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THE YEARWOOD SITE: A SPECIALIZED MIDDLE WOODLAND OCCUPATION ON THE ELK RIVER

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ABSTRACT

In 1975, extensive excavations at the Yearwood site documented an unusual Middle Woodland occupation characterized by a variety of structural types and a substantial amount of "exotic" goods indicative of participation in Hopewellian exchange networks. The overall character of the site differs substantially from other documented Middle Woodland sites in the area, and it is argued that Yearwood represents a warm weather encampment whose prime function was to serve as a locus for important social activities of the aggregate residential unit (social intensification).

Radiocarbon dates from Yearwood place the site in the first century A.D., but other considerations argue for a later date, probably in the third century A.D.

In 1975 the Division of Archaeology conducted salvage excavations on the Yearwood site (40LN16), a multicomponent site on the Elk River at Fayetteville, Tennessee (FIGURE 1). The site occupied a crescent-shaped area of high ground situated on the edge of the Elk River Valley. All midden material was contained within a thin layer of plow-disturbed soil, and following initial hand-excavated tests, heavy machinery was used to strip the topsoil and expose subsurface features. Virtually the entire site (ca. 2.5 acres) was exposed (FIGURE 2). Subsequent earthmoving by the construction contractor exposed additional large areas adjacent to the site and verified the horizontal extent of the site established by the original work. The excavations recovered materials from five different occupations, but the principal component was a Middle Woodland occupation, which is the subject of this paper.

Current knowledge of Woodland cultures in southern Middle Tennessee is based largely on the University of Tennessee salvage excavations in the Tims Ford Reservoir on the upper Elk River (Faulkner, ed. 1968) and on the far more extensive work in the Normandy Reservoir on the adjacent upper Duck River (Faulkner and McCollough 1973, 1974; McCollough and Faulkner 1976). While much of the Normandy data remains to be published and interpretations are constantly being modified and refined, this work has provided a substantial body of information on local Middle Woodland cultures. As the work at Yearwood progressed, it became apparent that this Middle Woodland component differed sharply from other documented sites in the area. First, it contained a variety of structural types placed in an unusual spatial configuration. Second, there was evidence for a strongly differentiated set of mortuary practices with some evidence of status distinctions. Third, the site produced a variety of exotic materials indicative of participation in the Hopewellian exchange network.

One of the remarkable aspects of the site is its variety of structural types and their spatial arrangement. There are eleven (possibly twelve) major structures on the site as well as several lesser constructions (FIGURE 3). The major structures are of two fundamentally different types. One type consists of medium and large single post structures which are usually oval or subrectangular but may also approach a circular or square outline. The smallest is a 7 by 5.5 m oval,

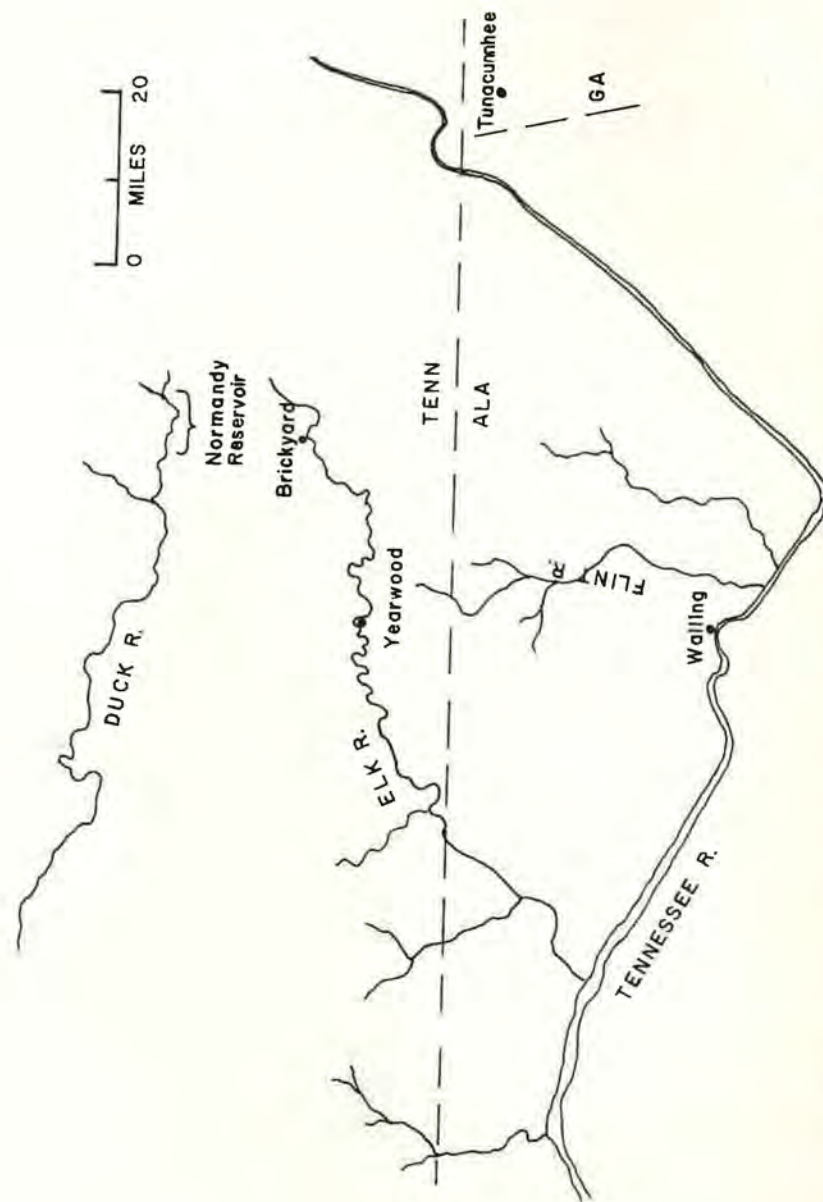


FIGURE 1. General location of the Yearwood site and other sites discussed in the text.

