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SELLARS: A SMALL MOUND CENTER IN THE HINTERLANDS

Brian M. Butler

ABSTRACT

The Sellars site in Wilson County, Tennessee, is a small fortified Mississippian Mound center of approximately 10 acres in area. The site was first described and investigated over 100 years ago, but still remains one of the least known and best preserved examples of this type of site in Middle Tennessee. After its acquisition by the state in 1974, limited test excavations were conducted at the site in 1974 and 1977. The results of the test excavations are presented along with radiocarbon dates and a discussion of the site's possible role in the larger Mississippian settlement system.

Introduction

The Sellars site (40W1-1) is a small fortified Mississippian mound center located three miles southeast of the city of Lebanon in Wilson County, Tennessee (Figure 1). The early phase of archaeological work in the Nashville Basin saw the investigation of a number of major Mississippian sites. While not the first to be excavated, Sellars was one of the first to be described and reported in a more-or-less professional manner. Of the handful of these sites that are intact today, Sellars remains the best preserved. In 1974 the State of Tennessee acquired the site for preservation and eventual development as an archaeological park or monument. In 1974 and 1977 preliminary test excavations were conducted at the site by the author. Despite its early appearance in the literature, Sellars remains one of the more obscure of the region's major Mississippian sites. This paper is intended to correct that situation.

The Sellars site has been a landmark in Wilson County for over 100 years. The site was first investigated by Fredrick W. Putnam of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University in September, 1877. Putnam was invited by the owners (the Lindsley family) to explore the site, which he did for one week with a 25 man crew. Professor J. H. Buchanan, an engineer at nearby Cumberland University, prepared a map of the site (Figure 2). Putnam's report along with Buchanan's map are published in the *11th Annual Report of the Trustees of the Peabody Museum* (Putnam 1878:339-360). The site is referred to as the "Earthwork on the Lindsley Estate near Greenwood Seminary".

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Subsequently, the site has suffered from the depredations of local relic collectors, although the full extent of the damage is still unknown. The site has achieved some notoriety as the source of four sandstone statues, found as two pair each consisting of a male and female (see Guthe 1963:60-61; Nash 1968:34). The statues were found by tenants and relic collectors and little is known of the contexts. The most artistic of these statues is the male figure "Sandy" which is the logo of the Tennessee Archaeological Society. Later owners of the property leveled most of the palisade embankment because it interfered with farming. The site derives its present name from the last private owner.

Site Description

The site is situated on the rim of an old terrace in the neck of a prominent bend in Spring Creek, a northward draining tributary of the Cumberland River. Spring Creek is a shallow meandering stream that generally flows over a bed of a solid limestone. The creek fluctuates sharply with rainfall and virtually ceases to flow during the dry months of later summer and early fall. A large limestone spring is located 300 m northwest of the site. The spring flows year round and may have been a more dependable water source than the creek itself.

In terms of its internal organization, Sellars is typical of a large number of small fortified Mississippian mound sites. When Putnam excavated at the site, it was in an almost pristine state. Buchanan's map (Figure 2) shows just how much was observable at the time. Because many of the features on the map are now obliterated and because of the small scale of the map, it is not yet possible to precisely correlate the old map with the permanent survey grid and the field map made in 1974 (Figure 3). Rough measurements taken in the field indicate that the Buchanan map is quite accurate.

The Sellars site consists of an oval village area, slightly pointed on the north end, surrounded by a palisade embankment and ditch and with a single large platform mound on the interior. The maximum dimensions of the enclosure, according to Putnam, are 900 feet (274 m) north-south and 650 feet (198 m) east-west. Calculations based on the Buchanan map and the 1974 field work indicate an area of 10.2 acres or 4.13 hectares within the palisade. The site was surrounded by a palisade complex consisting of two embankments separated by a shallow ditch. A short segment of this embankment complex is still preserved on the west side of the site in a low area where poor drainage and rock outcrops have discouraged cultivation. Comparison with Putnam's measurements indicates that the remnant has not been seriously altered since Putnam's time. The inner or main embankment is about 5 m across at the base and rises about 30 cm above the interior ground surface. The remnant is about 45 m long with bastions at each end. The bastions, slightly elevated mounds of earth, project forward of the embankment. The two surviving bastions are 33 m apart center-to-center and 25 m apart edge-to-edge. Putnam describes bastion-like features at regular intervals along the main embankment. Beyond the embankment is a shallow ditch which, in areas away from rock outcrops, Putnam describes as being three to four feet deep. The outer embankment is much smaller, being only 2.5 m wide and about 20 cm high.

Inside the earthwork is a single large platform mound, slightly trapezoidal in shape with the wider and slightly lower end to the east, facing the plaza. At the base, the mound measures 37 m in length with widths of 36 and

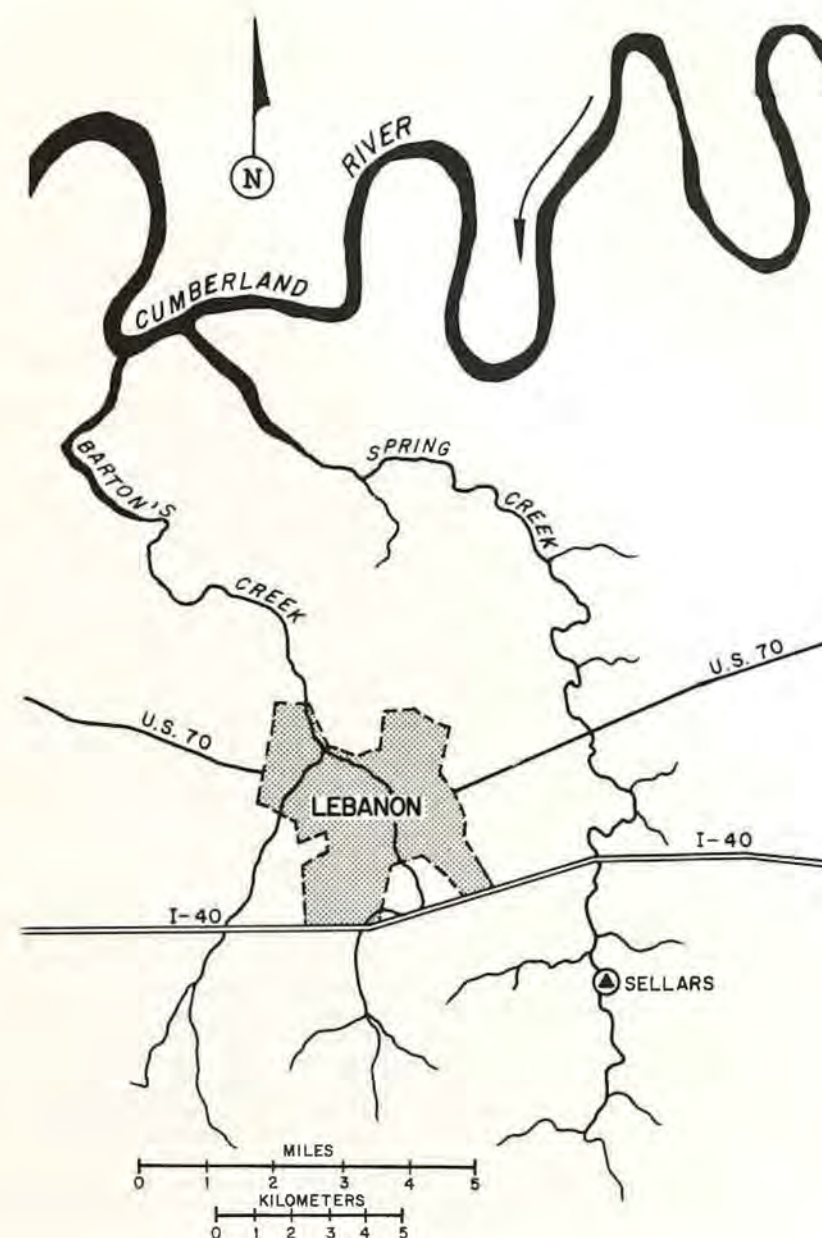


Figure 1. Location of Sellars Site.

