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ARCHEOLOGY OF THE TAMPA BAY AREA

by RIPLEY P. BULLEN

The Tampa Bay region includes the west coast of Florida from Tarpon Springs to Sarasota, or the three counties of Pinellas, Hillsborough, and Manatee; and its archeology is better known than that of any comparable region of the State. Nevertheless, in spite of the large amount of work which has been done on this area, there are many *lacunae* in our data. We are just beginning to glimpse the dynamics involved, and much work is required before we will have an adequate understanding of the prehistory of this area.

The first comprehensive information on the Tampa Bay region is that published by S. T. Walker in 1880. He surveyed the area, described and located sites, and differentiated between burial mounds, domiciliary mounds, and shell middens.¹ In 1881 he examined a twelve-foot section at Cedar Keys and presented his ideas regarding chronology and a pottery sequence.² His estimate of a thousand years as the age of the oldest pottery producing shell heaps is not greatly different from that accepted by modern archeologists a few years ago.³ His conclusions that "The key to the whole matter is a critical study of ancient pottery," was both sound and modern.

Around the turn of the century, Clarence B. Moore toured Florida in a steamboat and dug in a great many burial mounds. His publications, profusely illustrated, form a valuable catalogue

This article is a revised version of a paper presented before the Annual Meeting of The Florida Historical Society in St. Petersburg, March 30, 1951.

1. S. T. Walker, "Preliminary Explorations among the Indian Mounds in Southern Florida," *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for the year 1879* pp. 392-413. Washington.
2. S. T. Walker, "The Aborigines of Florida," *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for the year 1881*, pp. 677-680. Washington.
3. John M. Goggin, "A Revised Temporal Chart of Florida Archeology," *The Florida Anthropologist*, Vol. I, Nos. 3/4, pp. 57-60. Gainesville.

of the specimens he uncovered.⁴ Unfortunately, Moore did not have Walker's studious approach to and appreciation of problems, so that much data, which we greatly need, was not recorded.

F. H. Cushing, in 1897 while waiting to go to Key Marco, reexamined the Safford mound at Tarpon Springs and uncovered 600 skeletons.⁵ Little more occurred after that until 1924 when J. W. Fewkes excavated at the famous Weeden Island site in St. Petersburg.⁶ In 1929 and 1930 M. W. Stirling worked at the Safety Harbor site.⁷ During 1933-4 archeological work was done in Hillsborough County by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration under the direction of the Smithsonian Institution.⁸ After the Federal government withdrew supervision, this project was continued with the late J. Clarence Simpson, then with the Florida Geological Survey, as field director. While Simpson published a preliminary report,⁹ it was not until 1952 that this work was adequately made available to students.¹⁰

In 1940 Gordon R. Willey and Richard B. Woodbury tested six sites in northwest Florida and established a chronology based on changes in pottery typology in the manner suggested by

4. Clarence B. Moore, "Certain Antiquities of the Florida West-Coast," *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, Second Series, Vol. 11, Pt. 3, pp. 350-394; "Certain Aboriginal Mounds of the Florida Central West-Coast," *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, Second Series, Vol. 12, Pt. 3, pp. 361-438.
5. Frank H. Cushing, "Exploration of Ancient Key Dwellers Remains on the Gulf Coast of Florida," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 35, pp. 329-432.
6. J. Walter Fewkes, "Preliminary Archeological Explorations at Weeden Island, Florida," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, Vol. 76, No. 13, pp. 1-26. Washington.
7. M. W. Stirling, "Prehistoric Mounds in the Vicinity of Tampa Bay, Florida," *Explorations and Field-work of the Smithsonian Institution in 1929*, pp. 183-6; "Mounds of the Vanished Calusa Indians of Florida," *Explorations and Field-work of the Smithsonian Institution in 1930*, pp. 167-172. Washington.
8. M. W. Stirling, "Smithsonian Archeological Projects conducted under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, 1933-34," *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1931*, pp. 371-400. Washington.
9. J. Clarence Simpson, "Report on Activities in Hillsborough County," *Florida State Board of Conservation, Second Biennial Report*, pp. 109-116. Tallahassee.
10. Ripley P. Bullen, "Eleven Archaeological Sites in Hillsborough County, Florida," *Report of Investigations No. 8, Florida Geological Survey*. Tallahassee.

