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THE INDIAN MOUND THAT WAS TO MAKE TAMPA FAMOUS

By J. RAYMOND WILLIAMS

Although most people think Tampa is famous for its cigars, subtropical climate, or even the Super Bowl, there was an early twentieth century amateur archaeologist who thought Tampa would always be famous as a result of his discoveries. These discoveries, found when two local men dug into an Indian mound in their back yard, included human skulls with horns and with teeth growing out the sides of their jaws. If this weren't enough to make Tampa famous, the skeletons were said to be buried in a pattern which would prove that the origin of the great civilizations in prehistoric America could be traced to a mythical Welsh Prince.

Recently, I wrote a paper on the growth of knowledge in archaeology in the Tampa Bay area for presentation at a local symposium. This required the rereading of most of the accounts of early excavations and excavators in the immediate Tampa Bay environs, but did not allow me to deal fully with their activities - something I thought would be of interest and now have the opportunity to do.

Two facts struck me during the preparation of the symposium paper. The first was the absence of much literature, even local newspaper accounts; and, second, the destruction, so early, of the Tampa Bay area's most important archaeological sites without an adequate account of what was found, how it was found, where it was found, and what was found with it—all essential information needed to describe the function of prehistoric or early historic sites, and to be able to say much about how these

Indians lived. A modern archaeologist's first thought is one of despair about each of these two facts. The contextual information has been lost—indeed, never recorded, and the residue of activities, which we call artifacts, dispersed to unknown places. Of course, these were not really archaeologists; they



The sign reads "The Grave of Mystery will be Excavated and over it Erected a Mystery Mortuary and Miracle Museum under the direction of Mel Morris, Hotel Knox, Tampa." It was never built. The handwritten sign at the top of the photograph states "Bones are not to be handled."

were individuals who had an overwhelming curiosity about the content of Indian burial mounds and villages. And, even though the sites were not excavated by the rigorous and precise methods we use today and no detailed records were kept, these early

"archaeologists" did not dig for personal gain. They dug out of curiosity about their prehistoric predecessors. Things have changed today, I thought, until I recalled numerous surreptitious digging activities reported to me in past years (usually without the landowner's permission or on public lands), and the prehistoric and historic sites I have seen that looked like they had been used for bombing ranges after relic collectors, like a species of giant gopher tortoise, had dug into them. Their excavation methods have been referred to by one Florida archaeologist as the "rape and pillage" method. These are not amateur or avocational archaeologists who have a genuine interest in Florida's past; they are people who loot to collect, trade, or sell the labor of past individual's activities. In that sense, their activities are worse than what was occurring 100 or more years ago, since they have no interest in reconstructing extinct cultural systems. Indeed, they have no real appreciation for the accomplishments of the people who once lived where we live today and have no interest in those things that governed their daily lives.

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In comparison, the characters involved in the first excavations in the Tampa area had curiosity, and even though their interpretations frequently border on the absurd, they did not wantonly destroy what took the first inhabitants of Tampa Bay millenia to accomplish.

Several points need to be made to better understand the problems faced by these early excavators. First, humans have lived in Florida for over 10,000 years and this long



Display of Conch Shells (left) and Skeletal material from the Tampa Mound.

time span is broken into periods, based on technological, social, and other changes, different site types, and numerous other changes in artifact styles. Just as European prehistory is divided into the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze, and Iron ages (we all know of those divisions), American prehistory is similarly divided based on somewhat different criteria. For example, certain shapes of projectile points may be characteristic of a period that ranges from 6000 to 2000 years B.C.; ceramics did not appear until 2000 B.C. in the Tampa Bay area, and mounds for the burial of the dead did not appear until around A.D. 1, and so on. Through time, prehistoric peoples learned to be more and more efficient at exploiting their environment for food and other resources and this efficiency is reflected in changes in tool types, ceramics and other artifacts and

site types. The early archaeologists did not realize there had been a great span of occupation and tried to fit all sites into a single period. One must remember that absolute dating techniques are quite recent. Radiocarbon dating was not discovered until 1947 and not really used in archaeology until the 1950s. Second, most did not associate the large and complex mound sites with American Indians. Indians were considered a barbaric race and these barbarians or their

ancestors could not possibly, they thought, be responsible for the large, complex and patterned site formations which, to construct, would require a considerable breadth of knowledge and complex social systems. They looked for answers in Egyptian, or Incan, or other cultural systems to explain the presence of site features such as temple mounds in Florida. Last, they did not have the techniques and skills used in archaeology today. They did not understand the law of association or know the value of stratigraphy. They did not have the zooarchaeological skills or the advances in chemical and physical analyses of cultural materials, soils, etc. that we have today. They did not consider it useful to carefully excavate, record and analyze all cultural material and soil, or understand the site's environmental context. Thus they were handicapped since a foundation of scientific knowledge did not exist which could be used to better interpret the findings. Today, there is no excuse for destroying our few remaining prehistoric sites without proper excavation techniques, recording of materials, and analysis.

This story relates to one specific site and the early Tampa archaeologists who dug and reported upon it. The early Tampan who wrote about the site was Joseph J. Hall, who in 1928 was Secretary of an organization called the Florida Archaeological Society. The article was titled "Mystery of the Mound Builders: First Preliminary Archaeological Explorations of Tampa Mound, discovered by George Henriquez. It is the only known publication of this archaeological society and Hall's report is a mixture of asking the wrong questions, wild imagination, and exaggeration.

