisenberg go one step further by interpreting the meaning of the mound forms. They suggest that effigy mounds can be viewed as maps to prehistoric ideological systems. The authors focus on the cosmology or world view of historic Indian peoples, particularly the Ho-Chillic (Winnebago). Much of their data is derived from the oral testimony of Indian informants that was collected by historians, archaeologists, and ethnographers.

In this view, the authors recognize that some Great Lakes historic Indian peoples viewed their world as being comprised of two tiers of life and of supernatural forces. According to the authors, this view includes an upper-world consisting of sky or avian life forces and a lower-world represented by terrestrial life forms and water spirit creatures. The authors believe that effigy mound forms can be grouped into the above-mentioned cosmological categories. Therefore, the authors argue that the mounds represent a material link between an ancient ideological belief system and that of historic Indians.

Although this is a plausible explanation, at present it is very difficult to test scientifically. This is mainly due to the fact that we do not know how far back in time modern Indian belief systems can be reliably traced. Most archaeologists would agree that it is much easier to trace a people back in time by comparing stylistic similarities in material culture (artifacts such as stone tools, ceramics, dwellings, etc.) than to compare similarities in ideology (religion, beliefs, etc.). So far, professional archaeologists have not been able to establish indisputable material links between Effigy Mound Culture and any single modern Indian tribe. However, the authors do make a valuable contribution to the interpretation of effigy mounds by suggesting an alternative explanation to the meanings of the mounds than those traditionally held by contemporary archaeologists. Although we do not know the entire role that these mounds played in prehistoric societies, we do know that Effigy Mound Culture ended by approximately AD 1200. This may have been in part due to the development of new cultural patterns influenced by the arrival of new peoples from the south.

By AD 900, a new cultural pattern was present in Wisconsin. The Mississippian Tradition is defined by the archaeological appearance of shell-tempered ceramics, intensive agricultural villages and the construction of temple mounds. Aztalan State Park, Wisconsin's largest prehistoric community, is interpreted as a Middle Mississippian-related village. This site is related to the massive Mississippian site of Cahokia near present day St. Louis. The authors indicate that these communities were headed by a ruling chiefly elite and that the presence of Mississippian people in Wisconsin between AD 900 and AD 1250 may be due to the development of a trading system that included Wisconsin's local Late Woodland inhabitants. For reasons not yet completely understood, Mississippian cultural practices also declined by AD 1250.

The period of AD 1250 to the arrival of Europeans in the 17th century saw little in the way of mound building activities in Wisconsin. Some cultures continued to hunt and gather while others such as the Oneota practiced intensive corn, beans, and squash agriculture supplemented with hunting and gathering. The authors discuss the possible relationships between these late prehistoric cultures and modern Indian tribes. They also discuss the impact of European diseases, and the technologies, economies and religions on indigenous cultures.
Birmingham and Eisenberg conclude with a discussion of the laws that protect mounds and other types of archaeological sites in Wisconsin. They emphasize the need for preserving these nonrenewable cultural resources for future Wisconsinites. Additionally, the authors recognize the importance of increased collaboration between public, professional archaeologists, and Native American communities. Finally, the book contains a bibliographic notes section, a bibliography, and a detailed appendix of selected mound sites located on public lands in Wisconsin that can be visited by the reader.

Overall, this is a well-written summary of the rich prehistoric archaeological record of Wisconsin, with particularly good coverage of mound building cultures. It will appeal to the student of North American prehistory as well as to the general public. I intend to add Indian Mounds of Wisconsin to my list of readings for my Wisconsin Archaeology course.

**Recommended Readings**


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