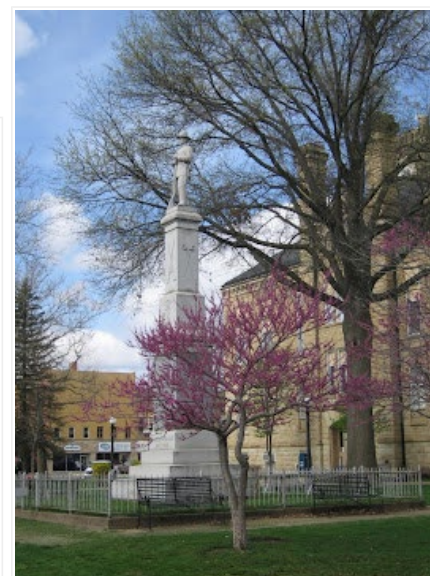


SUNDAY, JULY 15, 2012

A vanished archaeological treasure



Lucas County Civil War Memorial

ABOUT THAT DANGED BLOGGER



Frank D. Myers

Chariton, Iowa, United States

1. Southern Iowan. Who can measure the importance of place? 2. Queer, cranky and getting older. 3. Vietnam veteran. 4. Certified skeptic: Secular humanist with a Lutheran and Unitarian Universalist past

I've been thinking I wanted to write (without expenditure or too much effort) about a Lucas County archaeological site deemed worthy for the National Register of Historic Places that we now drive over on a regular basis, courtesy of the Iowa Department of Transportation. Remembered its discovery and the location, but neither the timing nor the exact circumstances.

Then a couple of weeks ago I found photographs (those used here) in the University of Iowa's [Iowa Digital Library](#) of the September 1986 archaeological dig that assessed the site. And last week, the alternate Frank (Mitchell) pulled from his files copies of two newspaper articles needed to get underway. Serendipity happens.



Lucas County always has been fairly rich ground for hunters of artifacts --- projectile points and other items. We have a couple of small collections at the museum and I nearly cried a week or so ago while reading about another collection, that of the late Harry LaRue --- sold years ago at a garage sale. LaRue had worked in conjunction with an archaeologist at times during the first half of the 20th century, so parts of that collection could be documented.

So there's interest in the remnants of our predecessors on this land, even though artifacts sometimes mistakenly are associated with historic tribes --- the Ioway, the Sauk, the Meskwaki, all of whom with the exception of a few holdouts had been pushed west by the time Euro-American pioneers rolled in. Or the native peoples encountered by early Lucas County settlers -- - Prairie Band Potawatomi, who had lived in southwest Iowa 1836-46 before being forced into "Indian Territory" but then returned for many years to hunt across southern Iowa.

The artifacts here are far older, many of them associated with people of the Woodland period, A.D. 300 to 1,000 or so, when the valleys and bluffs of most southern Iowa streams --- including the Chariton River, the South Chariton, White Breast and the Cedar --- were as intensively occupied by native people as they ever would be. Their burial mounds lined high ridges and their gardens and fields were planted in rich bottomlands.

At some point, perhaps about A.D. 900, an extended family or tribal group established its winter camp on the hillside above what we now call White Breast Creek, just south of the town of Lucas. Somehow, for more than 1,000 years that site escaped the plow --- nor was it picked over or excavated by artifact hunters.

Then, in the 1980s, the Iowa Department of Transportation came along, deciding to relocate the intersection of Highways 65 and 34 at Lucas

and Episcopallean leanings. My life, as does everyone else's, involves living contradictions with as much grace as possible.

[View my complete profile](#)

CHARITON'S SQUARE DEAL BLOG



Chariton's historic buildings, developed for the Lucas County Historical Society and Chariton Historic Preservation Commission.