Walker sixty years before.¹¹ Subsequently, Willey studied Moore's collections and the results of the work done during the 1930's and extended his chronological scheme to central Gulf and Manatee areas.¹² The final presentation, made in 1949, covered all of Florida northwest of Charlotte Harbor and required a 600 page opus.¹³

During 1948-1951 the Archaeological Survey of the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials conducted excavations at Safety Harbor¹⁴ and at Terra Ceia,¹⁵ made tests at Perico Island¹⁶ and at Sarasota,¹⁷ and excavated at Johns Island in the mouth of the Chassahowitzka River a short distance to the north of the Tampa Bay area.¹⁸ Data from this work, which used modern stratigraphic techniques not in general use during the 1930s, give a little different view of the situation than was previously held. Willey's general outline has proved to be correct but, as presented here for the Tampa Bay region, has been modified to take account of the new information.

Prehistory Life

The prehistory of the Tampa Bay area is the story of an indigenous population whose industrial products and ways of life were gradually modified by cultural influences from the north. From the earliest times until their abandonment of the

11. Gordon R. Willey and R. B. Woodbury, "A. Chronoligical Outline for the Northwest Florida Coast," *American Antiquity*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 232-254.
12. Gordon R. Willey, "Culture Sequence for the Manatee Region of West Florida," *American Antiquity*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 209-218.
13. Gordon R. Willey, "Archeology of the Florida Gulf Coast," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, Vol. 113. Washington.
14. John W. Griffin and Ripley P. Bullen, "The Safety Harbor Site, Pinellas County, Florida," *Florida Anthropological Society Publications*, No. 2. Gainesville.
15. Ripley P. Bullen, "The Terra Ceia Site, Manatee County, Florida," *Florida Anthropological Society Publications*, No. 3. Gainesville.
16. Riplev P. Bullen, "Perico Island: 1950." *The Florida Anthropologist*, Vol. III, Nos. 3/4, pp. 40-44.
17. Ripley P. Bullen, "Tests at the Whittaker Site, Sarasota, Florida," *The Florida Anthropologist*, Vol. III, Nos. 1/2 pp. 21-30.
18. Adelaide K. and Ripley P. Bullen, "The Johns Island Site, Hernando County, Florida," *American Antiquity*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 23-45.

region around 1700, life of the inhabitants of the area was closely tied to Tampa Bay and its nearby waters. From these waters came most of their sustenance as evidenced by tremendous shell middens, more recently turned into roads. Even during relatively late times, when agriculture was extensively practised, a considerable portion of their diet was seafood.

Chronology

While one Folsom-like projectile point, found northeast of Tampa,¹⁹ suggests the presence of man at a very early date, no other demonstrably preceramic (pre-2000 B.C.) remains have been found in the Tampa Bay area. Preceramic middens are, however, known for east Florida and it may be assumed man was also present on the Gulf coast at the same time. The western shoreline of Florida, particularly to the north of Tarpon Springs, appears drowned and the Gulf is encroaching upon it at a present rate of about a foot in one hundred years.²⁰ It is possible such remains, if originally close to an old shore line, may have been covered by the advancing sea years ago. As yet but little work has been done along river valleys where early midden deposits might be expected.

The earliest pottery made in Florida was tempered with vegetable fibers, possibly shredded palmetto fibers. Sites of this period, with middens many feet deep, are known for east Florida but have not been found on the Gulf coast. The reason, as in the case of preceramic sites, may be due to the advance of the sea. However, a few fiber-tempered sherds have been found at Perico Island²¹ so we may be sure man was present this early in the Tampa Bay region (*circa* 2000 to 400 B.C.).

At the end of fiber-tempered pottery times (about 400 B.C.), several centers of pottery manufacture developed. On the east

19. J. Clarence Simpson, "Folsom-like Points from Florida," *The Florida Anthropologist*, Vol. I, Nos. 1/2, pp. 11-15.

20. Bullen and Bullen, "Johns Island," p. 42.

21. Willey, "Archeology of the Florida Gulf Coast," p. 179.

coast what we refer to as chalky ware was made without benefit of temper. On the northwest coast and around Tampa Bay and to the south, pottery was tempered with sand. Between these last two areas, around Cedar Keys and Crystal River, crushed limestone was popular as tempering material. Another center, probably of a slightly later date, developed around Lake Okechobee with a peculiar semi-chalky, semi-gritty pottery. Just how and why these centers developed we do not know, but the differences in tempering materials permit us to trace inter-regional influences.