29 m on the east and west ends, respectively. The mound is about 4.5 m high. Putnam dug an approach trench from near the southeast corner into the center of the mound. His description contains little detail, but at least three mound phases are evident. Putnam did not refill his excavation and the mound today exhibits a massive crater partially filled by slump and erosion. Although it has been damaged some by "pot hunting", the mound still has sharp contours and has not been severely altered since Putnam's time.

Putnam is not specific about the existence of other mounds. Today there is a noticeable small mound about 50 m east of the main mound on the northern edge of the plaza. The Buchanan map shows a very large "house circle" at this point, but there is no specific mention of the feature. Putnam did excavate what he describes as a low mound (labeled C on the Buchanan map) south of the large mound. The description implies that there was a structure associated with this mound, but Putnam's interest was focused on the 60 stone box graves he removed from the flanks of the mound. With the exception of a single child buried with an adult, all interments were of adults.

Throughout the village area Putnam located some 100 low circular ridges of earth. He excavated 19 of them and correctly concluded that these were house sites. Like many other early excavators, he failed to perceive that they were square instead of round. Infant burials were found beneath some of the structure floors. Such "house circles" or house depressions are reported in many early descriptions of Mississippian sites in Tennessee and elsewhere. These are now almost all destroyed and few have survived to be examined by a competent archaeologist (see Nash 1968). None of these circles are visible on the site today.

Outside of the fortified site are seven low rock mounds. Six of these are southwest of the village on the edge of the high ground overlooking the creek. The seventh is just north of enclosure. In Putnam's time, these mounds were only two feet high but today they have been virtually leveled by cultivation. Color photographs taken the last time the site was plowed show them quite distinctly, however. The purpose of these mounds is not clear. Putnam trenched two of them and found only firecracked limestone rock, charcoal, and ash. These mounds were shovel probed in 1974 with the same result. Until one of these is thoroughly examined, little more can be said. The author suspects that these are refuse dumps.

Recent Excavations

In 1974 the Tennessee Division of Archaeology commenced test excavations at the Sellars site. Before the excavation began, a survey crew installed a permanent site grid of 50 m squares. The final grid consists of 24 50 m blocks with 16 of the intersection points marked with permanent metal stakes. The 50 m blocks are numbered consecutively 1 through 24 beginning in the southwest corner of the grid and counting left to right. Each 50 m block consists of 100 5 m squares. The individual 5 m squares are numbered 1 through 100 in the same fashion as the 50 m blocks. Thus, the southwest corner square in block 13 would be Square 13-1, while the one immediately above (north) would be Square 13-100. Five m squares were normally excavated as four 2.5 m squares, designated as quadrants (NW, SW, NE, SE).

In the 1974 season, excavations were conducted in five areas on the site. These units consisted of two trenches to locate or examine palisade features,

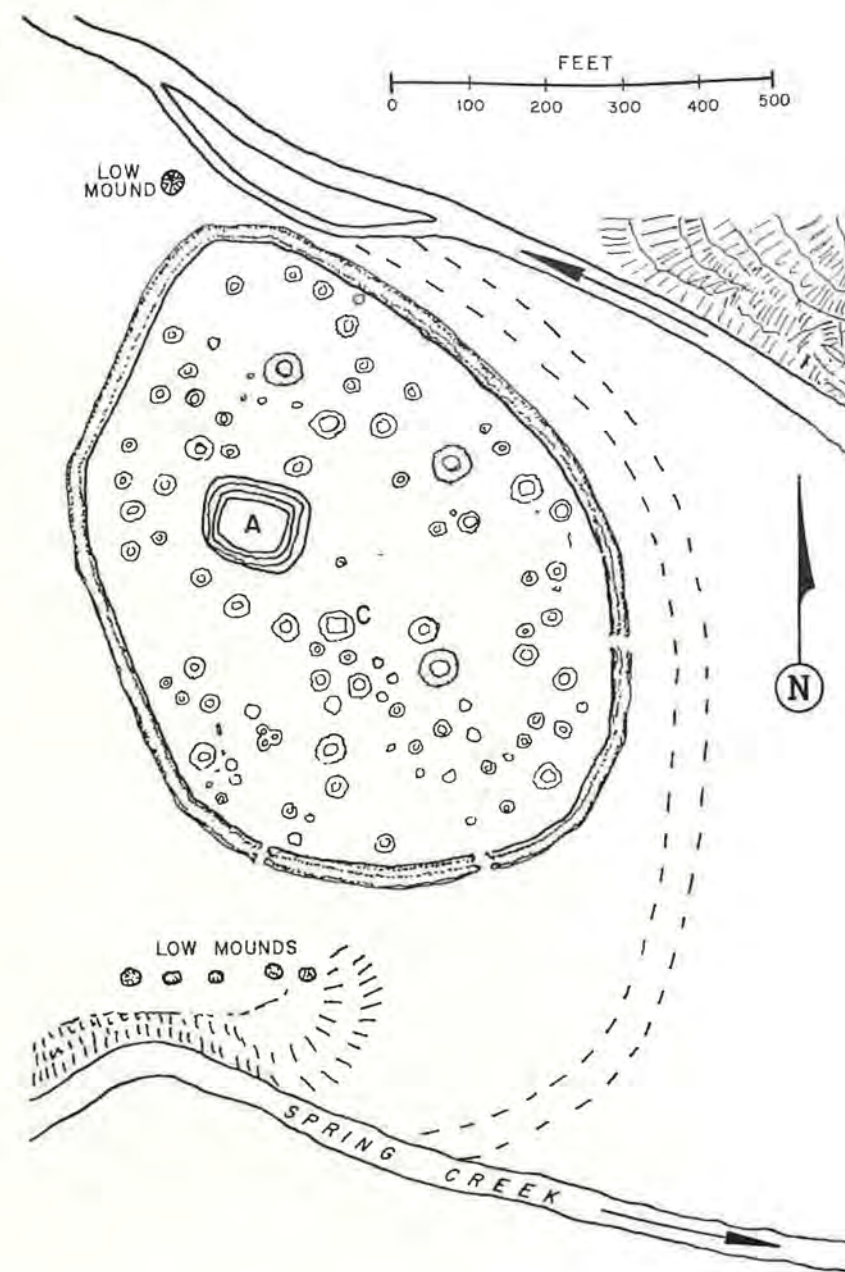


Figure 2. Buchanan's map of the Sellars site (after Putnam 1878).

two units selected on the basis of a random sample scheme, and one unit selected on a non-random basis. The 1977 work consisted of a single trench placed in the small mound on the north side of the plaza.

Palisade Excavations

Ultimately, three of the five 1974 excavation units explored palisade features. Two of these, Trenches 1 and 2, were intentional, while the third, Square 9-27, was one of the randomly selected test units in the interior of the site.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was a 15 by 2 m trench placed across the existing palisade remnant west of the platform mound (Figures 4 and 5). The trench was placed adjacent to the bastion on the north end of the remnant. The cut through the main embankment identified a post trench (Feature 22) running beneath the crest of the embankment. The trench varied from 25 to 43 cm in width and penetrated 40 cm into the subsoil. Faint disturbances noted in the embankment fill above this feature indicated that wall posts did project through the crest of the embankment but had been pulled up or broken off. The fill of the embankment was a mixture of topsoil and subsoil clay with no clear evidence of loading. There was evidence of an old humus line under the embankment. Investigation of the outer embankment showed that that structure had been nearly leveled by erosion. Some faint indications of the bottoms of postmolds were noted in the subsoil beneath the embankment.

The area between the embankments, about 8.5 m crest-to-crest, proved to be more complex than expected. The entire area between the two earthworks has had earth removed, but the sharply delineated ditch (Feature 45) is located just inside the outer embankment. As encountered in Trench 1, the ditch was found to expand and deepen sharply around the base of the north bastion. In the south wall of the trench the ditch is approximately 2.75 m wide and 68 cm deep. The upper 20-25 cm of the ditch fill is wash from the adjacent embankments; below this the fill is a dark midden-like soil containing some refuse. The ditch was actually dug around several large free-floating blocks of limestone which were too heavy to be moved.