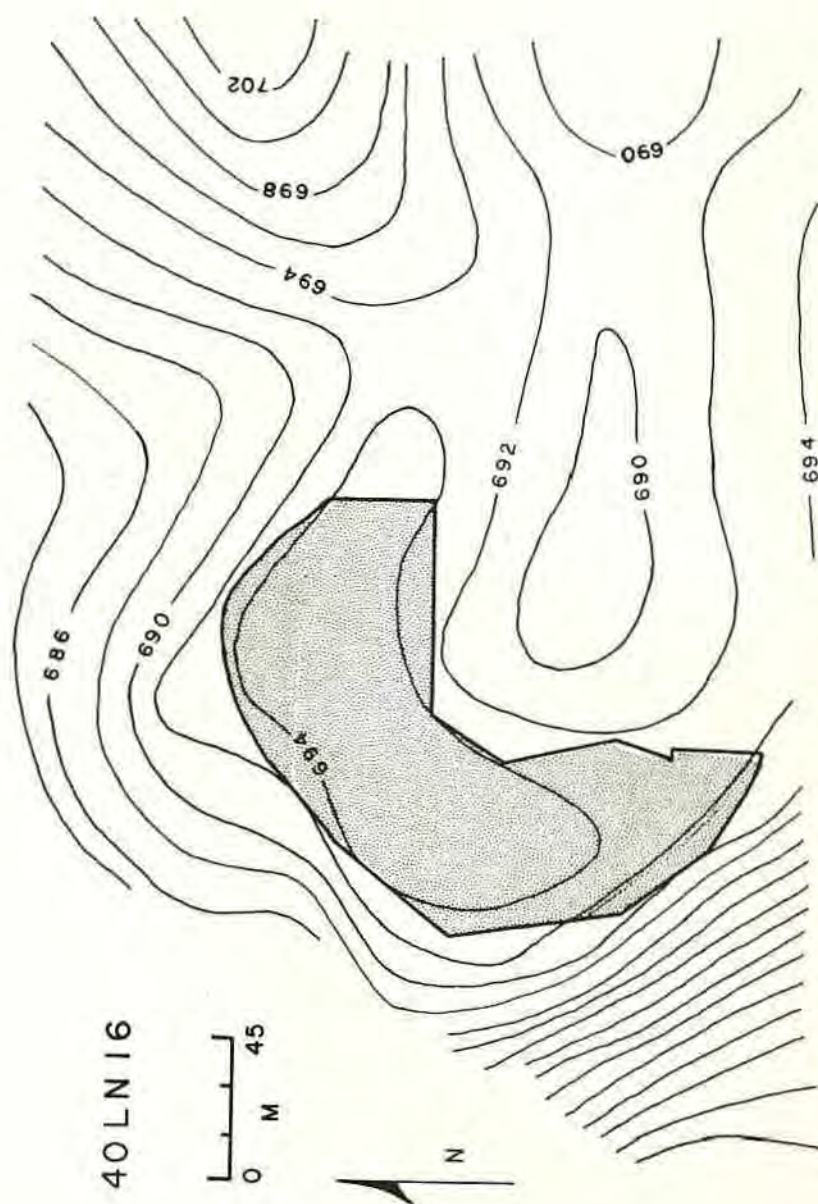


FIGURE 2. Topographic map of Yearwood showing the extent of controlled excavations.

and the largest is a nearly square structure measuring 13 by 12 m. In size and shape these structures are generally similar to other Middle Woodland structures documented in the Normandy work. With only one possible exception, however, none of these structures shows any evidence of an interior hearth or fire pit. There are six of these structures arranged in two groups of three each, located on the eastern and southern ends of the site (FIGURES 4 and 5). The composition of each group is the same. One structure is substantially larger, of heavier construction with a more regular outline than the other two structures in the group. Both of the dominant structures have an oval or circular ancillary construction immediately adjacent or built onto one side. In each group the dominant structure is the one closest to the center of the site. The remaining structures of each group are smaller, more lightly built, and more irregular in outline, and in three of the four cases, there is a large gap in the east wall of the structure.

The center of the site is occupied by a group of five (possibly six) structures of a very different type (FIGURE 6). These are medium and large open-sided, rectangular structures. The major defining characteristic is the presence of only two well-defined walls which are always the short ends of the rectangle. The long side walls are indicated by only a few intermittent posts. The smallest measures 7.5 and 6.5 m and the largest is virtually square, measuring 11 m on a side. This kind of post arrangement cannot have supported much weight. These structures appear to be open-sided shelters of lightweight construction--essentially ramadas--covered with brush, thatch, or even hides. In 1975, a somewhat similar structure was excavated by Willard S. Bacon at the Parks site (40CF5) in the Normandy Reservoir. The rectangular structure, whose walls were completely outlined by large posts, was situated in the middle of what has been defined as a Middle Woodland mortuary area of the Parks site (personal communication, M.C.R. McCollough; see also McCollough and DuVall 1976:132). At Yearwood, two of these structures may have internal hearths. There is another group of posts which may represent a sixth such structure but without the definite rectangular shape (Structure 2). One additional structure was uncovered--a well-defined semi-circular shelter measuring 7 m in diameter with an interior hearth.