Immediately after fiber-tempered times on the east coast, the earliest chalky pottery is decorated with incised straight lines to form patterns identical with some found on preceding fiber-tempered vessels. Chalky pottery with fiber-tempered types of incised designs is known for Perico Island²² in the Tampa Bay area and has been found in fair amounts at Bayport²³ and at Johns Island²⁴, thirty and forty miles respectively to the north of Tarpon Springs. At the later site limestone-tempered pottery with this decoration was also found in the lowest zones.²⁵ Undoubtedly, deposits of this period will be found in the Tampa Bay region,

After or during this transitional period, the manufacture of undecorated gritty pottery became well established in the Tampa Bay area and for hundreds of years was the only kind of pottery made. Pre-mound levels at the Weeden Island site²⁶ in St. Petersburg and the lowest levels of large shell middens such as those at Maximo Point, Cockroach Key, Shaws Point, Perico Island,

22. *Ibid.*

23. Adelaide K. and Ripley P. Bullen, "The Battery Point Site, Bayport, Hernando County, Florida," *The Florida Anthropologist*, Vol. VI, No. 3, pp. 85-92.

24. Bullen and Bullen, "Johns Island," p. 33.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Fewkes, *op. cit.*; Willey, "Archeology of the Florida Gulf Coast," pp. 108-9.

and the lowest four feet of the fifteen foot Terra Ceia midden²⁷ belong to this time period (circa 400 B.C. to 500 A.D.).

During this period pottery decorated in a manner which we call Deptford and which apparently originated in Georgia was being made in northwest Florida. Influences carrying this type of pottery tended to move southward. While more prominent slightly to the north in the Crystal River region, attenuated Deptford influences penetrated the Tampa Bay area as evidenced by a few fragments found at Maximo Point,²⁸ Perico Island,²⁹ and Shaws Point.³⁰

Still later influences from Georgia helped formed the Santa Rosa-Swift Creek period of northwest Florida. History repeated itself and attenuated influences reached the Tampa Bay region, as typical sherds of this period have been found at Shaws Point.³¹

Life in the Area

We know relatively little about life in the Tampa Bay area during these early times. Some things are, however, evident. The economy was one of food collecting as opposed to food producing. Extensive middens indicate that shellfish was the chief staple, abundantly supplemented with meat from turtles, fishes, deer, birds, and alligators. Other game was no doubt taken, and nuts and roots eaten.

We have little knowledge of the means used to procure these foods. Projectile points were stemmed, fairly large, and, presumably, propelled by means of spear throwers. Stone knives were in common use. Hafted *Strombus* shell hammers and chisels or gouges made from columellae of conches were prominent tools. Fragments of bone pins are also found. Whether they were hair ornaments or awls for more utilitarian uses is not known. Per-

27. Bullen, "The Terra Ceia Site,"

28. John M. Goggin, University of Florida, personal communication.

29. Willey, "Archeology of the Florida Gulf Coast," p. 177.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

31. *Ibid.*

forated *Pecten* shells may have been ornaments for personal adornment. They imply the presence of cordage and hence the probability of nets and snares.

Other tools, which were probably first used in the Tampa Bay area during this period, include shell celts, shell pendants or plummet-shaped objects, shell anvils, perforated *Venus* shells as weights for fishing, *Olivella* shell beads, and hammers and dippers of *Busycon* shells.

We can envision people living on their shell middens, probably with some form of shelter, busily engaged in their everyday occupations most of which, in one form or another, had to do with food. Frequent trips of greater or lesser distances were necessary to procure food and firewood. It is very doubtful if any agriculture was practised this early.

Some of the dead were buried at or in the edge of the expanding shell middens. The use of especially constructed burial mounds for interments probably started during the later part of this period, introduced by the Deptford and Swift Creek influences from the north. Also late in this period or early in the succeeding Weeden Island period, limestone-tempered pottery began to appear to the south of Tampa Bay.³²

Ceramic development of the west coast of Florida reached its height during what we call the Weeden Island period (*circa* 600 to 1400 A.D.). Pottery with graceful, curvilinear decoration made by punctations and incised lines, which is commonly exhibited in local museums, belongs to this period. Zoned areas in red are also typical, albeit somewhat rare. Less spectacularly, pottery was also decorated with imprints of paddles carved with checkerboard or curvilinear designs. In spite of this great exuberance in decoration, much of which seems to have been especially made for funeral use, most pottery of the period was plain.

Weeden Island pottery types are found over an area extend-

32. Bullen, "The Terra Ceia Site," p. 30.

ing from Charlotte Harbor northward well up the Chattahoochee River and westward along the Gulf across Alabama. There was extensive regional intercommunication. Locally this is evidenced by many vessels made of chalky paste, typical of east Florida. Some pottery is tempered with crushed limestone indicating influences from the Crystal River area. Certain plain vessels characteristic of the Lake Okeechobee region are also present.³³ Exquisite carved and ground plummet-like pendants in the form of bird and deer heads were found in the Jones and Thomas burial mounds.³⁴ They were made of a fine grained volcanic rock and must represent trade goods or materials from the north. Another important trait is the importation of greenstone celts either as finished products or as raw material. Projectile points are smaller, suggesting the bow and arrow had been introduced by this time.

