In 1961, James Bird and Paul Roundy had been assigned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to South Bend, Indiana. While there, they met with Father Charles E. Sheedy, at the University of Notre Dame. The two missionaries told him the story of Joseph Smith and the inscribed gold plates from which they believed he transcribed the Book of Mormon.

"I have some of Joseph Smith's type of writing here at Notre Dame," Father Sheedy interrupted. He showed the two surprised men to the attic of the nearby o'Shaughnessy Building. There they discovered three open boxes from which the Catholic priest removed several slate and copper tablets covered with hieroglyphics, pictographs and inscriptions. Father Sheedy hoped someone might be able to authenticate or disprove the collection. Perhaps the Mormons with their "golden plate" theory would come to the rescue.

Bird and Roundy dashed off a letter to researcher Milton R. Hunter of the First Council of the Seventy in Salt Lake City, Utah, but waited in vain for a reply. Hunter had misplaced the letter. When he finally found it several years later, he contacted Father Sheedy, requesting an interview. 2

Sometime before, the priest had turned down a chance to expand his number of alleged artifacts, when Ellis Soper, of North Carolina, offered to donate similar items. 3 Notre Dame was running out of storage room, so Father Sheedy was anxious to meet anyone who might take the questionable objects off his hands. He had even cooperated with Henrietta Mertz, a Chicago attorney and author, allowing her to examine his attic collection for six years, because she promised to write a book proving its authenticity.

But her efforts were stymied by publishers convinced the inscribed tablets were part of some 19th Century hoax. It was Father Sheedy personal opinion that they were perhaps of ancient Greek or Egyptian origin Such bizarre objects were not credibly examined by the convoluted theories Mertz advocated of transatlantic 5th Century Christian cultists. Such wild ideas might compromise the priest's academic standing and even embarrass the Notre Dame authorities. Washing his hands of the whole affair, he presented the astounded Hunter with his entire collection. 5

Since then, the strange tablets continue to fascinate antiquarians puzzled by the mysteries of pre-Columbian America. These investigators have always been aware of stone ruins and enigmatic artifacts discovered during the 18th and 19th centuries. As North America's forests were cleared, plows turned over the virgin soil, and pioneers stumbled upon vacant mines and shafts--all testimony to some civilization that rose and fell long before modern Europeans arrived.

As historian John Baldwin wrote, "An ancient and unknown people left remains of settled life, and of a certain degree of civilization, in the valleys of the Mississippi and its tributaries. We have no authentic name for them either as a nation or a race; therefore, they are called 'Mound Builders,' this name having been suggested by an important class of their works" 6

He was seconded by Carter and Cheeseman: "The Mound Builders were thought of as white, cultured, and not the ancestors of the Indians... Whoever these ancient people were, they left behind some very puzzling remains. The number of earthworks, when considered with their size and the area of the country they cover, becomes evidence of a great achievement." 7

The prehistoric mounds were so numerous their actual count is unknown. In Ohio alone there were more than 10,000 such sites. Tens of thousands more once existed throughout Michigan, Illinois and Indiana, Wisconsin and Missouri.

18th and early 19th Century antiquarians were virtually unanimous in their conviction that the remains of an ancient civilization of white people long ago spread across America from the gulf coast to Canada, from New England to the Pacific coast. These "Mound Builders," as they were called, were believed to have been a highly developed race far superior to the Indians known to the first pilgrims.

No other explanation for the profusion of evidence on behalf of some advanced, vanished culture seemed feasible. Indeed, the Indians themselves spoke of populations of white men predating their own arrival in parts of America Yet, today very few archaeologists believe that the Mound Builders belonged to a lost, white race. What brought about this re-interpretation?

According to Baldwin, "It is rather interesting to consider the circumstances that led to the abandonment of this theory as a myth. The fact is that by 1890 the tide of opinion had shifted,
and men of science denied that there had ever been a highly cultured white race in America's past. This very radical turn-about came as a result of the scientific leadership of one man, Mr. John Wesley Powell.9

In 1879, when Congress created the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of Ethology, Major Powell, a Civil War hero, received additional power and prestige as the Bureau's first Director. He was disposed to think that the Mound Builders were the ancestors of the native Indians, and presented his theory as dogma in the Bureau's first annual report, published in 1880. He wrote, "That the vestiges of art discovered do not excel in any respect the arts of the Indian tribes known to history. There is, therefore, no reason for us to search for an extra-limited origin through lost tribes for the arts discovered in the mounds of North America."10

So prestigious was the Smithsonian and its authoritative director that within a few years the scientific community had unilaterally adopted Powell's opinion, ignoring the vast amount of physical evidence previously accumulated. Scholars without significant new findings began to discredit and re-interpret the civilization of the Mound Builders in favor of Powell's theory. As one writer put it, "Evidence contrary to Powell's stated opinion was explained as fraudulent, as buried in the mounds intrusively, or simply re-interpreted to favor the new theory. From this time forward any thing that referred to the original glorious Mound Builder theory was considered mythical. It was a very hostile academic environment for anyone who ventured to propose that there had ever been a highly civilized group of people in the New World."11

Despite Powell's intractable stance against any form of cultural diffusion, stories like those told of James O. Scotford continue to plague conventional scholars. And it explains why so many anomalous artifacts appeared around the turn of the last century, as the following case illustrates.

James O. Scotford was tired. He had already set three quarters of a mile of fence and still had a few more hours before sunset. He drew taut the line in an effort to clear the mound between him and the last post. He then grabbed at his auger and began to dig another hole at the center of an old Indian mound. He would have to hurry, as his companion had almost caught up in placing more poles.

Scotford gave a groan, as the auger hit something hard. He pushed harder, but it didn't budge, then shouted to his companion to bring a spade. He hadn't expected a rock, since there were no stones in the area. He would have to dig around it. To his great surprise, the shovel uncovered a large earthen casket. The auger had broken its cover, but the larger portion was in tact.