The central portion of the site with its rectangular shelters contains the bulk of habitation debris and pit features. Few pits and little refuse were found around the single post structures. The center of the site is clearly the area where the majority of domestic activity took place. The inventory of pit features is unusual in that storage pits and deep earth ovens, very common features on other Middle Woodland sites, are virtually lacking.

The arrangement of the structures is such that it cannot represent a collection of individual structures placed over a long period of intermittent occupation. The site arrangement is too precise and organized to represent other than a relatively brief, single phase occupation, with the majority of structures (if not all) being contemporaneous. Other considerations support this interpretation. There are comparatively few pit features (ca. 40) and little refuse on the site. There is no superposition or rebuilding of structures and there are few random posts, that is, posts which are not a part of a structural pattern.

Absolute proof of contemporaneity is, of course, impossible under the circumstances. It is, however, interesting to note the virtual one-to-one correspondence between the number of rectangular shelters (5) and the single post structures (6). If Structure 2 is accepted, there are six structures of each kind. This situation suggests that the structures are functionally related in pairs. This pairing is particularly obvious in the case of Structures 5 and 9, both of which are markedly larger than all other structures of their respective types.

If the inference that the majority of the structures are contemporaneous is correct, then a substantial on-site population is implied. The single post

structures represent approximately 490 m² of floor space and the five definite rectangular shelters another 350 m². Structure 2 adds another 40 m². Assuming a functional difference between the major structure types and considering only the single post structures, the Naroll ratio of floor space to population (Naroll 1962) would imply a resident population of at least 50. Several Normandy sites have yielded more Middle Woodland structures than Yearwood, but not in contexts which would allow one to assume that an appreciable number of them were contemporaneous. The majority of the Middle Woodland habitations documented to date have generally been interpreted as encampments of small social units, either extended families or combinations of nuclear families (Faulkner and McCollough 1974:577-585; see also Bacon and Merryman 1973). By contrast, Yearwood appears to represent a substantially larger social unit, probably an aggregate of a number of these smaller social and residential units.

Remains of mortuary activity at Yearwood consist of nine burials and what is thought to be a large crematory pit. The burials consist of four redeposited cremations, three extended flesh burials, and two additional interments--one, a disarticulated infant burial and the other, a child burial of indeterminate type, possibly a bundle burial. Redeposited cremations were the predominant Middle Woodland burial mode encountered in the Normandy work, and their presence at Yearwood was no surprise. Extended flesh burials had not been previously encountered. These burials contained substantial grave goods including galena, prismatic blades, gorgets, knives, projectile points, and in one case, a small pottery vessel. Surface finds of a serpentine gorget and copper earspool fragments in the same vicinity are thought to come from other flesh burials destroyed by plowing. The nature of the flesh burials and their accompaniments indicate marked differences in the treatment of the dead, but the significance of these differences is not clear. Such burials are traditionally thought to indicate differential social status, but alternative explanations are possible. One of the cremations contained an atlatl weight and fragments of several large biface knives of non-local material which were damaged in the crematory fire.

Later machine work by the contractor exposed a significant feature located about 80 m southeast of the southern end of the site. This feature has been tentatively identified as a crematory pit. The feature was a rectangular, shallow pit (2.8 by 2 m) with a flat bottom. The side walls and bottom of the pit were heavily fired, and the bottom contained a thin layer of compacted wood charcoal and fired earth. The identification of the pit is tentative because no burned human bone was found in the pit. The pit is of sufficient size to accommodate an extended adult body, and it resembles crematory basins documented in other areas. From the nature of the redeposited cremations, it is obvious that the remains of a crematory fire were carefully collected and possibly even sifted to recover miniscule fragments of bone. Considering this and the fact that the pit bore evidence of having been cleaned subsequent to its last use, the lack of bone remains is perhaps not too surprising.

There is a distinct possibility that more mortuary activity took place on the site than is suggested by the small number of interments. There is no reason to assume that all individuals cremated on the site were actually interred there. Redeposited cremations were recovered at a number of sites in the Normandy Reservoir, but crematory features have been identified at only one or two. The obvious conclusion is that cremated remains were often transported away from the site of cremation. Recent work in the Bear Creek drainage of northern Alabama has documented the existence of a Middle Woodland stone mound mortuary complex dating roughly from 100 B.C. to A.D. 300 (Oakley 1975). These mounds contain both primary inhumations and redeposited cremations. Similar stone mounds exist in the Elk River Valley, specifically in the immediate area of Fayetteville. One such mound formerly existed within a half mile of the Yearwood site but was destroyed in the 19th century.