Burial mounds were common features of the landscape during Weeden Island times. Many were built with a subsurface base containing charcoal which suggests purification or sanctification. Pottery vessels, either whole or fragmentary, were deposited with or for the dead. Many pottery fragments were included in the mound fill during construction but special pottery offerings were also made. In places where the land was wet, causeways were built to connect these mounds with shell midden village areas, as at Terra Ceia and Shaws Point.

Most of these changes seem to be merely additions to the existing culture of the inhabitants of the Tampa Bay area. There is no break in occupation at large sites at the beginning of Weeden Island times. While agriculture was probably practised, the economic base was still the collecting of food from water, air, and land. Many Indians lived pretty much as their ancestors had on the same expanding shell middens, used to a large extent the same tools, and were buried in the same mounds.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Bullen, "Eleven Archaeological Sites," Figs. 15-16, pp. 48, 50.

Sites were more numerous than in the preceding period and people were more actively participating in a wider geographical horizon, whether or not they realized it. As a result of some agriculture, life was a little easier and more time available for care of the dead. Certainly, an increase in ceremonial life is suggested by the data.

All these things testify to an energetic, increasing population. New features in the culture and its artistic peak suggest cultural cross-fertilization. Very likely these changes were in part brought about by people, relatively few in number, who migrated into the Tampa Bay area.

The cultural climax of the region, in terms of large sites and density of population, occurred during the following Safety Harbor period (*circa* 1400 to 1700 A.D.). This was the period of the Timucuan farmers encountered by the early Spaniards.

The most important feature of the Safety Harbor period in the Tampa Bay area was the successful practise of agriculture, supplemented by animal and sea food, which gave the Indians a stable economy with an excess of storable food and, consequently, more spare time and energy.

Grindstones become common artifacts. Houses with wattle and daub walls were built.³⁵ Pottery, from our viewpoint, declined artistically and was relegated to a strictly utilitarian role. Poorly executed incised designs show connections with the previous Weeden Island period but limestone as tempering material was no longer used. Vessels were technically poorer in construction but the addition of handles made them more easy to use.

A change also occurred in burial forms. Bundle burials are found in Safety Harbor burial mounds and the upper level of otherwise Weeden Island tumuli.³⁶ The dead were exposed to the elements until most ligaments had disappeared, after which the bones were collected and interred, possibly at stated intervals.

35. Griffin and Bullen, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

36. Bullen, "Eleven Archaeological Sites," pp. 11, 47; "The Terra Ceia site," p. 34.

Such was the practice during photo-historic times, and the Spaniard, Ortiz, who was rescued by De Soto, for a while guarded a charnal house at night to keep away wild animals. Archeological proof of this practice was found at Parrish Mound II near the Little Manatee River.³⁷

Mounds

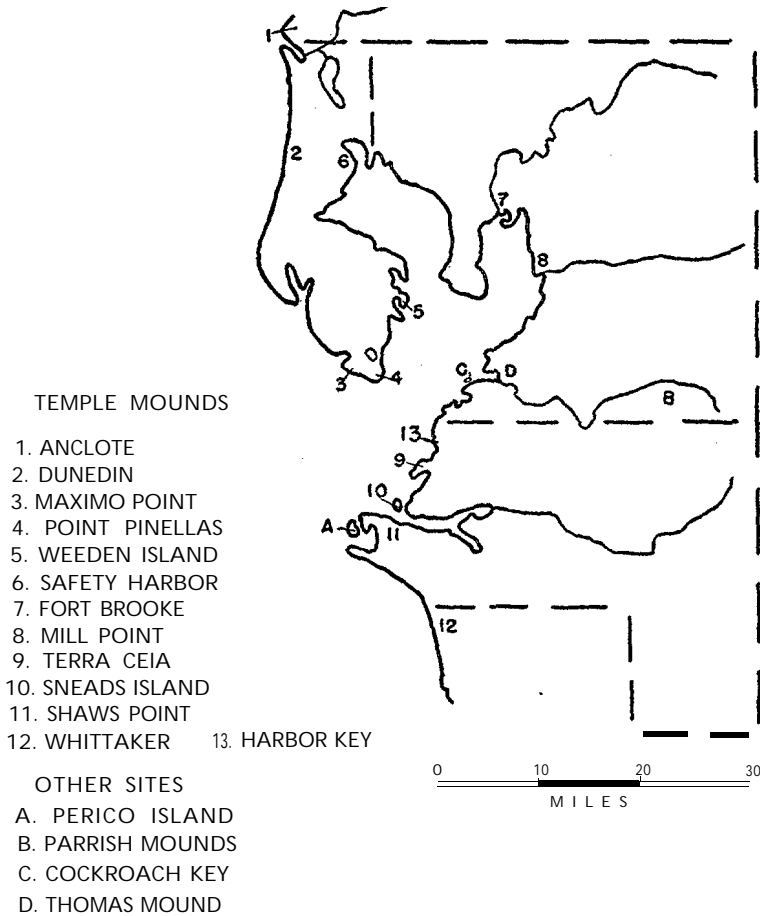
The most spectacular development of the Safety Harbor period in the Tampa Bay area was the building of large pyramidal mounds. These flat-topped, rectangular mounds are usually about twenty feet high and a hundred and fifty feet across at their base. Frequently, the flat top or platform measures about twenty by forty feet. Built in several stages these mounds served as foundations for buildings which, according to early Spanish accounts, were decorated with wooden carvings. We call these structures "temple mounds" on tile assumption these buildings functioned as temples, although they may have been priests' or chiefs' houses.