Scotford was wild with excitement, as he rode toward Edmore, Michigan with the casket nestled in the bed of his wagon. The townspeople crowded around, as they listened to the story of discovery.

During the weeks and months that followed, the citizens of Edmore, and those of surrounding communities, opened up more than 500 mounds, all blanketed with dense vegetation. Large cedar trees and oaks covered a few of the mounds. The searchers uncovered hundreds of different relics, including other ancient earthen caskets, tablets of clay, slate, sandstone, and copper. They were all beautifully carved with ancient biblical and historical scenes, writings, and symbols.

It was recorded, "So many citizens from the towns of Wyman and Edmore were eyewitnesses and involved in the excavating and recovery of the relics and the evidence, so clear that doubts were never entertained for a moment as to the authenticity of the work. In one case, a casket was found under the roots of a tree which by its concentric circles was shown to be about 300 years old; and one of the roots of the tree had grown through the corner of the casket and was coiled up inside the box, but so decayed that it was broken with atouch."12

Although farmers for years had been finding copper and slate artifacts while clearing and plowing new ground, the activities in Montcalm County exploded into excavations throughout Michigan.

Perhaps no man helped to open more mounds in Michigan than Father James Savage, a priest of the Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Trinity, in Detroit, Michigan. He described the mounds as follows:

"On these mounds you may find large and aged trees; oaks, pine, and other varieties. The decayed roots of pine and other trees that grew, thrived and died on these mounds. They contain another peculiarity. There is a strata of charcoal and ash in each mound. This strata often show the basin-shaped contour of the interior of the mound when its possessor was laid away to rest. There does not appear, as a rule, sufficient charcoal and ashes for cremation, only enough for purification. In some mounds, however, there is heavy strata."

"These prehistoric mounds of Michigan contain caskets, lamps, bowls, pipes, tablets, etc. of clay: battle-axes, knives, spears, daggers, and arrow-points, domestic utensils, saws, chisels, spades, etc., and a variety of ornamental wearing apparel--all of chilled copper; stone tablets, medallions, metals, skinning knives, various implements, and of strange design, the object of
which we can not imagine. One remarkable feature of these mounds--they contain no flint implement of any find, nor have I seen any stone or copper beads; other ornamental wearing apparel is frequent."

An associate of Savage stated, "Many curious things were unearthed, such a caskets, tablets, amulets of slate, stone, cups, vases, altars, lamps of burnt clay, copper coins hammered out, and rudely engraved with hieroglyphics. The caskets are of sun-dried clay, and are covered with picture writing and hieroglyphics. The caskets seem to be intended as receptacles for the tablets of record. They have close-fitting covers, which are cemented on with Assyrian like cement, and various figures were molded on the top--the ancient Sphinx, beasts, serpents, human faces with head dresses or crowns."15

For the next twenty years, Detroit was the center of interest for people seeking ancient relics. To give some order to such popular archaeology, Father Savage joined Daniel E. Soper, a former U.S. Secretary of State, and respected businessman, to form a discovery team.

Savage reported, "We have opened more than 500 of these mounds in the four counties in which we have worked--a territory exceeding over 260 miles. We have diligently inquired regarding the locality of other finds and have so far located sixteen counties in Michigan in which these specimens have been found. We are confident that we are only in the border land of the great prehistoric people."16

Between 1858 and 1920, many thousands of mounds were excavated, but the vast majority were empty. According to Russell, "It must not be imagined that every mound opened has been a storehouse of objects of interest. On the contrary, the proportion of productive to non-productive mounds has not been greater than one to ten."17

Nonetheless, many thousands of artifacts were indeed found, and, as time passed and descriptions of the relics appeared in many newspapers, people throughout the state reported finding similar relics.

In Soper's own words, "I have personal knowledge of more than 3,000 articles that have been found and if they are fakes and were buried to be found, whoever buried them has been a very busy person, because they have been found throughout the state by hundreds of different people.

"The objects recovered from the mounds are, variously, of copper, sandstone, limestone, burned clay and slate. The copper appears to be true mass-lake copper. Of the slates, the grayish black variety predominates, this being of the quality which outcrops near Baraga, in northern Michigan. The sandstone is of fine texture now quarried at Amhurst, Ohio. Red and green slate limestone appear, these being of an argillaceous character and having a good polish."18

The research undertaken by Soper and Savage led them to believe that long before the ancestors of modern Native Indians arrived in North America, a race of white people with superior intelligence and culture left their mark in the vast, prehistoric graveyard that covered the state of Michigan. Both men felt they had the evidence to prove their conclusions. But their ideas brought them ferocious criticism.

The so-called "men of letters" in America's scientific community condemned Soper and Savage as conspirators of an archaeological hoax. For every published report even mildly in favor of the two hapless investigators, some university-trained scholar would issue a charge of fraud.

So unrelenting was the official campaign of academic hysteria, that everyone however remotely associated with the Michigan artifacts distanced themselves from the bitter controversy. Any discussion of the artifacts' possible genuineness was no longer considered. Eventually, over the decades, the Michigan Tablets fell into almost complete oblivion.

Today, however, they are being re-examined in the new light of unprejudiced investigation. Many collections private and public are being photographed and cataloged for the first time. Thanks in large measure to Ancient American magazine, their story and images are preserved for present and future researchers into the lost history of North America.