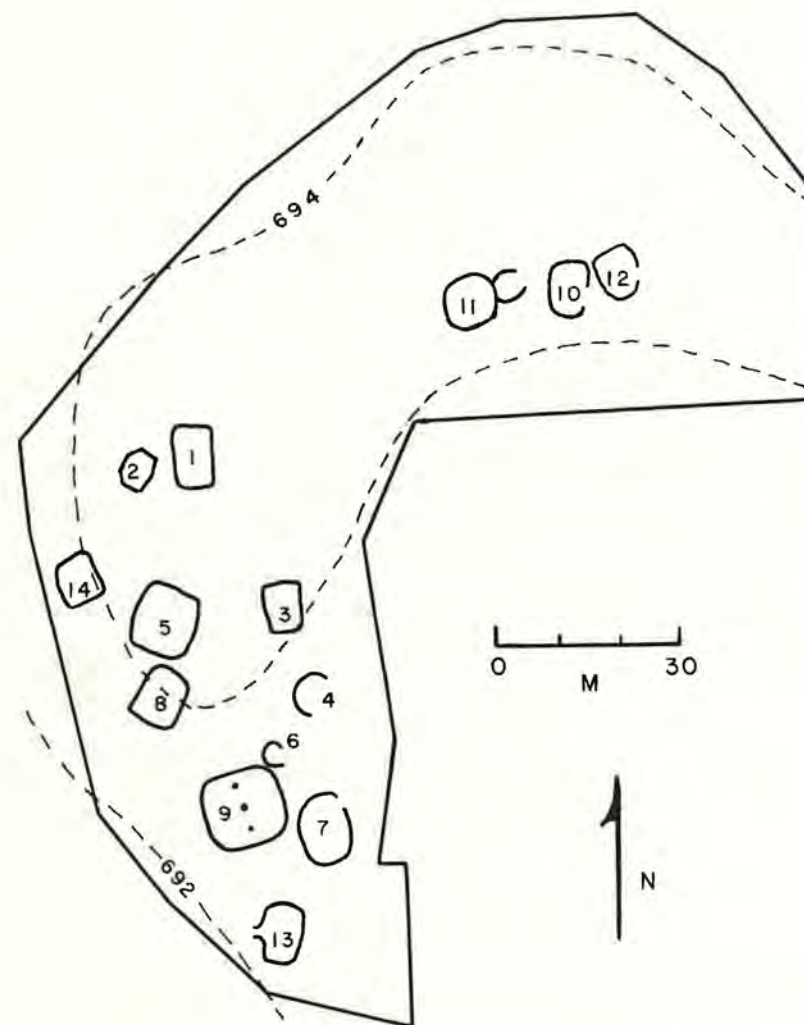


FIGURE 3. Locations of numbered structures.

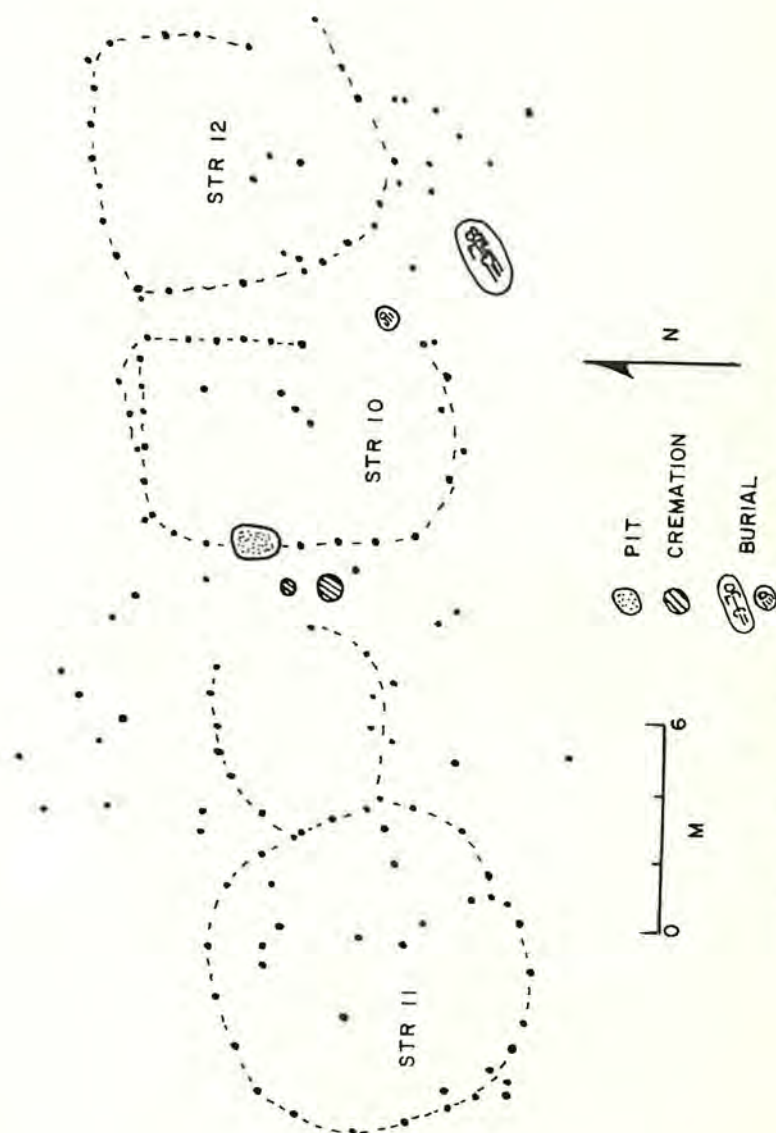


FIGURE 4. Structures on the eastern end of the site.