In front of the main embankment, the subsoil has a gradual slope down toward the ditch, a feature which seems to correspond to Putnam's description of a "level bench" (Putnam 1878:340) just outside the inner embankment. This area is interrupted by Feature 50, a large deep pit which extends into the trench from beneath the bastion. The pit contained some refuse in the bottom but its fill was virtually indistinguishable from the embankment fill. Interpretation of the feature relationship is uncertain, but the pit appears to predate the construction of the palisade. At the inner rim of the ditch, the remnants of a linear trench-like feature (Feature 49) were discovered. This feature appears to be the bottom portion of another post trench which has been truncated by later digging to make the main embankment. Feature 49 could thus represent an earlier palisade construction.

The excavation yielded enough information to derive most of the major details of the palisade construction. The first step in the construction was the digging of post trenches and/or postholes. After the posts were set in place, earth was heaped up on both sides to support the wall, thus creating an embankment. The original height of the embankment can be inferred from the amount of slopewash and the area represented under the curve of the embankment. These calculations suggest

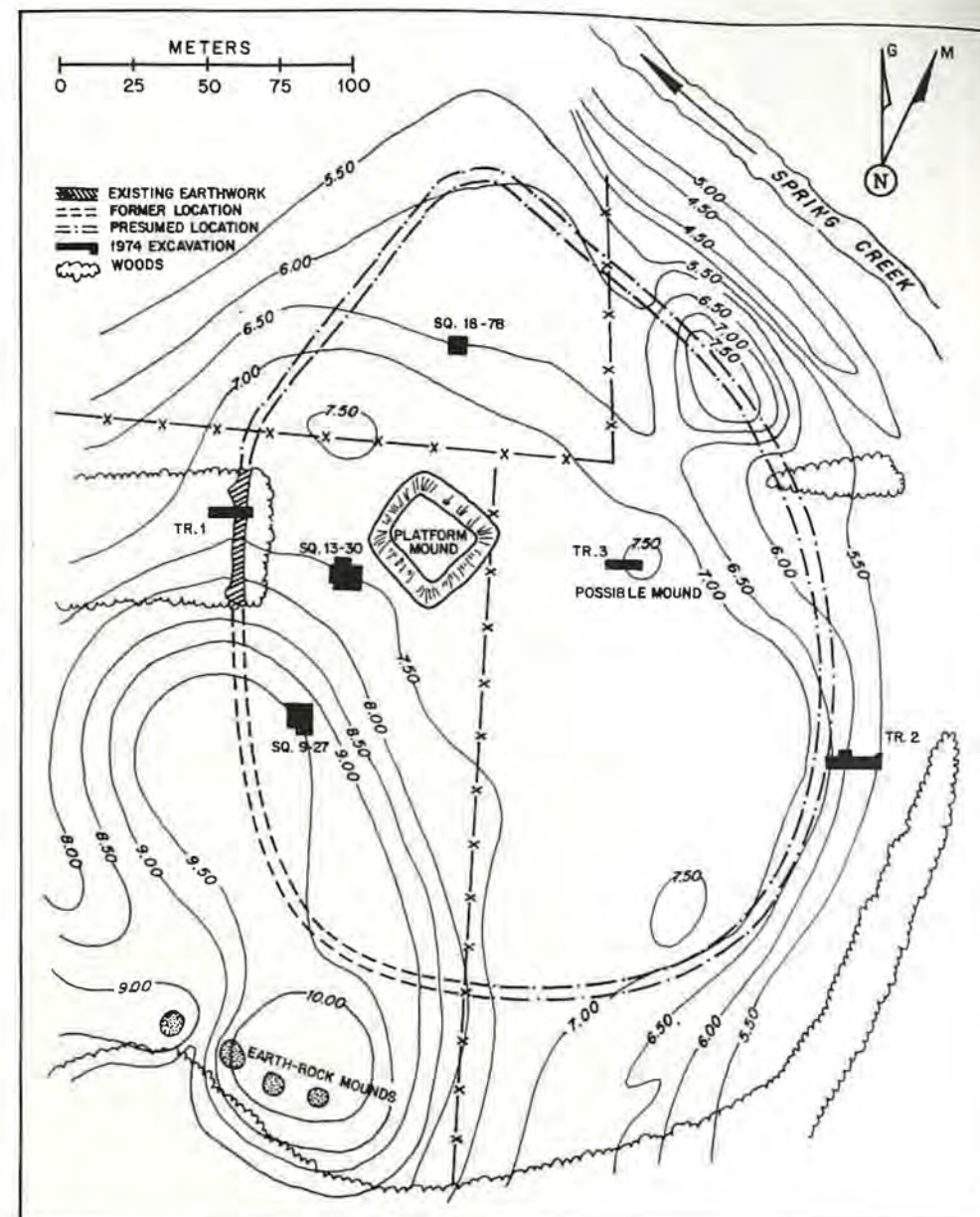


Figure 3. Map of Sellars showing recent excavations. Contour interval is 50 cm.

that the original height of the main embankment, which has a basal width of 3.7 m, was 1.55 m or about 85 cm above the present crest. The calculations assume a symmetric construction with a cross-section of an isosceles triangle. Calculations on the outer wall are less certain because of the greater destruction and the lack of data on the full extent of the slope wash outside the embankment. The available data suggest that the outer embankment, which has a basal width of 2.5 m, was originally 1.25 m high or about 80 cm above the present crest. The outer embankment was almost as high as the inner one but had a narrower base and contained only about 60% as much earth. The two embankments and ditch are interpreted as a single fortification complex consisting of a lightly built outer wall, a shallow intervening ditch, and a large and more heavily constructed inner wall complete with bastions.