Sources
2. Letter from Milton R. Hunter to Fr. Charles Sheedy, February 20, 1962; copy in possession of the authors.
3. Ellis Soper inherited his father's collection, plus a copy of the letter offering his collection to Notre Dame, December 2, 1959; in author's possession.
4. Correspondence between Henrietta Mertz and Fr. Sheedy, May 24, 1954, through March 23, 1962; copies in possession of the authors.
6. Upon the death of Mr. Hunter, the L.D.S. Church took possession of the collection.
"In 1848, Professor Edwin Worth began collecting stray finds of slate, copper, and ceramic pieces bearing amateurish engraved pictures captioned in paleo-Hebrew, hieroglyphics, and unrecognized scripts, but almost invariably including YHW In quasi-cuneiform. Worth exhibited his collection in Detroit and New York. It was destroyed by fire at Springport, Indiana, in 1916. A farmer clearing a field at Crystal, Michigan, uncovered a large polished slate spindle bearing YHW (and more beneath this) [Ken Moore, "Michigan's Mysterious Tablets," Ancient American 11/9 (1995), 31-32]. By 1820, other individuals had found a total of more than 10,000 (possibly as many as 30,000) related "Michigan artifacts" in Ohio and Canada, as well as Michigan. Several antiquarians assembled large collections. In 1910, Mormon bishop, Rudolph Etzenhouser, published 44 pages of photographs that included a typical black slate tablet found in Michigan on September 3, 1896; it illustrated scenes of Noah's Flood in four horizontal panels, not omitting the cuneiform YHW. There were other photos of a ceramic box surmounted by an Assyrian-type sphinx, found near St. Louis, Michigan, on December 12, 1904, likewise displaying YHW [ISAC published a facsimile of Etzenhouser's book in July, 1994.] Horses and elephants appear on the tablets, along with a very few paleo-Hebrew words, and Egyptian hieroglyphics. The Garden of Eden and Tower of Babel were other represented themes, but also illustrated references to the New Testament, Including Simeon's beholding the child Jesus (Luke 2:25-32), and a 13-panel life of Jesus as Yahshua the Messiah.

During 1912, sewer workers in the Highland Park district of Detroit found a small copper hammer head Inscribed with the YHW.

Henriette Mertz's collection incorporated pieces from those of Worth, Etzenhouser, and three other collectors. She particularly marveled at recurring representations of circular 13-month calendars. Her exposition, The Mystic Symbol (Global Books, 1986, posthumous), widely revived interest in the curious, derided artifacts."

notice. From the 1860's onward, pieces with the same markings had been collected by a professor Edwin Worth and, although it was unknown to the farmers around Crystal, Professor Worth had exhibited some of these in Detroit. The collection, began by Professor Worth in 1848, exhibited for a time in New York, was finally destroyed in a fire at Springport, Indiana, in 1916. Only a few copper pieces survived and these are illustrated by Henriette Mertz in her book, The Mystic Symbol.

Local farmers, knowledgeable only about Indians, were surprised by these artifacts, which were unlike anything they had ever seen. No one could read any of the incised writing. Farmers began to display and compare their newly found artifacts and all agreed that there was writing on them, but no one could agree on what that writing purported to be.

Between 1870 and 1920, farmers from seventeen Michigan counties had found artifacts, each piece showing the same grouping of cuneiform. From these finds, some major collections developed, as did the earliest indications of controversy. The first professionals to view the artifacts could offer no explanation for them and, not able to recognize the writing as any script with which they were familiar, declared, in each and every case, that the artifacts were fraudulent.

In 1890, James Scotford made his first Michigan Tablet find; it elevated the controversy to a hysterical level which is only now beginning to subside. Scotford, a young hired-hand on the Davis farm near Wyman, while digging post-holes, unearthed a clay jar covered with the unknown script. Scotford was uneducated and could make nothing out of the markings. Again, the curious came, this time to the Davis farm, to see tablets and speculate on their meaning. This latest flurry of interest aroused the attention of archaeologists, even in Europe. By the end of 1890, Scotford had dug up more objects, such items as a sphinx, a vase and tablets; each one displayed the grouping of cuneiform along with the other unknown scripts.

In nearby Stanton, people who were convinced that these relics were, in fact, remains of an unknown culture formed a society to study them. Photos were sent to museums and universities in the hope that someone could recognize the writing or identify the objects. Every answer was negative. A typical newspaper article was headed "Archaeological Forgeries at Wyman, Michigan". At this same time, 1892, a man named Cornell of Battle Creek, Michigan, believing wholeheartedly that the artifacts were genuine, published a small monograph entitled "Prehistoric Relics of the Mound Builders". It describes the objects and illustrates some of them. After a description of the circumstances of the finds, he provided a detailed account of the mounds in which they were found, leaving us a very important eye-witness account. After summarizing some history of the Near East, he ends the pamphlet with a page of eye-witness testimonies signed by people who watched artifacts being dug from the ground.

The society of Stanton disbanded while the debate and condemnation continued sporadically in various newspapers and journals. Public notice gradually melted away until October, 1907, when more artifacts again began to appear in Detroit. A man named Daniel Soper, who later went on to assemble one of the major collections of these artifacts, was responsible for this newest sensation. His own account, written some years later, is a most interesting narrative. He describes walking in the woods and seeing a mound where a woodchuck had dug a den. The sand thrown out by the woodchuck contained pieces of broken pottery which, when washed off, displayed the writing and markings. He got a shovel and dug into the mound where he found a clay lamp and a slate box which contained three copper spearheads.

On the same evening of this first find, Soper went to see his friend, the Reverend James Savage, who, beyond being a Pastor, was a knowledgeable amateur archaeologist and collector. Savage recognized that the artifacts resembled nothing in his present collection of ten thousand artifacts. Later, Savage was to build another major collection of mound artifacts.

In 1910, Bishop Rudolph Etzenhouser, a missionary of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, enters our story. Etzenhouser proceeded to assemble his own collection and then published a formal brochure, Engravings of Pre-Historic Specimens from Michigan, U.S.A. It featured forty-four ages of photos of artifacts and the tablets, including some from the collections of Soper and
Savage. The engraved plates for this printing were made by Van Leyen & Hensler of Detroit. The brochure has an introduction which generally suggests that, although the language of the tablets has not yet been interpreted, it will in the long run "...yield an interesting chapter to the ancient history of this continent". A few copies of his booklet are still in circulation.