In terms of artifacts, the outstanding characteristic of the site is the presence of a wide variety of non-local, exotic materials usually associated with Hopewellian trade networks and mortuary ceremonialism. The total quantity of these remains is not large, but they constitute a significant proportion of the modest collection of material associated with this component. The quantity is especially surprising in view of the fact that few such items were recovered in the very intensive Normandy excavations of eight Middle Woodland sites in various physiographic settings. These materials, which occur in both mortuary and non-mortuary contexts, include copper and ceramic earspools, mica, galena, serpentine, Flint Ridge prismatic blades, quartz crystals, and a collection of ceramics which are either non-local in origin or inspired by non-local styles. These include rocker and dentate-stamped ceramics, some untyped incised sherds, and a number of sand-tempered sherds which may be of South Appalachian origin.

Seasonality and Site Function

The Yearwood site poses a number of complex interpretive problems. Do the obvious differences in structural type reflect different seasons of use (warm vs cold weather) as favored in current interpretations of Normandy structural and biological data, or do they relate to functional differences unrelated to domiciliary use, such as the "charnel house" at the Parks site? If one chooses to interpret the structures as representing both summer and winter habitations, a virtual year-round occupation is implied. The site would, in effect, constitute a semi-permanent or permanent village. The bulk of evidence, however, will not sustain this interpretation. The scanty midden and the restricted number and types of pit features, as well as the lack of overlapping construction and extraneous posts, argue for a short-term, non-intensive occupation.

In particular, a number of considerations suggest that the site is the product of a warm weather occupation. The structures in the center of the site, associated with most of the pits and habitation debris, are flimsy, lightweight shelters unsuited for cold weather habitation. The single post structures on the ends of the site are substantial buildings; however, they do not contain internal hearths, and several have major gaps in their wall construction. Normandy structures of all types are generally securely sealed, and most have internal features ranging from basin-like hearths to large earth ovens. Warm weather habitation is also supported to some extent by the faunal remains. The faunal collection is meager (ca. 500 identifiable elements), but it does contain a variety of both fish and turtle remains, fauna which are not readily accessible in cold weather. It is interesting to note that recently the attempt has been made to use a similar faunal assemblage to argue for a cold weather habitation at the Banks III site in Normandy (Faulkner, Corkran and Parmalee 1976:234-237).

One possible interpretation is that all of the structures are essentially domiciliary in nature. Even in comparatively warm weather, rain and wind-secure quarters would be desirable. The large rectangular structures would be essentially shelters for day use, hence the preponderance of domestic refuse in association. The single post structures, on the other hand, would be primarily sleeping quarters. There are, of course, other equally plausible interpretations.

Site function is the role a given site plays in the settlement system. In the title of this paper, Yearwood is described as a "specialized" occupation. Specialized is used in this context to indicate that this site represents a set of activities substantially different from those represented by other sites in its area. Yearwood appears to represent the seasonal congregation, probably in warm weather, of the maximum local social and residential unit. Activities on the site involved the handling, processing, and, in some cases, disposal of exotic materials and artifacts originating far outside the immediate area. From the

prevailing scarcity of such materials on other sites, one can infer that access to such goods was limited and that they were handled in quantity only at certain times and places. Mortuary activity, including cremation and primary inhumation, also took place on the site. The latter contained substantial grave goods, possibly indicative of differential social status.

In his article on Middle Woodland settlement systems of the Illinois Valley, Struever (1968) has postulated the existence of two types of sites which are of some use in evaluating Yearwood. The first is the so-called Regional Exchange Center. This is a site where the local populations periodically congregated to conduct trade and ritual activity by means of which rare and exotic materials were distributed through the local population. The site is characterized by its large size and unusual concentrations of exotic materials. The second site type is the Mortuary Camp. These are small habitation sites in the vicinity of burial mounds. These sites were not occupied for subsistence reasons but for maintenance and reinforcement of social integration centering on mortuary ceremonialism. These sites were occupied for only short periods and lack permanent structures and features such as storage pits and earth ovens. They do exhibit substantial quantities of exotic materials. Recent excavations at the Pinson Mounds complex in West Tennessee (Broster and Schneider 1975) have encountered Middle Woodland habitation areas which resemble Yearwood in many respects. These areas are characterized by scanty habitation remains, irregularly built structures with poorly-defined hearths, crematory features in the habitation area, and the occurrence of a variety of exotic materials including copper, mica, quartz crystals, Flint Ridge prismatic blades, and non-local ceramics. Although these habitation areas do not correspond to Struever's definition in several important respects, they have been interpreted as mortuary encampments (Broster and Weaver 1975:95). Such a conclusion, of course, is hard to avoid when one is surrounded by a large number of burial mounds. As an analogue to Yearwood, however, neither site type is entirely satisfactory. Although such sites may exist in the Illinois Valley, I suspect that in a majority of cases these definitions are being applied to sites which served a combination of these functions.

I do not feel that Yearwood is either an exchange center or a mortuary camp in the strict sense of Struever's definitions. Rather, I think that Yearwood is a site where the dispersed elements of a small social unit congregated seasonally to participate in a variety of group-oriented activities including ritual, trade and/or redistribution, and the preparation and disposal of the dead. In other words, the prime function of the Yearwood site was social intensification. This interpretation of Yearwood fits well with the concept of the Dispersed Model of Middle Woodland settlement proposed by Faulkner (1973:44-45). In this settlement system, we are dealing with a social group which exists throughout much of the year dispersed into smaller units, probably extended families or combinations of several nuclear families. These smaller units were probably economically self-sufficient. This settlement system has a central site, but its existence is based not so much on subsistence demands as on the necessary performance of certain social activities. At one time in the year, probably in the spring or early summer, the various small groups would congregate to form the maximal residential unit and to conduct group ritual, trade, and mortuary activity. Following this, the group would again disperse into smaller encampments.

