

# Stepping Back in Time

The Chariton River Valley has provided a sense of home to Euro-American settlers and their associated farming activities since 1842 with the land cession from the Sac and Fox Tribes occurred. Communities and towns sprung up answering the needs of the growing influx of settlers' intent on making a life for themselves and their families. Immigrants from Croatia, Ireland, and Italy formed the labor force critical in mining coal deposits in Appanoose County during the first part of the Twentieth century. While modern society has relocated the hubs of businesses providing the physical needs of a community, remnants of the small communities (Milledgeville, Iconium, Darby, Walnut City) and neighborhoods (Griffingsville, Brushy Creek) in the Rathbun Lake area continue to provide stability to residents who continue to call this area home. The Iowa Indians used the area as a westward migration corridor; but none of

the three Native American tribes (Iowa, Sac and Fox) in the area established long term camps in the Chariton River area. Migrating Mormons trekked through the area in 1839 and 1840. The first record of Euro-Americans on the Upper Chariton was a company of dragoons surveying the area in 1832. The Upper Chariton River itself has been documented on maps as early as 1802. Personal accounts in 1796 described the area above the mouth of the "Charaton". Osage and French traders referred to the river as the "Charatonscarty".

Since the 1940's, prehistoric visitors in the Chariton River and Valley area have been documented by numerous archeological field surveys and investigations. With the assistance of local landowners, groupings of mounds have been identified on ridge tops overlooking the Chariton River Valley and adjoining creeks as well as along the river bottoms. Testing/trench-

ing, soil borings of the significant mound groups and investigation of find sites were professionally conducted by the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution prior to impoundment of the waters of Rathbun Lake. These sites were documented as Iowa Site Records. Extensive archaeological surveys were conducted in the 1960's due to planned recreation areas on public lands surrounding Rathbun Lake. Thirteen archaeological professional reports have been written on studies conducted on Rathbun Lake area lands between 1949 and 2000. Each archaeological survey includes an inventory of known sites, a site evaluation of artifacts located, recording of new sites, cataloging of artifacts and recommendations for additional or no additional investigations. Past archaeological surveys and literature searches are used to locate documented historical sites and to determine if planned development activities will have an impact on the historic site. Planned development activities have included construction of wetlands, recreation area development, shoreline protection, trail development, downstream discharges, utility corridors, and other earth moving activities. Major surveys have been contracted out to Historical/Archaeological professionals; the US Army Corps of Engineers, Kansas City District, has a professional archaeologist who coordinates with the Lake Project Cultural Resource Coordinator on the initial investigation and literature search for planned development activities. All surveys and information obtained are coordi-

nated with the Iowa State Historic Preservation Office who provides a state recommendation of action.

Upon hearing the archaeological term, groupings of mounds, many may associate this term with the well known Effigy Mounds of sculptured bear and bird shapes in northwest Iowa or the 109 man-made



earthen mounds at the Cahokia Mounds, an ancient city, east of St. Louis. The mounds of the Rathbun Lake area are conical in shape with groupings of up

to 12 mounds. A good example of the mounds typically found at Rathbun Lake is located in the Honey Creek State Park. The Woodland Interpretive Trail wanders a quarter of a mile among a series ten mounds. Past archaeological surveys suggest the influence of the Woodland Period dating back to 2800 to 1200 years ago characterized by pottery, burial mounds, and food storage. Habitation sites for the Woodland Culture have also been identified in the Chariton River Valley based on ceramics. There is little to indicate other culture periods in the documented prehistoric sites.

Persons need to be aware that it is against the law, and for that matter, many laws, to destroy or remove cultural artifacts from public lands. Pillagers of mounds find sites, and historic sites will be prosecuted by state and federal laws. Once an artifact is removed from its location and not professionally curated, the significance and historical value is lost forever. The stolen or removed artifact becomes just a pretty trinket lost to history. The best way to preserve history is to assure that it is not destroyed and that it is appreciated for its value and understanding in the development of a culture, society or area.



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