By now many well-recognized experts were denouncing the artifacts as forgeries, some already accusing Scotford of counterfeiting them. This is interesting. In hindsight, their accusation is interesting, because what they were actually saying was that he forged artifacts which had, in fact, been found before he was born. Bishop Etzenhouser was on a lecture tour to acclaim the artifacts and various well-known professors were lecturing just as vigordusly to the contrary. At this time, a committee was formed to settle the question by proceeding to Detroit to see a mound opened. Professor Frederick Starr of the University of Chicago and Roswell Field, an editor of the daily Chicago Examiner, were joined by a representative of the Mormon Church, Dr. James Talmage, Director of the Deseret Museum at Salt Lake City. Already, there had been vague suggestions that the Michigan tablets could in some way throw doubt on those allegedly found by Joseph Smith; the Mormon Church now had a special interest in this study.

Along with the committee, a group of curious spectators watched, as two mounds were opened, yielding 5 artifacts. Professor Starr then wrote that even though he had himself removed one of the objects from the mound they had been "introduced into the mound by sleight-of-hand even as everyone watched" (sic). His report was published without question. However, it was for Talmage to become the loudest voice among all the denunciations, which have overshadowed the study even until most recently. Thankfully, Talmage kept a diary of field-notes and observations and, again thankfully, Dr. Fell, for reasons which remain obscure, published the significant section of Talmage's journal in ESOP (1988).

On first reading Talmage's notes, it becomes obvious that he went to Detroit with the explicit intention to discredit the artifacts (my personal evaluation). His story, published in the Deseret Museum Bulletin, including illustrations of some of the objects, is headed "The Michigan 'Relics' - A Story of Forgery and Deception". He viewed the Soper and Savage collections and it is here that we find the first reference to the group of cuneiform characters appearing on the artifacts as the "Tribal-Mark". Concurrently, a Professor Kelsey had labeled this the "sign-manual of the forger". The Talmage journal is readily available (ESOP), so to avoid lengthy repetition, I summarize the highlights:

The published story begins with a brief referral to the Soper and Savage collections and then poses a five part theorem, which Talmage suggests must be completely true for the relics to be considered as authentic:

1. That...the present State of Michigan was inhabited in the long-ago...by people of the Caucasian race possessing a high degree of civilization.
2. That, living at the same time same area, was another group of inferior culture, resembling the Indians of today.
3. That these two peoples, representing widely different cultures, were at enmity one with the other
4. That the people of higher culture used a written language, both pictographic and characters, some of which had points of resemblance to alphabets of Egyptian, Greek, Assyrian, Phoenician and Hebrew.
5. That the peoples of the higher class had knowledge of books of Jewish scripture, specifically Genesis, and later books of the Old Testament. [Note here: A lack of reference to New Testament]

From a perspective today I suggest that, in the light of progressive positive study, all of the five points which Talmage considered fanciful are being validated.

Talmage states that if the Michigan "relics" were genuine, they would "Furnish strong
external evidence of the main facts set forth in the Book of Mormon. Yet, having said this, he curiously again brands them as forgeries. He suggests that he open some mounds himself and everyone concerned agreed that he should. He allowed Scotford to lead him and in November of 1909, he opened some mounds with Scotford's help. Talmage then describes an area near the Oldsmobile factory and admits that some of the mounds appeared to be plainly artificial in origin. [His description of the first mound opened is important for us here now because it contains several facts which, at this later time, suggest a theory to me which I will detail later]. In the sand, 12-inches below the mound surface, layer of charcoal was found. Both Scotford and Soper stated that the finding of this charcoal layer would prove that the mound held artifacts. They continued digging and did find a copper axe. He describes the next mound, which the locals called the "Serpent Mound". Here he found the layer of charcoal and then a slate tablet inscribed on both surfaces. Scotford stated, "This is like what was found on one of the plates from Mormon Hill at Cumorah, New York". In this same mound they found a slate knife inscribed on one side.

Several days later Talmage, with Scotford and Soper, went back to this mound and found another slate tablet. The next mound, with the charcoal layer, produced another slate tablet. Now, the next few mounds opened had no charcoal layer and produced no artifacts. All of the artifacts found displayed the "Tribal-Mark". Talmage went to New York and then Washington to show his six, newly found artifacts to museum archaeologists, all of whom pronounced them as "fakes". He returned to Detroit and quietly went out to dig with the help of some hired men. The 22 mounds they excavated yielded nothing. Returning to Salt Lake, Talmage learned of the Etzenhouser book. He illustrates some of the plates from this work and adds his own very disparaging commentary. After stating his reasons for believing the artifacts as spurious, he directly accuses Scotford of forging them.

In April, 1953, Michigan's Controversial Finds was released. It was written by an Al Spooner, son of a man who had been with Soper until 1920. The following November, at a lecture on the "Soper Frauds", a Judge Claude Stone of Peoria, Illinois, who believed that all of the relics were genuine, asked Dr. Henriette Mertz to examine the writing on some of the tablets and, if she found that they were indeed authentic, to then prove their authenticity.

Dr. Mertz was well-known to Judge Stone as a scholar. She was professionally training in forgery identification and, because of her many years of preColumbian studies, had a working knowledge of the writing habits of the ancients. As a Lt. Commander-USNR, she served in the Office of Scientific Research and Development. She clearly possessed all the professional credentials for such an investigation. Dr. Mertz agreed that she would examine some of the tablets and rule on them impartially. The ensuing 30-years of intense study of these artifacts resulted in her book, The Mystic Symbol, a work that does indeed prove to any reasonable scholar that the Michigan artifacts and tablets are not frauds. Although in limited supply, her investigation is still available and my personal feeling is that history will accord it a high place among publications of this century.

Its title reflects the grouping of cuneiform which appears on each and every tablet or artifact and which Dr. Mertz transliterated as "I-H-S", or the name of God, as rendered by the Ancients. It is also generally agreed that the cuneiform is not Babylonian, but rather a related Persian form.

The Mystic Symbol contains many fine illustrations of tablets and objects. The most numerous tablets are religious, depicting scenes from both the Old and New Testaments and executed so precisely that there is never a doubt about the exact biblical reference.