The major difference between the Dispersed and Nucleated models proposed by Faulkner is the existence in the latter of a major, more-or-less permanently occupied site which functions as the nucleus of the settlement system. This site is the focus of activity on a year-round basis although various exploitative groups would leave the site on a seasonal basis. For reasons given above, it is difficult to view Yearwood as this kind of nuclear site. These models are ideal types, of course, and the realities are likely much more complex. A modification of the Dispersed Model I would suggest is that the encampments of the small subunits may

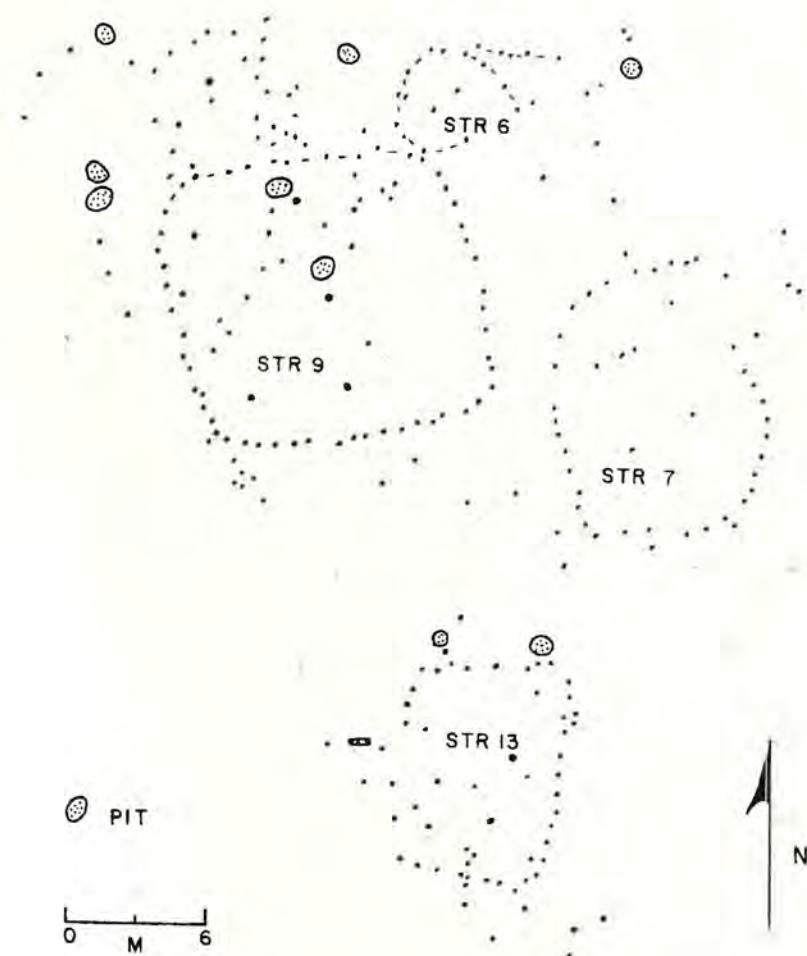


FIGURE 5. Structures on the southern end of the site.

have been more permanent than the model would indicate. In other words, instead of a series of short duration seasonal camps, these small groups may have occupied single sites for a major portion of the year, with the larger group still congregating only once during the year.

These models aside, it is clear that in Middle Woodland times, forms of organization and social interaction which far transcended the scale and capacity of local bands were operative in this area. The Old Stone Fort (Faulkner 1968), located at the forks of the Duck River, is ample evidence of this. This site is a large hilltop enclosure (ceremonial site?) whose construction and use spanned the period from ca. A.D. 1 to A.D. 400. The site is the product of large amounts of organized, directed labor and surely represents the contributions of a multiplicity of groups in the surrounding area.

Chronological Placement

The chronological placement of the Yearwood site is still somewhat tentative. The site is difficult to assess independent of its radiocarbon dates because the locally made ceramics differ substantially from those reported from ostensibly contemporaneous sites in the area. The recent Normandy Reservoir work has defined two Middle Woodland phases--the McFarland phase (ca. 200 B.C. to A.D. 200) and the Owl Hollow phase (ca. A.D. 200 to A.D. 500). On the basis of available radiocarbon dates, however, there is a disjunction in the chronology from about A.D. 200 to A.D. 400 (personal communication, M.C.R. McCollough; see also Faulkner and McCollough 1974:331-333). In other words, there is a lack of dated sites which fit into this period. This situation has aroused the suspicion that a Middle Woodland phase may be missing from the Normandy sequence as it is presently defined. Before the radiocarbon dates were run, it was conjectured that Yearwood might fall into this intervening period. The four dates from the Middle Woodland component place the site substantially earlier than originally expected. The dates are given below.