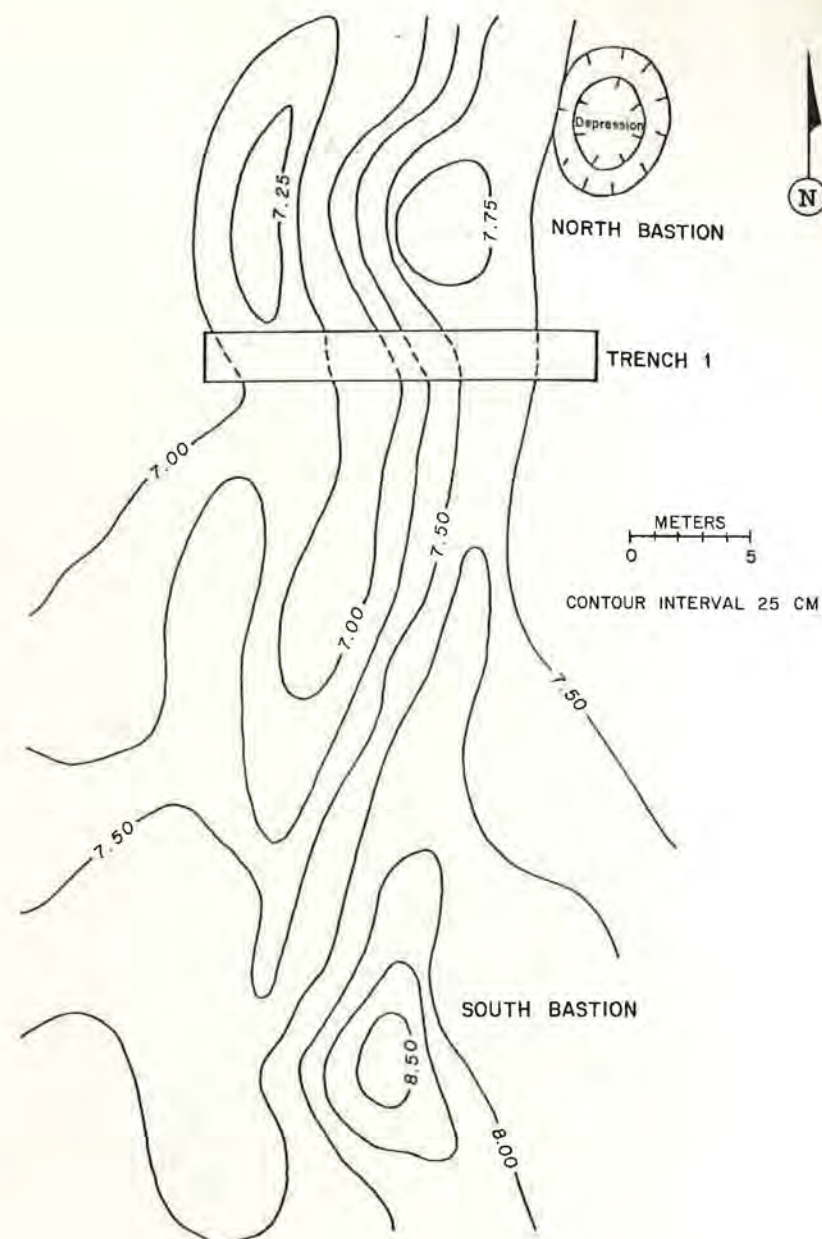
Trench 2

Trench 2 was an attempt to locate the palisade complex on the eastern side of the site where it had been obliterated. In accordance with the best possible correlation with the Buchanan map, this east-west trench was placed across the rim of the terrace which marks the eastern edge of the site. The trench was originally 10 by 2 m but was later extended another 8 m downslope with various lateral extensions.

Very little artifactual material of any kind was recovered--only a few small sherds and chert flakes. In the western half of the trench, the topsoil proved unusually deep--a dark sandy clay soil which extended to a depth of 35 to 40 cm. The reason for the depth of this soil was not apparent until Feature 54 was discovered and identified. Feature 54 is best described as a "hump" of hard packed soil running north-south across the trench between 7 and 9 m from the west end. The hump varied from 2 to 2.5 m in width and rose 15 to 20 cm above the sterile subsoil. The soil of this feature was the same color as the surrounding soil but was much harder and contained a high concentration of small chert pebbles of the same type found in the subsoil. Two postholes were associated with the feature, one against each side of the trench.

Feature 54 was recognized as the base of one of the palisade embankments, but at the time it was not clear which one. Accordingly, the trench was extended 8 m downslope in search of the other one. From comparisons with Trench 1 data it later became clear that Feature 54 was the base of the outer embankment. In Trench 1, the two embankments were separated by 8 to 8.5 m, a distance which would place the remains of the main wall just beyond the west end of Trench 2. When the main embankment was leveled, the outer embankment acted as a dam, trapping the soil behind it and causing the increased depth of topsoil noted in the western half of the trench.

A lateral extension was cut on the north side of the trench to expose an additional segment of Feature 54. The feature continued on the same line as expected but no new postholes were found. As the feature was removed, the converging ends of two wall trenches were discovered. An additional extension to the west revealed the corner of a wall trench house which extended under the embankment and thus predated the palisade construction. Adjacent to the corner of the house, an infant burial was discovered in a damaged stone box grave.



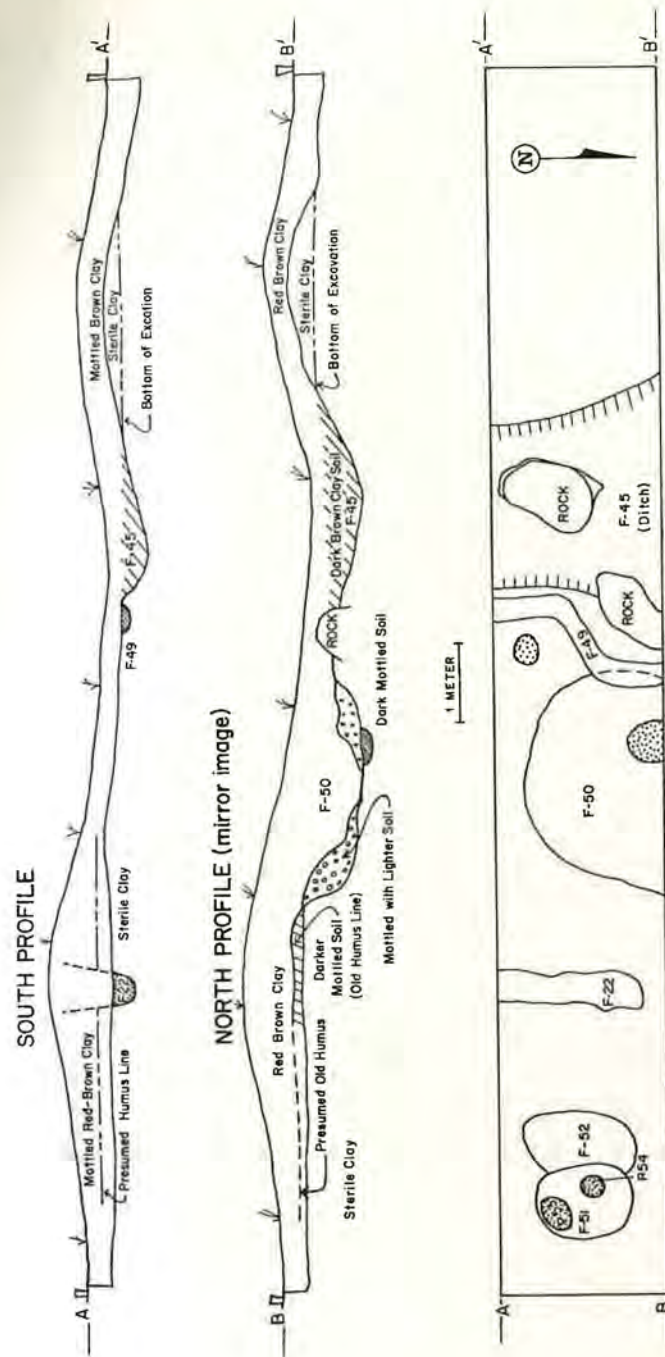


Figure 5. Profiles and plan view of Trench 1.

Square 9-27 and Adjacent Units

This excavation unit was situated on the east slope of the high area which constitutes the southwestern edge of the village site. The area investigated is about 50 m southwest of the platform mound. Excavation began in Square 9-27, a random sample square, but ultimately all of Squares 9-27 and 9-37 as well as portions of two others were cleared (Figures 6 and 8). The total area excavated was 91.25 m².

The midden in this area proved to be quite shallow and totally plow disturbed. A hard yellow-orange clay was encountered everywhere at a depth of 15 cm. This excavation unit is on a slope and erosion has obviously stripped some of the topsoil. Moderate amounts of cultural material were recovered from the plowzone but much of this ultimately proved to be from plow-disturbed features.

As square 9-27 was cleared, a large ill-defined feature emerged in the northern half of this unit. Square 9-37, adjacent to the north, was then excavated. This large disturbance, Feature 6, appeared to be four-sided and had appropriate dimensions to be a refuse-filled house basin. Excavation of Feature 6 was begun under the assumption that it was a house depression. Ultimately, Feature 6 proved not to be a house depression but instead a maze of inter-connected refuse filled pits and depressions.

After Feature 6 was excavated, a series of short post trenches and associated postholes were detected forming a continuous line across the excavation from northwest to southeast. Collectively these features comprise a segment of a palisade (Feature 53). This complex was not located earlier because of the nearly sterile fill of its component features. The palisade enters the extreme northwest corner of the excavation, runs southeast for 6.35 meters, makes an angle and then continues for 7.55 meters, exiting at the southeast corner of square 9-27 SE. Six complete and two partial trench segments were exposed in the excavation.

There are seven large individual postholes which appear to be supports for some type of tower or bastion built in the angle of the wall. These posts outline a rough trapezoidal area 5 m long and 2 m deep, set slightly off center to the north on the wall angle. It is possible that this structure projected forward of the palisade wall like a true bastion, but insufficient area was exposed to determine that.