During the course of her study, Dr. Mertz assembled her own collection of objects, some from the Soper and Savage groups, the Worth Collection, from Judge Stone, the clay Luke-Tablet from the Etzenhouser Collection, and several other random pieces. One noteworthy item is an artifact which really is hors-de-combat from the regular controversial collections. It is a copper
hammer about the size of a modern tack-hammer and bears the Mystic Symbol. It was found by workmen who were digging a new sewer in the Highland Park section of Detroit, in 1912. More about this collection later.

One focus of Dr. Mertz's research was on the calendars which appear on some of the tablets. These are circular calendars of 13-months as used by ancient peoples. She illustrates four and remarks that every request that she made to scholars knowledgeable in ancient calendars for insight was ignored or refused. Most experts regard them as "hot potatoes" and will not become involved in the study, a direct result of the whole corpus of negative publicity.

Dr. Mertz estimates that all of the referenced items over the years may total more than 10,000. Of these, sadly, there are records of disposal for over 3,000 artifacts. As a result of the "fake" label, many collectors "purged" their collections. She estimates the Savage Collection at about 2,700 pieces, with several hundred more in the Soper Collection. Not stated in her book but remembered from past conversations, Henriette recounted that she traced several thousand related items to Notre Dame University. There she learned that the tablets were stored away in the school archives. She also suggested two other archives, where some of these pieces might yet be collecting dust. I have passed this information along to one who will follow it up and more tablets may yet come to light. Dr. Mertz and I both noted that Talmage had sent some tablets to the Smithsonian.

Dr. Mertz passed away in 1984, just as she was finishing her book. Herbert Mertz published the book posthumously, cleaned out her apartment in Chicago, trashed all of her files, then took her collection to his home.

Four years later, I asked him in a letter if he might let me have, on loan, a tablet for study. I was then a member of AIAR* and I asked, out of courtesy, for his permission to use the Mystic Symbol as a logo to memorialize Henriette's work. By return mail, he sent me two copper tablets, one of which was inscribed on both sides. I showed them to many study groups and had them displayed at the Visitor Center of America's Stonehenge (New Hampshire); I sent photographs of the artifacts to interested persons. At the time, a colleague, Evan Hansen of Beryl, Utah, was staying with me; he had some guest-lectures at Lowell University.

Evan is a very sharp-eyed observer and he spent much time examining the copper tablets. After he returned home, he sent photos and some xeroxes from Dr. Mertz's book to one of his correspondents. His generosity was instrumental in bringing another, completely neutral scholar into our investigations. His name was Don Clifford of Harlingen Texas. Since then, Evan has done much in-depth research on all of the illustrated tablets.

In the Spring of 1989, Herbert Mertz wanted to divest himself of Henriette's collection by donating it to a conservator who would be responsible for its preservation and make it available for further study. He decided to give (or loan?) the total collection to AIAR.

The collection then was taken by Dorothy Hayden to her home in Mt. Vernon, New Hampshire, because as Director of AIAR, it was only right for her to keep them. The collection made one public appearance.

In June, 1989, I rented the Columbia Cultural Center in Taunton, Massachusetts, for a seminar and an exposition of the Mertz Collection. From this display the Mertz collection went back to New Hampshire where it has been ever since.

Subsequently, David Deal of Monte Vista, California, has done some masterful work towards readings of the mixtures of languages on various tablets. Some of his findings have been printed in various archaeology periodicals, but the best summation appeared in The Ancient American #5 March/April 1994. David has, through detailed coalition of historical references and his own understanding of the ancient languages, added a multifaceted and enlightened body of evidence, which adds an exclamation point to Dr. Mertz's proof of authenticity for the artifacts.

In a recent letter (April 30, 1994) David sums up his work on the Michigan artifacts: "I think they are an extremely important piece of ancient American history. I think I have
demonstrated, and in fact proven their meaning in a general sense, something that Henriette Mertz was not able to do. Of course I would not have been able to do what I did without her pioneering work. As you know, these artifacts have a bad reputation, but as I have demonstrated, they are genuine" --- a rather modest statement considering the magnitude of his endeavors.

Only recently Evan Hansen, after several years pursuit along a paper trail, received a letter from the Mormon (LDS) Church stating that they do, in fact, hold Michigan Relics. The letter, dated 23 March, 1992: 'Dear Mr. Hansen: Elder Lorin C. Dunn, to whom you have written two letters, has asked that I respond to you... The Church Historical Department has the material which you have described in your letter, though presently it has not been fully processed for our collection. We anticipate that this material may be available for research before the end of this year. Please contact us again several months from now concerning this matter." It is signed by Ronald 0. Barney, Archivist, Sr.

This is a major part of the Savage Collection which Dr. Mertz had, from hearsay, traced to Notre Dame University. I have copies of several other letters which the recipients do not give me permission to reproduce but they show that the LDS Church received 1,027 items of the Savage Collection from Notre Dame in 1960 and have them still.

One item of positive research on some atypical copper tools from the Perkins Collection of the Wisconsin Historical Society was undertaken by the New York Testing Laboratories, Inc. These were subjected to microanalysis, hardness test and X-Ray examination. Rather than being the crude cold-hammered tools made by Native Americans as was always accepted, they were shown to have been produced by a society quite advanced in metals technology. The results are finely detailed by Mallery in *Rediscovery of Lost America* and one of the octagonal chisels, bearing the Mystic Symbol is included in the Mertz Collection.

From Wayne May, *Ancient American* Vol. 3 No. 19/20, p. 15

To the first time reader of *The Mystic Symbol*, know this: at present the Michigan Tablets can be traced to 27 counties and three states. The first record of date testifying to their existence is in the year 1848. Public awareness did not surface until the 1870's. Even then, this is not all. Dr. Barry Fell's book, *Arnemca B.C.*, shows a hinge-ogam inscription at Monhegan Island, Maine. He translated it as a signboard for "cargo ships from Phoenicia". There are actually several more of these inscriptions which have not received wide attention and it is most likely that Monhegan Island was one of the major ports in antiquity for transatlantic shipping. This inscribed stone was documented in *The Royal Society of Canada*, 1898. The Mystic Symbol is inscribed on this stone 13 times.