SAMPLE	R.C. YEARS B.P.	MEAN
DIC-600	1980±60	30 B.C.
DIC-601	1900±95	A.D. 50
DIC-602	1800±75	A.D. 150
DIC-604	1930±65	A.D. 20

Samples 601 and 602 were directly associated with rocker-stamped pottery. These dates form a reasonably tight cluster with a composite average of ca. A.D. 50. The dates would align the Yearwood occupation with the latter half of the McFarland phase (see Faulkner and McCollough 1974:330-331).

The problem with this alignment is that certain items, particularly the rocker-stamped pottery and the rectangular one-hole gorget form, do suggest a somewhat later date. On the other hand, the lithic complex at Yearwood, with its preponderance of McFarland cluster points and its lack of so-called "spike points," is fully in accord with described McFarland phase lithics.

As noted previously, the Yearwood ceramics do not compare well with described McFarland ceramic assemblages. Described McFarland ceramics are a variable mixture of check stamped, plain, and fabric-marked pottery with occasional occurrences of cord-marked, simple stamped, and complicated stamped sherds. Check stamped pottery dominates most assemblages while fabric-marked pottery appears to belong in the early part of the phase. Virtually all of the pottery is limestone-tempered. One of the major problems with the Normandy data has been the mixed nature of the cultural remains found on these shallow, unstratified sites.

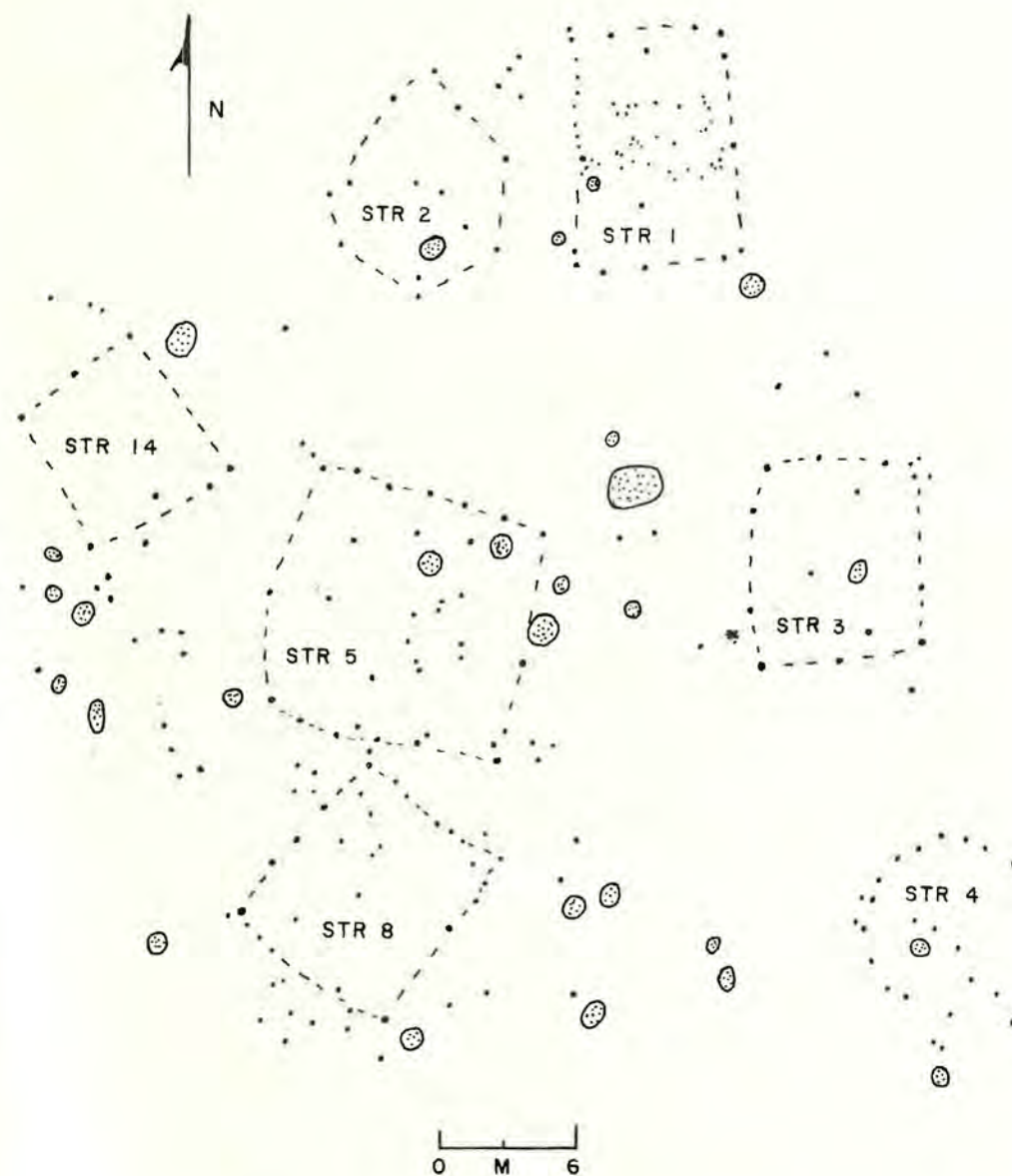


FIGURE 6. Structures in the center of the site.

Identifying contemporaneous ceramics has been a particular difficulty; thus, the associations of some of the ceramics described as McFarland might be suspect.