The palisade was intentionally dismantled. The support posts were pulled, a process which introduced some refuse into their holes. The majority of the wall posts were either burned or broken off. Charcoal was found in the bottoms of some of the postholes. In five instances, small pieces of rotted wood were found in a vertical position in postholes; rotted wood was apparently also found in two other instances but destroyed before workers recognized it. The wood remains have been examined by a wood technologist and are definitely conifer. Given the local environment, this means that the posts were almost certainly red cedar.

The discovery of this palisade was a surprise. The main palisade/embankment complex is located some 12 to 15 meters further west. Feature 53 runs roughly parallel to the larger work. The size, position, and nature of the construction make it clear that Feature 53 represents a village fortification and not an internal wall. The sterility of the trench fill and the fact that it encloses a much smaller area suggest that this fortification is earlier than the one represented by the embankments and ditch. Note that Feature 49, a possible post trench, was

located in Trench 1 and thought to be a remnant of an earlier wall construction. Features 49 and 53 quite possibly represent the same construction.

The status of the complex of features identified as Feature 6 is not entirely clear. These shallow basins may be the result of removing earth for construction purposes; none show any direct evidence of being fire or cooking pits. Whatever the original purpose, they were ultimately used for refuse disposal. The fact that the Feature 6 complex ends just at the edge of the palisade wall suggests that it is contemporary with the wall. Two of the support posts for the wall are within Feature 6 but the intrusive relationships could not be determined in the dark pit fill.

Village Excavations

Square 13-30 and Adjacent Units

Square 13-30 is located a short distance west of the platform mound. It was one of the squares selected by a random sampling scheme. Subsequent excavation expanded into adjoining squares so that the completed excavation unit comprised two entire 5 m squares (13-30 and 14-21) and portions of three others, with a total area of 81.25 m² (Figures 7 and 9). The midden in this area was shallow, varying from 20 to 30 cm generally increasing in depth toward the mound (east).

This excavation unit exposed a wall trench house (Structure 1). The house was square, measuring about 6 meters on a side. The structure was oriented exactly the same as the long axis of the platform mound and plaza, that is, approximately 110° magnetic. The house had a well defined entranceway in the east corner consisting of two short post trenches. Inside the house were two large support posts but no obvious hearths, although two small nondescript pits, Feature 3 and 25, were candidates for such. The structure appears to have been dismantled and there was no subsequent building activity. There were several large shallow pits in the house area but these appear to postdate the structure.

Very little artifactual material was recovered from this unit, and almost none in direct association with the structure. Because of the nearness to the mound (11 meters to the east) and the lack of subsequent building activity, the structure was judged to be relatively early on the site--a placement later supported by carbon dating.

Square 18-78

This 5 m square is situated about 40 m north of the substructure mound. This unit was not selected in the random sample. Early in the field season attention was drawn to this area because of a large, roughly circular area of extremely lush grass, which stood in sharp contrast to the surrounding pasture vegetation. Ultimately, a unit was selected near the center of this area in the hope that the vegetation marked a major subsurface feature. Excavation encountered an extremely large, refuse-filled pit (Feature 4) which occupied most of the area of the square. The immediate vicinity seems to have been a slight depression and the whole area, including Feature 4, was capped with a heavy mantle of refuse-rich soil. Feature 4 was oval in shape and oriented northwest-southeast, extending out of the northwest corner of the square. The partial length was 5 m and the width was 3.6 m. At its deepest point, the pit bottom was 73 cm below

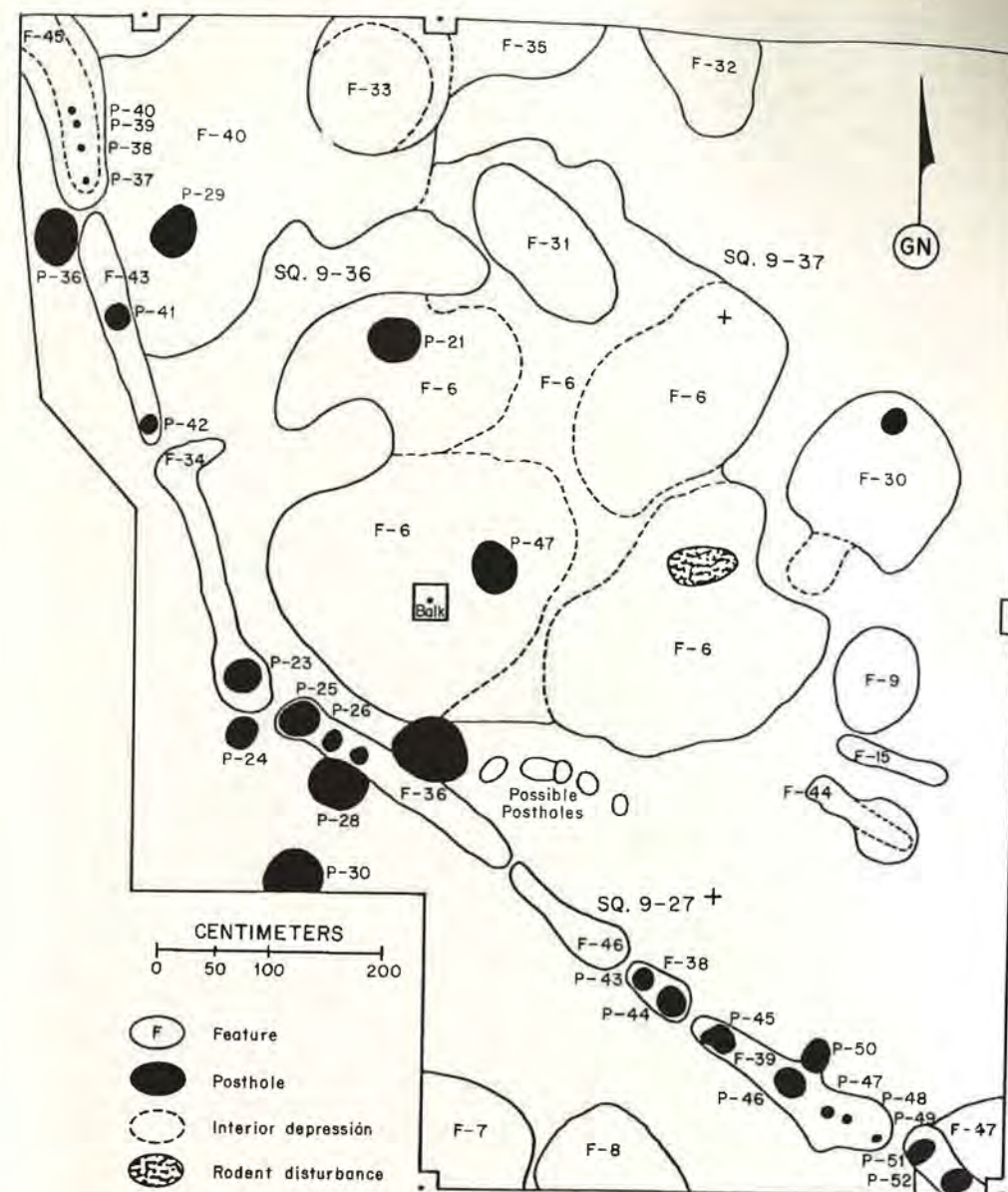


Figure 6. Square 9-27 and adjacent units showing palisade section.

the surface. Other than a wash layer in the bottom, the pit evidenced no stratigraphy. The dark fill was packed with large quantities of rock, bone, and ceramics. One has to suspect that the pit was dug to procure fresh earth for building purposes and then was used as a garbage dump. The organic rich midden and pit fill would seem to account for the distinctive surface vegetation. Even though Square 18-78 was the smallest excavation unit of the 1974 season, it produced a significant proportion of the artifactual materials recovered that year--61% of all the ceramics and 35% of all chipped stone material.

Mound Excavations

In 1977 additional work was done at Sellars using students from the University of Tennessee at Nashville. Because of the limited amount of time and labor, the field objective necessarily had to be restricted. Accordingly, it was decided to test the small mound on the north side of the plaza. The goal of the work was to determine whether this feature was a genuine substructure mound or, as some local collectors maintained, a pile of spoil dirt from Putnam's excavations. The Buchanan map is not definitive on this point. It indicates a very large house depression at the approximate location but with hachuring which suggests some elevation. The feature on the Buchanan map does have a depression in the center. The present mound has been subjected to cultivation as well as the digging of relic collectors.