How many plates and related artifacts were actually discovered? Somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000. When the scientific community of the day declared the famous Soper/Savage collection a fraud, hundreds if not thousands of Michigan items were destroyed by their owners/finders. The good news is that there are twelve known collections still intact, ten in Michigan, one in New Hampshire and a major collection in Utah. I will be enormously gratified if the present reprint stimulates new research and debate into such an exciting part of America's prehistory.

I wish to acknowledge and thank several researchers --- Kenneth Moore, David A. Deal, Dr. James P. Scherz, Jerry Mower and Lois Benedict. Their time and efforts in bringing this information to light have been realized and will continue to enlighten future investigators who seek the truth.

Wayne N. May, Publisher *Ancient American Magazine*


The Michigan relics came to public attention in 1879 when they were reported in a state newspaper. But for thirty one years before, A traveling minister had been collecting them throughout the state. From 1848 to 1920, the relics continued to be accidentally uncovered by local people clearing forests and building roads. Over the course of more than seventy years and across twenty seven counties, thousands of slate, clay and copper tablets continued to emerge.
Written testimonies and sworn affidavits accompanying many of the discoveries were officially recorded, mostly by farmers who plowed them up while working their land, and not by trained archaeologists, who were neither available nor open-mindedly disposed enough to even give their authenticity the benefit of a doubt. They claimed then, as they still do, that the Michigan tablets must necessarily be fake, because no one from the Old World could have arrived in America before Christopher Columbus.

Their fossilized mind-set was examined in *Ancient American* Volume 2, Issue Number 9, May/June 1995, page 31, by Kenneth Moore. He addresses the claims of hoaxing these artifacts by citing the work of two brothers named Scotford, who probably faked a few of their own reproductions of the Michigan tablets. But Moore also points out that although it is reasonable to expect some forgeries with any collection of this size, it must be remembered that when fraudulent duplicates of this kind are made they are usually copied from *original* artifacts. More revealingly, the first Michigan plates to be found, already in the many hundreds, at least, were already being collected before the Scotford brothers were even born!

By 1920, the scholars of the day had academically crucified several men and women who would not stand down concerning these artifacts. Some colleges and private museums actually destroyed their Michigan tablet collections by casting them into local dumps. In the decades following that wholesale destruction, the Soper/Savage discoveries lapsed into almost total obscurity, and might have been utterly forgotten, save for the independent research of two American writers, Henrietta Mertz and Milton R. Hunter.

The books of Henrietta Mertz continue to be prized by readers interested in pre-Columbian arrivals in the New World by overseas visitors. Her *Pale Ink*, an examination of possible Chinese contacts in British Columbia 2,000 years ago, and *The Wine Dark Sea*, rethinking Jason and the Argonauts as transatlantic voyagers in quest of a South American Golden Fleece, are still sought after by diffusionists. But Mertz was a professional trained in forgery identification, and it was in this capacity that she was challenged to either prove or disprove the authenticity of the Michigan tablets.

After 30 years of research, her conclusions were about to go into print, but she passed away unexpectedly before publication. A few years later, her nephew released Henrietta's *Mystic Symbol, Mark of the Michigan Mound Builders*. The book argues that the Michigan relics are largely authentic, and urges their preservation as genuine relics from a lost American civilization. During her long years of research, Mertz was able to track down a large number of artifacts originally collected by the Catholic priest, Father Soper after his death, they had been sent to Notre Dame University for storage. In all, some 4,000 such items were shipped to Notre Dame in poorly packaged cracker barrels. About 2,500 objects, more than half the collection, were badly damaged in transit to the university. Originally made of brittle clay, many fractured and broke, often crumbling to pieces. Henrietta requested permission to examine their surviving collection with an eye to its ownership. She was allowed to research the artifacts in the company of a Catholic priest, but university officials were reluctant to give them up for purely academic purposes.

In the midst of her investigation, the Father with whom she had been working on the Michigan tablets was coincidentally contacted by missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly known as Mormons. Aware of their second scriptural book (the Book of Mormon) that testified to the presence of Christ in America, the priest invited them to inspect the Soper-Savage collection. Intrigued, the missionaries wasted no time in contacting Milton R. Hunter of Salt Lake City, Utah, a researcher of American antiquities.

After several months of communication and visits to Notre Dame, the school officials chose to turn over the collection to Hunter rather than Henrietta. She was nonetheless afforded enough time with the artifacts to complete her research for *The Mystic Symbol*. Elliot Soper, son of Daniel Soper, offered his father's collection to Hunter after having learned of Notre Dame's transference of its artifacts.

Hunter's expanded collection of Michigan plates and related items is today warehoused in the historical archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Their historical department recently allowed *Ancient American* staff and Triple A Productions to photograph Mr. Hunter's collection in its entirety for continued study.
Some Examples of Michigan Artifacts

Michigan Tablet Showing Creation of World
(Ref. Ancient American Vol. 5, No. 31)
Ancient Michigan 13 Month Calendar and Pictures of Son of the Right Hand and Left Hand (Ref. The Mystic Symbol by Henriette Mertz p.32)

Another 13 Month Calendar referring to phases of Moon and other events (Ref. The Mystic Symbol by Henriette Mertz p.32)

Various LDS Church Ancient Artifacts
Ref. Ancient American Vol. 4 No. 25 p. 39

Some Copper Tools in the LDS Collection
Ref. Ancient American Vol. 4 No. 25 p. 39
Ancient Michigan Tablet showing Class Room and History Lesson
(Ref. The Mystic Symbol by Henriette Mertz  p.37)

Ancient Michigan Tablet Showing the Flood
(Ref. The Mystic Symbol by Henriette Mertz p.144)
A Strange Stone Carved Medallion From Michigan Artifacts (From Book *This Land* by Edwin G. Goble & Wayne N. May, Ancient American Archaeology Foundation, Colfax, WI, 2002)