Yearwood ceramics are dominated by what are rare or minority types in McFarland ceramics. Cord-marked pottery predominates, and there is some plain and a very small amount of check stamped pottery. Particularly diagnostic are smoothed (plain) shoulders and necks, frequently with a narrow strip of cord-marking left at the rim. Occasionally, these plain bands are set off by punctations. Rare forms include random incising or scratching, incising and punctation combinations, and complicated stamping. There is a minor but persistent occurrence of sand-tempered pottery. These sherds contain mica and appear to be nonlocal. The majority are plain but there are examples of simple, complicated, and rocker-stamped sherds.

A few examples of the zoned and punctated vessels have been found on other sites in the upper Elk River Valley, specifically at Brickyard (Butler 1968:168) and at 40FR47 (Bacon and Merryman 1973:6). Both of these sites have been identified as McFarland phase sites, but Brickyard is a particular problem. This shallow, multicomponent site yielded materials from Early, Middle, and Late Woodland occupations. The Late Woodland ceramics were typologically distinctive, but the remainder could not be adequately separated. The bulk of the Woodland remains were grouped under a single rubric, the Brickyard phase, which was ultimately subsumed under the McFarland phase. Brickyard did produce a substantial amount of plain and cord-marked pottery, a small amount of sand-tempered pottery, as well as fragments of an unusual rocker-stamped vessel (Butler 1968:168, 173, 203).

In view of these considerations, the problem is to decide whether the differences in the ceramics at Yearwood and known McFarland sites are the result of geographical separation, functional variation, or, in spite of the radiocarbon dates, a difference in age. The sites being discussed represent two separate but adjacent river drainages, the Elk River (Yearwood and Brickyard) and the Duck River (Normandy Reservoir). While it is possible that some major differences in surface treatment preferences existed among contemporaneous Woodland groups in these adjacent drainages, the geographical separation is so minimal that it hardly seems plausible. Such a situation would also stand in sharp contrast to the general uniformity in changes in ceramic styles evident throughout much of the Tennessee Valley. Another potential explanation is that the character of the activities performed at Yearwood resulted in a substantially different ceramic inventory than that at known McFarland sites. The inferred emphasis on group ceremonialism at Yearwood might be invoked to explain "exotic" or specialized ceramics, but it is hardly adequate to account for major differences in utilitarian ceramics.

By the process of elimination, one is again faced with the problem of chronology. There is now some evidence that Yearwood and other sites in the central portion of the Tennessee drainage may represent a distinctive Middle Woodland phase which is either not present in the upper Duck River Valley or which has not been identified among the assemblages there. The Tunacunnhee site in the Lookout Valley of northwest Georgia (Jefferies 1976) is a burial mound and village complex which has produced large quantities of classic Hopewell trade materials. These include various copper artifacts (spools, panpipes, plates), mica objects, platform pipes, sharks' teeth, and prismatic blades. The habitation area associated with the mounds produced medium-sized triangular projectile points of the general McFarland/Copena Triangular type. The ceramics are predominantly limestone-tempered plain and cord-marked, but about one third of the total are sand-tempered. There are minor amounts of simple stamped ceramics. In brief, the general character of the village remains is quite similar to Yearwood.

Another site with similar material is the Walling village, located on the Tennessee River in Madison County, Alabama (Walthall 1973:375-401). The ceramics

from this multicomponent site evidence considerable mixing, but the major occupation appears to be a Middle Woodland component characterized by limestone-tempered plain and cord-marked pottery with a small amount of stamped ceramics. Some sand-tempered pottery is also present. Of particular note are nineteen rocker-stamped sherds, some of which are similar to the Elk River specimens. One sherd has the stamping applied over cord-marking, identical to the Brickyard examples. The Walling site is located a short distance from the confluence of the Flint River with the Tennessee River, and the headwaters of the Flint are only a few miles south of Fayetteville, Tennessee.

All three of these sites--Yearwood, Tunacunnhee, and Walling--are located in the Tennessee drainage in relatively close proximity. The maximum distance between any two of the sites is only about 75 miles. They all evidence some participation in Hopewellian exchange networks and have similar inventories of ceramics and projectile points. The ceramics are, again, predominantly limestone-tempered plain and cord-marked with minor amounts of stamped materials. Check stamped pottery, in particular, is scarce. There is a persistent occurrence of minor amounts of sand-tempered pottery ranging from almost one third of the collection at Tunacunnhee to only a few sherds in the Elk River Valley. The quantity of sand-tempered ceramics seems to be an inverse function of the distance from the South Appalachian area.

The similarities cited above suggest that the three sites are broadly contemporaneous. Tunacunnhee has yielded three radiocarbon dates, which are given below.

UGA-ML-8	A.D. 150±95
UGA-ML-9	A.D. 440±395
UGA-ML-10	A.D. 280±125

(from Jeffries 1976)

Sample UGA-ML-9 is useless because of the high standard deviation, but the other two dates average at slightly over A.D. 200. These dates would place Tunacunnhee in the "gap" which presently exists in the Normandy sequence. The Yearwood dates are substantially earlier, although one sample, DIC-602, did yield an identical date of A.D. 150. There is not yet enough data to resolve the problem. Until additional work is done, the temporal placement of the Yearwood site must remain in some doubt. Present information suggests, however, that the Yearwood dates may be too early and that the three sites discussed here should date in the period of A.D. 200 to 300.

Notes:

1. This is a modified version of a paper presented at the 33rd Southeastern Archaeological Conference at Tuscaloosa, Alabama--November, 1976.

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