THE MALLORY'S CASTLE BLOG

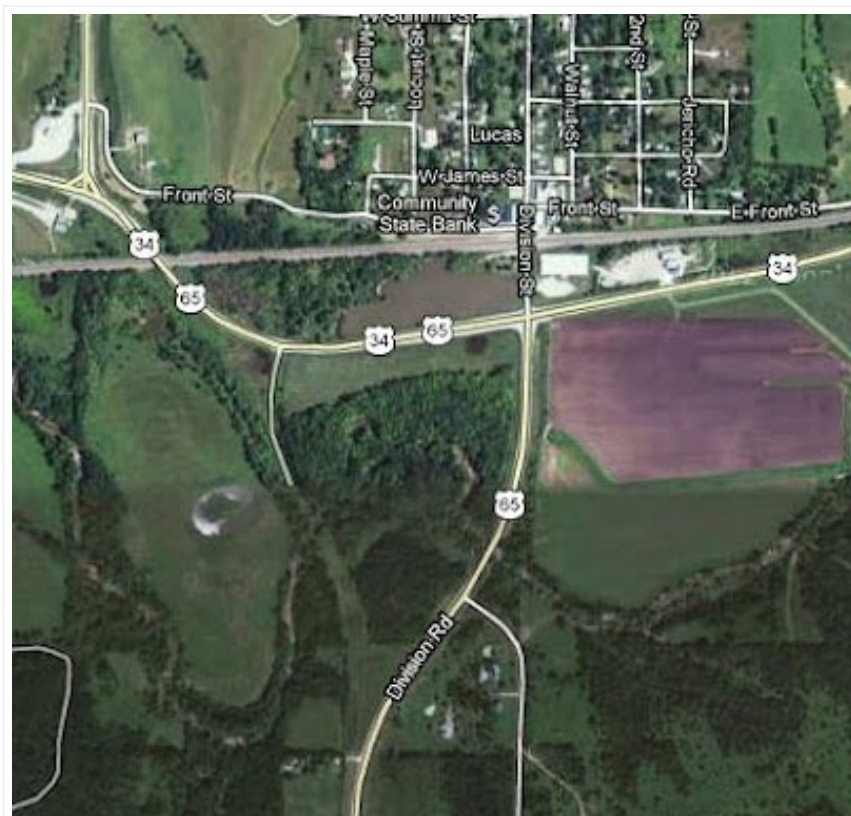


A new blog devoted to the life and times of Smith H. Mallory, his family, his house (the Iliou, or Mallory's Castle) and early Chariton. Click on the photo to go there.

COAL MINING IN LUCAS COUNTY



by moving it some distance east and building a new bridge across the creek. This map gives an idea of what happened. If you look at the wishbone shape in the lower center, you can see the old Highway 65 route swinging to the left; the 1980s route, to the right.



An archaeological survey was required before the DOT could start construction, however, and in 1986 those assessing the hill rising south of the White Breast directly in the path of new highway construction found that winter camp virtually undisturbed, so much a rarity in south central Iowa that it was deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

In the end, the DOT declined to redesign the approach to the intersection, commissioned a full-scale archaeological dig to record the site and remove the artifacts it contained. The results were boxed up and put into storage. So in that manner, a piece of Lucas County's living history died.

- [1. Black Diamonds, Part 1](#)
- [2. Black Diamonds, Part 2 \(William Haven\)](#)
- [3. Black Diamonds, Part 3](#)
- [4. Coal mining, Cleveland launched \(1877\)](#)
- [5. Two Days in Old Cleveland \(1887\)](#)
- [6. Black Diamonds, Part 4](#)
- [7. Visit to New Cleveland & Whitebreast No. 4](#)
- [Gray, Thomas \(1880\)](#)

DEATH IN THE MINES

- [Baux, Jacob \(1918\)](#)
- [Davies, Roger \(1876\)](#)
- [Fry, Shadrack \(1880\)](#)
- [Gardiner, James \(1937\)](#)
- [Jukes, William \(1880\)](#)
- [Lancey, David \(1923\)](#)
- [Reese, John \(1888\)](#)
- [Rennie, Robert \(1879\)](#)
- [Roberts, Robert \(1888\)](#)

BLACK LIVES MATTER



Theopolis Gibson

- [Baker, Frederick: County's black Civil War loss](#)
- [Carter, Eliza Ann \(Life & Times\)](#)
- [Gibson, Theopolis \(Life & Times\)](#)
- [Iowa Bystander correspondents](#)
- [Juneteenth vs. Emancipation Day](#)
- [Kay, John \(Cemetery Heritage Tour\)](#)
- [Kay, John, & the Jeffers Family Part 1](#)



Here's how those newspaper articles tell the story, the first from The Chariton Leader of Nov. 1, 1988:

The discovery of an Indian village dating as far back as 1,000 years ago has put an Iowa Department of Transportation project to relocate the intersection of highways 65 and 34 on hold.