From The Book *This Land*, 2002 P. 49
From The Book This Land p. 174
Creation Tablet: A Michigan plate depicting Old Testament scenes which demonstrate the use of and correct understanding of the marks (Son of the Right Hand and Son of the Left Hand) as they are applied to various scenes throughout the Michigan tablets and the Illinois stones.
Two Calendars and Serpent on Pole
(Ancient American Issue 49, p.21)

Trading With Indians
(Ancient American Issue 49, p.21)
Astronomy and Signs in Heavens
(Ancient American Issue 49, p.21)
Michigan Tablet Showing Noah and Flood (From Relics of American Mound Builders By John Campbell, Montréal Canada 1898)
Michigan’s Controversial Tablets Go Home To Michigan
From Ancient American Issue Number 49

Early in the 1980s, Milton R. Hunter, a resident of Salt Lake City, Utah, was successful in acquiring a large collection of unusual artifacts gathered by Father Savage, a Catholic priest from Detroit, Michigan. First discovered during 1858, they continued to be found until the early 20th Century in over 27 counties throughout the state of Michigan.

By 1900 the plates/tablets were at the center of one of the hottest debates over artifactual authenticity in the history of Michigan archaeology. Father Savage and, later, Michigan state senator, Daniel Soper, gathered these questionable tablets of stone, clay and copper from mostly farmers who found the objects on their property. Their combined efforts came to be known as the “Soper/Savage Tablets”, and/or the “Michigan Plates.”

With Father Savage’s death in the late 1930s, all the items were packed up and sent to University of Notre Dame, in South Bend, Indiana, where they were placed in storage. There the collection remained out of sight until two missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints met with Father Charles F. Sheedy, caretaker of the collection. After several visits with the priest, he suggested that the artifacts might have something to do with the Book of Mormon in the LDS faith.

The two missionaries contacted Milton H. Hunter, then serving as a member of the Quorum of Seventy in the LDS church, and told him about the collection. Hunter, a collector himself with a Ph.D. in History, contacted Father Sheedy, and was eventually able to acquire the entire Savage collection for the cost of shipment from Indiana. While on their way to Utah, Hunter learned that Daniel Soper’s son, Ellis, wanted to donate his father’s artifacts to Notre Dame’s collection of Michigan tablets. In the elder Soper’s own words,

“I have personal knowledge of more than 3,000 articles that have been found, and if they are fakes and were buried to be found, whoever buried them has been a very busy person, because they have been found throughout the state by hundreds of different people.

“The objects recovered from the mounds are, variously, of copper, sandstone, limestone, burned clay and slate. The copper appears to be true mass-lake copper. Of the slates, the grayish black variety predominates, this being of the quality which outcrops near Baraga, in northern Michigan. The sandstone is of fine texture now quarried at Amhurst, Ohio. Red and green slate limestone appear, these being of an argillaceous character and having a good polish.”

Soper’s objects joined the Father Savage collection. These items were not the property of The Church of Jesus Christ of LDS, but Hunter’s own personal properties. He photographed each object, then began an intensive study of all the artifacts. His findings were described in an unpublished manuscript that accompanied the collection to the LDS museum. I have obtained excerpts from this document, in which which Hunter concluded:

“The evidence clearly shows that an ancient race of Mound Builders lived in the state of Michigan and were exterminated, perhaps by the Indians. It seems likely that for many years during their history they dotted the entire state with their towns and cities, and left thousands and thousands of mounds as mute evidence of their ancient past.

These Mound Builders attained a rather high state of culture. They had a written language which they inscribed on metal plates and stone tablets. Those tablets thoroughly demonstrate the fact that these ancient Americans possessed Egyptian culture and the Hebrew religion.

Such honorable men as Catholic priests and others of high character were the excavators of the mounds. They bore testimony continuously in newspaper accounts and in books to the antiquity of the Mound Builders and to the genuineness of their records. They knew the soil that composed the mounds was virgin soil, having not been disturbed for hundreds of years. One irrefutable evidence to this effect was that the large trees --- many of them hundreds of years old --- were growing upon the mounds when these men dug into them, and found the ancient relics.”
In a letter he wrote to Soper’s son, Ellis, Hunter observed:

...Also, the fact that many people have proclaimed that both Father Savages and your father’s collections are frauds or forgeries makes your and my problem much more complicated.

As you know, I, personally, however, feel that the artifacts are all genuine.”


Dr. Hunter took these pixnotographs of the collection he “willed” to the Museum of Church History and Art, in Salt Lake City, Utah, where it was warehoused until recently. Last fall, museum directors negotiated its return to the State of Michigan. According to Dr. John Halsey, curator for the controversial items, they will be placed on display in the near future at the Lansing Museum of History.

While mainstream scholars insist that the Michigan tablets constitute a hoax, independent investigators believe they are authentically prehistoric. In view of this on-going controversy, how the artifacts will be presented when finally put on display should be of particular interest.

ANCIENT INHABITANTS OF NORTH AMERICA
(From Ancient American Issue Number 53)

From a scientific point of view, the history of the ancient Inhabitants of the North American continent is veiled in mystery. There have been discoveries that reveal a long and what must be an interesting past for our country, but yet relatively little is known, and much is yet to be understood.

The physical remains of numerous people are evident in many places; their cities, their fortifications, and their religious structures are scattered over a large part of what is now the United States. The size and extent of their ruins serve as witnesses to the greatness of their numbers and to their advanced skill. The antiquity of their remains remind us that we are but newcomers to this land; that we only recently, built in places that many before us have called their home.