The mound gives the superficial impression of being circular with a diameter of from 23 to 30 meters depending on what point one selects as the beginning of the mound slope. Once mapped, the mound proved to be four-sided although the shape is subtle and not easy to detect (Figure 10). The top of the mound is about 80 cm above the level ground to the west and south. The natural surface falls away sharply to the north and east of the mound. The top of the mound is somewhat rounded with clear evidence of refilled collector's pits.

Trench 3, a 12 by 2 m trench oriented on the east-west grid axis, was placed into the west side of the mound. The east end of the trench reached a point just south of the center of the mound. Typical of many small test excavations, Trench 3 ultimately created more questions than it solved. Portions of two structures could be identified at the base of the mound (Figure 11). Both structures were oriented appropriately to the plaza, the main mound, and the previously excavated structure, that is, an axis with an azimuth of about 110° magnetic.

The earliest structure (Structure 3) was built in the existing topsoil. It was a substantial wall trench house. Two hearths (Features 65 and 67) and three large internal support posts were associated with this structure. The support posts represent three corners of a square support post arrangement. Assuming that the hearths and support posts were symmetrically spaced relative to the center of the house, the structure has one dimension of between 5 and 6 meters. This structure was ultimately dismantled and the area covered with a 10 to 15 cm layer of clean earth, upon which a second structure was built. The latter (Structure 4) was identified by the bottoms of a line of wall posts and one support post. The postmolds associated with this structure were filled with charcoal, a circumstance which suggests that the structure was burned. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the mound surface outside of the walls exhibited a layer of charcoal and ash as well as several areas of surface firing.

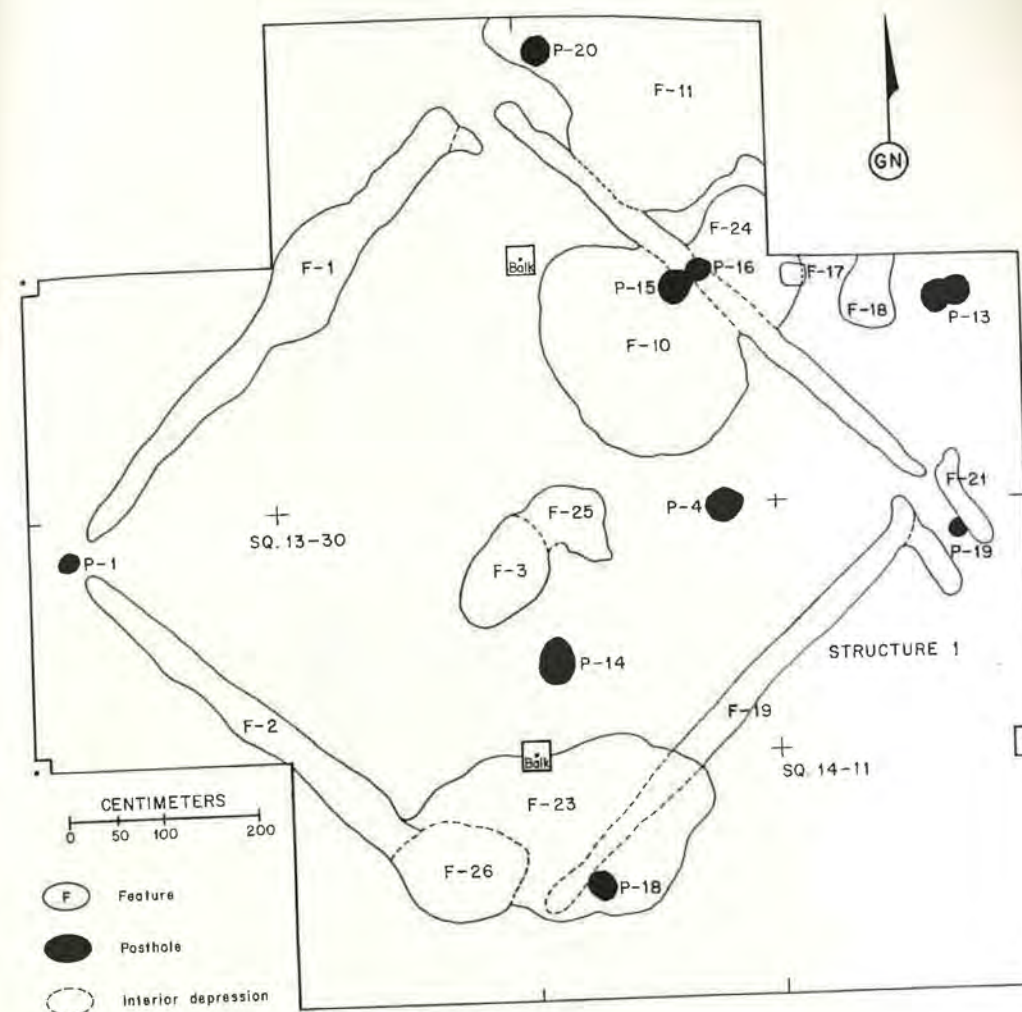


Figure 7. Square 13-30 and adjacent units showing Structure 1.

Above this level, nothing could be identified in the upper portion of the mound. The upper 40 to 50 cm of fill consisted of a dark, homogeneous midden-like soil which contained small amounts of refuse. The only features which could be identified were all recent disturbances. At the base of the original "mound", a shallow curving wall trench (Feature 61) was identified cutting across the test trench. This feature, which could be associated with either of the identified structures, appears to represent a small palisade or fence enclosing the structure(s).

Ultimately, the test trench did not achieve its designated goal in that the nature of this mound is still not fully resolved. The bottom portion of the mound is clearly prehistoric. The first structure was built on the original ground surface, and the second was put on an elevated surface. At this point, the low mound would have been about 15 m square. The thick mantle of dark soil above this is still a mystery. Present data do not rule out the possibility that this mantle represents spoil dirt dumped on a house depression by Putnam's excavators. A recent origin might explain the fact that this feature is so prominent while most of the village area features observed by Putnam have been obliterated. The one hundred years since Putnam's work are more than enough time to obscure the boundary between prehistoric and recent fill, particularly if the two soil units were similar in color and content. The quadrilateral shape of the mound is difficult to explain in this regard, but if the underlying feature were so shaped, the spoil dirt could have been placed over it in a similar configuration. The mound, whatever its origin, has now been substantially spread by cultivation and erosion.

Cultigens

Flotation samples from the 1974 work were processed and both maize and beans were recovered from several proveniences within the site. Mr. Leonard Blake of the Missouri Botanical Garden examined the samples and identified the cultigens (letter from L. Blake of March 28, 1975). One surprise was the prevailing high row number found at the site; 10, 12, and 14 row ears are represented with 12 row being the most common. The largest sample of cultigens was obtained from one of the wall trenches of Structure 1 in square 13-30, where both maize and beans were recovered. Wood charcoal from the same wall trench yielded a date of ca. A.D. 1050 (see below). If the date is correct, this represents one of the earliest occurrences of beans documented in the Southeast to date.

Dating

Five radiocarbon dates have been obtained for the Sellars site. Table 1 presents basic data on these age determinations. The B.P. dates are based on a half-life of 5570 years with an error range of one standard deviation. The calendar dates have been corrected by the two readily available tree ring correction tables--the so-called Arizona TRC (Damon et al. 1974) and the M.A.S.C.A. TRC (Ralph, Michael, and Han 1974). For the period in question the tables alter the directly converted B.P. date very little, a maximum of 35 years.

Of the five dates, only UGa-948 deviates seriously from the expected range. The sample was obtained from one of the short post trenches of Feature 53, the early village palisade. The date of ca. A.D. 430 is clearly unacceptable for a Mississippian feature. Sample UGa-947 dates Feature 6, a complex of shallow



Figure 8. Square 9-27 and adjacent units showing palisade segment (Feature 53). View to southeast.