Temple mounds have ramps along one side which lead towards the village area, but there is a considerable space between them and the village proper which does not produce pottery or other occupational debris. This arrangement is very suggestive of civic planning. No doubt the "town square" was used for games and religious ceremonies.

These mounds represent a vast amount of human effort. The map herewith shows the location of thirteen such edifices from Anclote to Sarasota. This rather large number for such a relatively small area testifies to their importance in the lives of the inhabitants. It is hard to believe such community enterprises would have been completed without a very compelling motive.

With agricultural development there probably arose a pow-

37. Willey, "Archeology of the Florida Gulf Coast," pp. 147-9.



erful class of priests who conducted religious ceremonies which were tied in with the agricultural calendar. Undoubtedly, such ceremonies were held on these temple mounds while the populace viewed them from the "town square." Religion, integrated with food production, would explain the large amount of work which went into the construction of these temple mounds. The whole arrangement, including the construction of temple mounds in stages, is very reminiscent of similar structures in Mexico. Prob-

ably, ideas which originated there eventually resulted in temple mounds in the Tampa Bay area.

At the Safety Harbor site many bone pins were found, some of which were socketed.³⁸ These were parts of hair ornaments. There is reason to believe wooden masks were also made. Festive garb at community fetes may have utilized the artistic urge which in the preceding period found expression in pottery decoration.

Late in the Safety Harbor Period small, narrow, triangular arrow points became the prevailing style.³⁹ These points, temple mounds, and many of the features of Safety Harbor ceramics are common factors of what archaeologists refer to as Mississippian cultures, found more or less throughout the southeast and well up the Mississippi River valley. It was influences from that area which gradually modified the culture of earlier Indians and produced that found by the first whites.

While the Tampa Bay region may have received a few immigrants from the north at the times of these changes, there are too many ties with the previous period to suggest any mass movement of people. Profoundly affected by these changes and culturally oriented towards the north, Indians of the Tampa Bay area did not sever their contacts with the south and east, as chalky pottery and that from the Okeechobee region were found at the Safety Harbor site.⁴⁰

Spanish pottery and pottery made by Indians at Spanish missions in north Florida was found at relatively shallow depths in excavations at the Safety Harbor site.⁴¹ Glass beads, looking glass, and an occasional iron axe or small silver ornament are sometimes found in burial mounds of the Safety Harbor Period.⁴² Some of these show the culture to have lasted into the latter part of the 17th century. There is some indication that crema-

38. Griffin and Bullen, *op. cit.*, Pl. IV, a-b.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 23, 25.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

41. *Ibid.*, 2, 24.

42. Willey, "Archeology of the Florida Gulf Coast," pp. 123-4, 139, 151, 334.

tion of the dead began to be adopted during the historic part of the Safety Harbor period.⁴³

Shortly after 1700, Creek Indians from the north began making raids into north Florida. The most important of these, lead by Governor Moore of Carolina in 1704, broke up the chain of Spanish missions near what is now Tallahassee. Just how, if at all, Indians in the Tampa Bay area were affected by these raids we do not know. They undoubtedly suffered from the four epidemics which visited the Indians of Florida between 1613 and 1726.⁴⁴ Those left likely moved southward. By 1750 Indians from the north, later to be known as Seminoles, occupied much of north Florida and were near if not in the Tampa Bay area.

Throughout all known periods, the Tampa Bay area has been subjected to repeated and increasingly more powerful influences from the north. Even to-day, history repeats itself.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-150.

44. John R. Swanton, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 137. Washington.