Finding where the mound once stood was the result of the tenacity of a University of South Florida undergraduate student in

anthropology, Mr. Roger Bumpas. He was assisted by Dr. Lyman O. Warren, a well-known amateur archaeologist from St. Petersburg who has made significant contributions to an understanding of Florida archaeology, Mr. Tony Pizzo, who seems to know and remember everything, Ms. Holly Pardi, a graduate of USF with an anthropology degree who searched the County Court House property records, and personnel at the USF Special Collections Library. It was these individuals who did the hard and time-consuming work.

The story of the mound that was to make Tampa famous began around April 1, 1928 when Mr. Ulysses Parodi and Mr. George Henriquez (the name Henriquez is used in the article written by J.J. Hall about the mound, although a Tampa Tribune article about the dig refers to him as George Hernandez) began digging in an Indian mound on Mr. Parodi's property on Nassau Street between Manhattan Avenue and Hubert Avenue. They recovered between 34 and 39 skeletons, depending on the source of information, broken pots, conch shells, stone and stone implements, and some things simply referred to as "trinkets."

Prior to digging, modern archaeologists ask questions about sites which will give us answers relevant to the discipline or the prehistory of the area. We call these 11 research designs." J.J. Hall, who wrote about the excavation, also asked questions which he thought the recovered burials and cultural materials from the mound would answer. His major questions were "Who were the Mound Builders? Where did they come from? Where did they go?" He was not simply interested in collecting and selling artifacts or bones. He was asking questions he thought the recovered materials from the mound could answer. Unfortunately, he was asking the wrong questions. The "Mound

Builder" controversy had been settled 50 years earlier by professional archaeologists, but was not accepted as fact by much of the general public; and, interestingly enough, continues to be asked by many individuals today. When early explorers saw and dug into the large mound sites in the eastern United States, they were intrigued by their size, complexity and the fine workmanship of their contents. Such monumental architecture was not, they thought, a result of activities by ancestors of modern Indians. Racial and ethnic biases were definitely a great part of the reason they believed this. How, they thought, could the ancestors of simple village horticulturalists or hunters and gatherers living in small bands or villages, as the Indians were living in the Colonial Period, be descendents of such an intelligent "race?" They looked elsewhere for explanations, as stated earlier-to Egypt, China, Mexico, or Europe, not realizing that the great "civilizations" that had developed in eastern North America (referred to by archaeologists as the Mississippian Period and dating from about A.D. 900 to 1350) had changed rapidly prior to European contact. Too, they looked for, expected to see, and saw, things that did not exist except in active imaginations.

This is what happened to Joseph Hall. Hall stated that the burial formation at the Tampa Mound was in circles and squares with the central figure standing up in the center and the others in circles of 12 around him. How this added up to 34 or 39, the body count, is not stated! Since Mr. Hall evidently did not see the site or the burials as they were excavated, he had to rely on hearsay from the diggers. He grasped at the hearsay, however. Furthermore, his beliefs were reinforced by listening to hearsay about burials from another site nearby. This site was a mound in Ruskin, Florida, which, according to rumor, contained 65 burials, all found

kneeling in a circle around a giant in the center who was over 8 feet tall.

Hall traces this burial pattern to the mythical Welsh Prince Madoc, who, according to a fifteenth century Welsh poem, was said to have sailed in 10 ships and discovered America in the twelfth century. Prince Madoc was also the subject of Robert Southey's early eighteenth century poem "Madoc," and burial patterns in circles and squares were written about in Southey's "History of the Great Southern Empire," which was fiction rather than history, though this did not seem to matter to Joseph Hall. Southey had traced the origin of this type of burial pattern to the influence of Prince Madoc.

If the discovery of a pre-Columbus European influence on burial mode was not enough to make Tampa famous, the skeletons themselves would, thought Mr. Hall. According to Hall, they were examined by students, doctors, archaeologists, anthropologists and a - Doctor of Phrenology." Yet, ignoring normal human variation and sexual dimorphism, of which he must have been aware, Hall stated that they were a "mixed race." The larger ones were men, the others of European ancestry, according to Hall. The European ancestors were Welsh, I presume! What makes them so unusual, and was to make Tampa famous, was that Hall stated that they had teeth growing where teeth do not grow today, and some of them had horns. Hall stated that "one unique specimen alone is enough to bring worldwide fame to Mr. Henriquez and Tampa among scientists all over the world who will be interested and will come to Tampa to see and investigate this remarkable type of skull." Furthermore, he stated that the finds "will bring more world-wide publicity to Tampa among

students, educators, scientists and everyone than any other find made in America."

These unique skull characteristics confirmed, to Hall, that the specimens belonged to a separate race, the "Mound Builders," and that the burial pattern confirmed that the Mound Builders had their origin in Europe. Thus, he had answered, once and for all, the question of the origin of the Mound Builders. Most Americans, being of European descent, did not find it difficult to believe that all important events have their origin in European cultures. Hall was, of course, wrong on both counts. There has never been a circle and square (with one individual in the center) burial pattern uncovered by professional (or amateur) archaeologists. Neither have there ever been skeletons recovered with characteristics, such as horns, discussed by Hall. The teeth are undoubtedly unerupted third molars, which often come in at odd angles; and the horns, based on the photograph in Hall's article, are portions of the supraorbital torus, or eyebrow ridge.

Yet, I am still told stories by some lay individuals today who claim to have seen "wagon-wheel" burials and other oddities. The macabre is obviously often more interesting than the truth-look at the success of Erich von Daniken's books and his fantasies about ancient astronauts. As a professional archaeologist, I frequently hear stories that have their origin in active imaginations.

Thus, to answer a question the way he wanted to answer it, Hall had to be blind to reality. He had to create physical characteristics and burial patterns which did not exist. The alternative would have been to ask a different question, one which did not interest him, or the public, at that time.

Tampa, however, went on to become famous, even without the Indian mound.