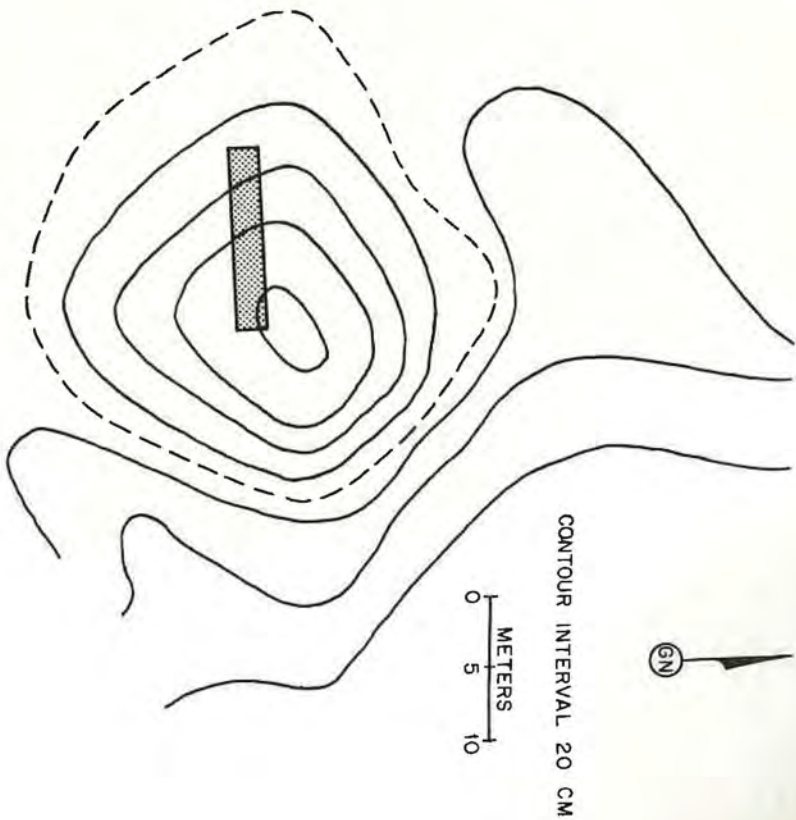


Figure 9. Square 13-30 and adjacent units showing Structure 1. View to southeast.

TABLE 1: RADIOCARBON DATES

SAMPLE	PROVENIENCE	ASSOCIATION	B.P. DATE	CALENDAR DATE (A.D.) TREE-RING-CORRECTED	
				ARIZONA	MASCA
UGa-944	Sq. 13-30SW Feature 2	Wall-trench house, Structure 1	900±110	1056±114	1063±120
UGa-945	Sq. 18-78NW Feature 4	Large, refuse- filled pit	705±65	1236±71	1244±75
UGa-946	Trench 1 Feature 22	Post trench of main village palisade	800±65	1148±71	1186±75
UGa-947	Sq. 9-36SE Feature 6	Refuse-filled pits associated with early palisade	975±235	986±237	1006±245
UGa-948	Sq. 9-27SW Feature 39	Early village palisade	1545±110	424±112	440±120

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Figure 10. Trench 3 and the small mound.

refuse-filled pits adjacent to and apparently contemporaneous with this early palisade. The calendar date of ca. A.D. 1000 is consistent with this interpretation although the large standard deviation limits the usefulness of the date. UGa-946 was obtained from the post trench beneath the main embankment in Trench 1. Field observation clearly indicated that this fortification was later than the one represented by Feature 53, and the calendar date of ca. A.D. 1150 confirms that. UGa-947 was a sample retrieved from one of the wall trenches of Structure 1. Charred maize and beans were also found in the same feature. The calendar date of ca. A.D. 1050 agrees with field observations which suggested that the structure was relatively early on the site. UGa-945 is from Feature 4, the large refuse-filled pit which produced most of the diagnostic ceramics obtained in the 1974 work. The ceramics clearly belong in the latter half of the local Mississippian sequence (i.e., post A.D. 1200) and the calendar date of ca. A.D. 1240 agrees with that placement.

The dates are in general somewhat earlier than was expected, but other than the unacceptable UGa-948, they are internally consistent and agree with field observations as to their relative age. Despite the internal consistency of the dates, one is still not entirely satisfied by them. A nagging problem is the lack of comparability between the ceramics from Sellars and the far larger collections from Mound Bottom which should be essentially pre-1250 A.D. (O'Brien 1977). According to the Sellars dates, the two sites overlap substantially in age. At Sellars the association of the dates with diagnostic ceramics is, unfortunately, poor. The two proveniences which produced early dates, Feature 6 and Structure 1, yielded almost no diagnostic ceramics. Only the 1240 A.D. date pertains to a large, useful ceramic sample, and that date was obtained from large pieces of charcoal included in the refuse fill of Feature 4. The wood could be older than the associated ceramics. The ceramics from Feature 4, however, are generally similar to those described by Ferguson et al. (1972) and Dowd (1972) for the "Middle Cumberland Culture" with associated dates (albeit from bone collagen) in the 1200-1400 A.D. range. The dating of the recently excavated Averbuch site in the Bordeaux section of Nashville (Reed 1978) should help clarify the latter portion of the Mississippian sequence in the Nashville Basin.

Discussion

At this stage few major conclusions are possible. Excavations to date have explored an area of about 284 m², which represents a 0.6% sample of the village area. A definitive study of the site will require a comprehensive program of excavation. The recent work has supplied data primarily on the palisade complexes of the site. In culture-historical terms, the major results are the radiocarbon dates which indicate a much longer occupational span than was anticipated for the site.

More important than specific details about the site will be an understanding of the role this small mound center played in the regional Mississippian settlement system. The title of this paper makes note of the remote location of this site. Although systematic survey data are largely lacking, enough is known to suggest that Mississippian groups along the Cumberland River in the Nashville Basin were involved in a subsistence-settlement adaptation which differs considerably from those now documented along the Mississippi and lower Ohio Rivers. While there is substantial settlement in and adjacent to the floodplain of the Cumberland (as one would expect), there are also numerous and often large sites