The site near Lucas may be important enough to merit consideration for placement on the National Register of Historic Places, according to Randy Faber, an official in the DOT's department of planning.

Faber said officials are now trying to decide whether to redesign the intersection project to avoid the site or to go ahead with the original plan, doing a full-scale archaeological dig to recover artifacts before undertaking construction.

Preliminary studies of the site reveal that it may have been inhabited for as long as six months by a number of people, according to Carl Merry, project director of the Highway Archaeology Program at the State Archaeologist's Office in Iowa City.

Some 1,200 artifacts were recovered from the site during a 1986 excavation, indicating the site was used for day-to-day living more than 1,000 years ago, Merry said.

Among the artifacts discovered were chert flakes, or waste chips discarded from tool-making; arrow point fragments; hematite and iron ore used for making red pigments used in ceremonial practices; and ceramic pot shards. In addition, there is evidence of burials taking place on the site.

Dating of the pot shards indicated Indians using the site belonged to the Woodland Culture, dating from 500-900 A.D. The type of shards discovered seems to show that the site was occupied during the latter part of that period.

Merry said the site is considered important, because it is relatively undisturbed.

"There are about 12,000 archaeological sites in Iowa, but many of them are in plowed fields. An unplowed important site is becoming more rare in

- [Kay, John, & the Jeffers Family Part 2](#)
- [Kay, John, & the Jeffers Family Part 3](#)
- [Martin, William \(Benjamin Alexander\)](#)
- [Martin, William \(G.A.R. flag holder for\)](#)
- [Mason, Anderson: County's first black voter](#)
- [Mathis, Dudley \(Slave or Free?\)](#)
- [Owsley, Jane, Dallas, Martha & Henry](#)
- [Rhinehart, Charles & Newton](#)
- [Wright Family \(Farmers & Miners\)](#)

THE RICHMONDS

- [1. Romulus R. Richmond's photograph](#)
- [2. Meet Aunt Lillie Richmond](#)
- [3. Lillie Richmond & children at rest](#)

GEORGE TODD

- [Part 1: From Slavery to Chariton](#)
- [Part 2: Enslaved in Missouri](#)
- [Part 3: Encounters With the Media](#)

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

- [Barnes, A.C., & Coker F. Clarkson](#)
- [Barnes, A.C., & his Washington hand press](#)
- [Underground Railroad at Melrose, Part 1](#)
- [Underground Railroad at Melrose, Part 2](#)

THE KU KLUX KLAN IN LUCAS AND WAYNE COUNTIES, IOWA



- [The Klan in Lucas County \(Part 1\)](#)
- [The Klan in Lucas County \(Part 2\)](#)
- [Chariton's Ku Klux Klan headquarters building](#)
- [The Klan in Lucas County: Loose Ends](#)
- [The Klan in Lucas County: Updates](#)
- [About those Ku Klux Klan snapshots](#)
- [The Ku Klux Klan in Wayne County \(Part 1\)](#)
- [The Ku Klux Klan in Wayne County \(Part 2\)](#)
- [The Ku Klux Klan in Wayne County \(Part 3\)](#)

CHARITON AND KLONDIKE GOLD



- [1. Klondike Gold: Prelude](#)
- [2. Klondike Gold: John Bentley's demise](#)
- [3. Klondike Gold: Starling Riggins' hard luck](#)
- [4. Klondike Gold: Charley Rose comes home](#)

STRONG WOMEN

- [Branner, Virginia M.](#)
- [Lewis, Sarah Lucretia](#)
- [McAfee, Dr. Dora Wyland](#)
- [Talboy, Capt. Helen Mahony](#)

HENRY T. HIESTER, MASTER PHOTOGRAPHER

Iowa," Merry said.

The Woodland Culture falls in the middle of Iowa's prehistorical period, Merry said. "By then there were a lot of technological improvements indicating that people had some control over their environment."