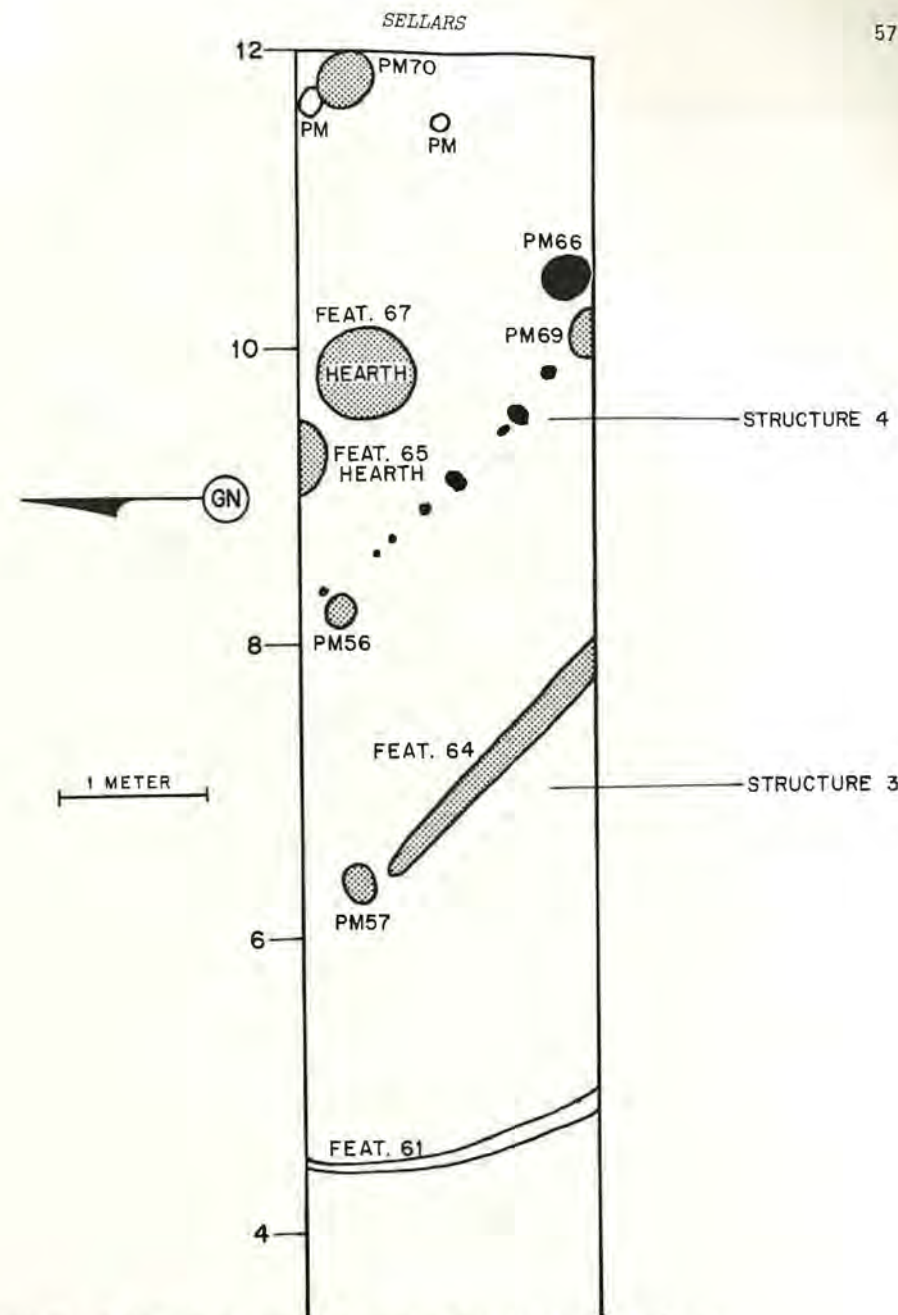


Figure 11. East end of Trench 3 showing architectural features.

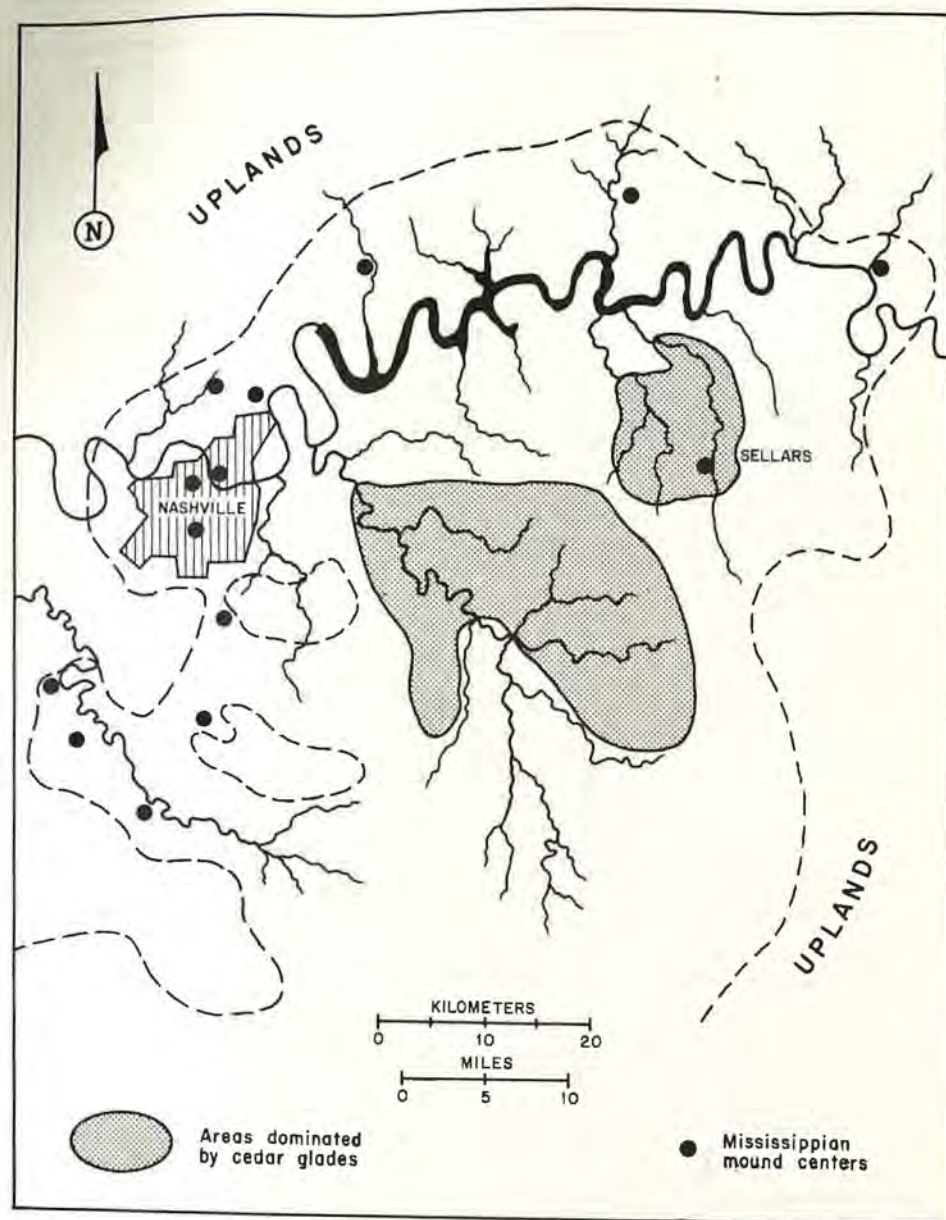


Figure 12. Mississippian mound centers in the Middle Cumberland area.

located in upland settings on small creeks at substantial distances from the river. In fact, most of the documented mound sites in the middle Cumberland areas are in such locations.

Even by these standards, the location of the Sellars site is difficult to explain in terms of subsistence patterns. Sellars is located further away from the Cumberland (21 km) than any other mound site in the drainage and it is twice as distant as the second-most remote site. The area around Sellars is singularly unsuited for Mississippian subsistence practices as we presently interpret them. Only small plots of alluvial soils are available in the meander loops of Spring Creek and these are at high risk due to the stream's habit of late season flooding. Adjacent upland soils are thin and unproductive even under modern farming methods. In many areas of the Nashville Basin the soils are no more than 12 inches deep. These areas supported a particular biotic community known as cedar glades (Harper 1926, Quarterman 1950 a and b). These areas consisted of a mosaic pattern of dense stands of red cedar interspersed with open areas whose ground cover ranged from bare rock to various grasses, sedges, and shrubs. The relationship of cedar glades to prehistoric subsistence patterns has not been investigated, but their food resource potential appears to be far below that of the local mesophytic forests. Sellars is the only major Mississippian site in the Nashville Basin located in the middle of an area dominated by cedar glades.

If the location of the Sellars site is not an optimal or even a preferable one for Mississippian subsistence activities, then other explanations must be sought for its existence. Clay (1976) has suggested that Mississippian systems responded to their environment (both physical and social) on a number of different levels. At the strategic level, responses are based on the social, economic, or political good of the larger system which may have relatively little to do with primary subsistence on the local level. One has to suspect that Sellars is indicative of such a situation. The location of Sellars is strongly suggestive of a placement dictated by the need to establish group boundaries and maintain a border settlement in the midst of a large expanse of mostly uninhabited area. The distribution of the known Mississippian mound sites along the Cumberland corridor is strongly suggestive of this (Figure 12). East of Nashville, there are three mound centers spaced at approximately equal intervals along the north side of the Cumberland River. Sellars is the only one south of the river, occupying an isolated but relatively central location in this zone. The location is immediately suggestive of a border settlement. The Spring Creek drainage comprises a relatively direct overland route from the Cumberland River southward to the Eastern Highland Rim; thus, the site may have functioned as an important terminus for external trade and communication in a southeastern direction.

Notes:

1. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 4th Annual Meeting of the Tennessee Anthropological Association, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, April 7, 1979.

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