Woodland Indians are characterized by the use of ceramic pottery. They also had a developed agriculture, rather than a simple nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle, Merry said.

Merry's office is recommending a full-scale dig if the highway project cannot be redesigned to avoid the site. Merry cautioned potential souvenir hunters that it is a criminal misdemeanor to disturb an archaeological site.

It should be noted that there are far more than 12,000 archaeological sites in Iowa --- no one, including archaeologists, really know. Interesting ones tend to turn up during construction projects and meet the same fate as the Lucas site.

Here's the second article, from the Herald-Patriot of July 20, 1989:

The National Register of Historic Places has decided that a prehistoric Indian site near Lucas is eligible for listing as a significant part of America's past.

The site, however, lies in the path of a project to reroute the intersection of Highways 34 and 65, and the Department of Transportation intends to proceed with its original plans for the area, according to Randy Faber of the DOT's department of planning.

That means the DOT will have to contract for an archaeological dig at the site to recover as many artifacts and as much information as possible before construction can begin, Faber said.

Archaeologists working at the site under a preliminary study for the DOT in 1986 uncovered what they believe is a Woodland-era Indian village, dating back more than 1,000 years ago.

Surveys reveal that the area was occupied by a number of people for perhaps as long as six months, according to Carl Merry of the State Archaeologist's Office.

Evidence of such day to day living activities as flint knapping, pottery making and religious ceremonies were found, along with several burial mounds.

Officials with the National Register of Historic Places said in a letter to the DOT the area was significant because of its undisturbed nature.

In addition, it's considered to be a "single component" site, meaning what's been found so far leads scientists to believe the area was devoted to a single activity at a specific time, uncontaminated by other artifacts from a different Indian culture.

Such undisturbed sites are "rare in south-central Iowa," officials with the State Historical Department wrote in a letter to the National Register.

More than 1,200 artifacts were discovered there in the 1986 survey, including arrow points and waste chips from stone tool making, pottery shards, and hematite, an iron ore used for producing red pigments for ceremonial practices.

Characteristics of the pottery fragments indicate the site was occupied during the latter part of the Woodland Period, which extended from 500-900 A.D., according to Merry.

The Woodland Period is considered to be about midway in Iowa's prehistoric era, with people beginning to show some mastery over the environment.

Faber said the National Historic Preservation Act requires the DOT to recover information from the site if it's decided that a project redesign is not feasible.

It is unlikely that a dig will be conducted at the site this year since archaeologists are unusually busy with other DOT projects this summer, Faber said. While no contract has been extended, it's more probable that excavations will take place in 1990.

Another consideration on the timing of the excavation is that the DOT wants to gain ownership of the site so that recovered artifacts become the property of the state, he added. Technically, all artifacts found to date belong to the person now owning the land.

Once recovered and analyzed, the artifacts likely would be curated in a museum or college.


Merry, of the State Archaeologists's office, noted that it is a misdemeanor to collect artifacts from an unidentified historic site.

The excavation must be fully completed before highway construction can begin. Faber said the starting date for the intersection project hasn't been announced.

Posted by [Frank D. Myers](#) at 5:34 AM

1 comment:

[Steve Hanken](#) said...

 I just would like to say there is a possibility you can retrieve artifacts from this excavation from the state for display in your museum. I have seen ownership transfers in the past between Museums and the State Archaeologist Office. That "dead shelf space" is both costly and getting



- [1. Henry T. Hiester: Chariton's minor role](#)
- [2. Henry T. Hiester: New Mexico, 1870-80](#)
- [3. Henry T. Hiester: Chariton years, 1884-6](#)
- [4. Henry T. Hiester: Death & Texas, 1886-95](#)
- [5. Henry T. Hiester: Loose ends](#)



THE CHARITONE

- [01. Good news for the Charitone](#)
- [02. Chariton's modern new hotel](#)
- [03. The Charitone WILL rise again](#)
- [04. Charitone memories and barbers](#)
- [05. Inside looking out](#)
- [06. The Elbow Room and more](#)
- [07. A little Annex analysis](#)
- [08. Jay Leno and the Hotel Charitone](#)
- [09. The sign comes down](#)
- [10. Inside the Charitone: Looking out](#)