Mound Builders

Ancient American mounds were first observed by Spanish explorers in the early 1500s. Marquette and Jollet explored the northern mound country in 1673, at that time it was empty, the mounds appeared as natural formations, the area was depopulated. Missionaries of the mid-1700s mentioned the mounds in their journals, and travelers of the day reported their existence. When the area became British territory after the 1756 war with France, settlers began to move westward (Valley of the Ohio), this was the beginning of the real interest in the mounds. There were many people who became interested in the mounds, among the early notables were Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

In these early years after the discovery that a cultured people had anciently inhabited this land, it became popular to theorize as to who these people were. It was finally proposed that they were a race distinct from the ancestors of the Indians. As J.D. Baldwin said in 1871: An ancient and unknown people left remains of settled life, and of a certain degree of civilization, in the valleys of the Mississippi and its tributaries. We have no authentic name for them either as a nation or a race; therefore they are called ‘Mound-Builders’, this name having been suggested by an important class of their works. (Ancient America, pp. 14-16.)

The Mound Builders were thought of as white, cultured, and not the ancestors of the Indians who were found living in the same area. Today, there have been identified two overlapping mound building traditions among the ancient peoples. One is currently thought to be the ancestors of present day Indians. These ancient people have been called the Adena and Hopewell cultures. It is said that they did not possess skills higher than the Indians, and that at some time In
the past they must have lived a settled way of life. It would not have been possible for a nomadic, food gathering, or a hunting people to gather in sufficient numbers for periods of time long enough to accomplish the great works of the Mound Builders.

Whoever the ancient people were, they have left us some truly puzzling remains. The number of earth-works, when considered with their size and the area of the country they cover, becomes evidence of a great achievement. The various purposes for which (hey were apparently constructed indicate a complex people who had various societal roles, dominant among them was an apparent military necessity.

E.G. Squire and E. H.. Davis performed the first systematic study of the ancient earthworks, and in 1847 they published a descriptive work in Volume I of the Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge. Their book was titled *Ancient Monuments of The Mississippi Valley.*

Concerning the extent of the earthworks, they said: These remains are spread over a vast extent of country. They are found on the sources of the Allegheny, in the western part of the State of New-York, on the east; and extend thence westward along the southern shore of Lake Erie, and through Michigan and Wisconsin, to Iowa and the Nebraska territory, on the west. Lewis and Clark saw them on the Missouri river, one thousand-miles above its junction with the Mississippi; and they have been observed on the Kansas and Platte, and on other remote western rivers. They are found all over the Intermediate country, and spread over the valley of the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. They line the shores of the Gulf from Texas to Florida, and extend in diminished numbers, into South Carolina. They occur in great numbers in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Arkansas. Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Texas. They are found, in less numbers, in the western portions of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North and South Carolina: as also in Michigan. Iowa, and in the Mexican territory beyond the Rio Grande del Norte. In short, they occupy the entire basin of the Mississippi and its tributaries, as also the fertile plains along the Gulf. (*Ancient Monuments, pp. 1-2.*)

Since the mounds cover such an extensive territory, we would expect that there would be a very large number of them in total, this is true, although no one knows for sure what kind of a number that would correctly be. Baldwin indicates what they are estimated to number in an area where they are more common: About 100 enclosures and 500 mounds have been examined in Ross County, Ohio. The number of mounds in the whole state is estimated at over 10,000, and the number of enclosures at more than 1500. The great number of these ancient remains in the regions occupied by the Mound-Builders is really surprising. They are more numerous in the regions on the lower Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico than anywhere else; (*Ancient America. p. 24.*)

Relative to the size of the mounds, Squire and Davis have said:

“The mounds are of all dimensions, from those of but a few feet in height and a few yards in diameter, to those which, like the celebrated structure at the mouth of Grave Creek in Virginia, rise to the height of seventy feet, and measure one thousand feet in circumference at the base. The great mound in the vicinity of Miamisburgh, Montgomery county, Ohio, is sixty-eight feet in perpendicular height, and eight hundred and fifty-two in circumference at the base, containing 311,353 cubic feet.

The truncated pyramid at Cahokia, Illinois, has an altitude of ninety feet, and is upwards of two thousand feet in circumference at the base. It has a level summit of several acres area. The great mound at Selselstown, Mississippi, is computed to cover six acres of ground. Mounds of these extraordinary dimensions are most common at the south, though there are some of great size at the north. The usual dimensions are, however, considerably less than in the examples here given. The greater number range from six to thirty feet in perpendicular height, by forty to one hundred feet diameter at the base.” (*Ancient Monuments, p. 5.*)

It appears from this, that the people who were responsible for the mounds were numerous
as well as industrious. In addition to a large population, they possessed other elements of civilized life including cities, cities that could be supported only upon the principle of division of labor.

Baldwin notes evidence of such walled cities:
“At Newark, Ohio, when first discovered they were spread over an area more than two miles square, and still showed more than twelve miles of embankment from two to twenty feet high. Farther south, as already stated, the enclosures are fewer and smaller, or, to speak more exactly, the great enclosures and high mounds are much less common than low truncated pyramids, and pyramidal platforms or foundations with dependent works. Passing up the valley, it is found that Marietta, Newark, Portsmouth, Chillicothe, Circleville, Ohio; St. Louis, Missouri and Frankfort, Kentucky, were favorite seats of the Mound-Builders. This leads one of the most intelligent investigators to remark that the centers of population are now where they were when the mysterious race of Mound-Builders existed. There is, however, this difference: the remains indicate that their most populous and advanced communities were at the South. (Ancient America, pp. 29-30.)

In addition to city dwelling as a way of life, they may have had some form of central government. The earth-works represent enough similarity of thought as to accord to them a common culture. They may have had common enemies, for their fortifications are not only similar in design, but as some have noted, they form a cordon of defensive works across their territory. Squire and Davis, in their study of the fortifications, come to the conclusion that there existed a: System of Defenses extending from the sources of the Allegheny and Susquehanna in New York, diagonally across the country, through central and northern Ohio, to the Wabash. (Ancient Monuments, p. 44.)

Concerning this line of fortifications Charles Whittlesey said:
That they formed a well occupied line, constructed either to protect the advance of a nation landing from the lake (Lake Erie) and moving southward for conquest; or, a line of resistance for a people inhabiting these shores and pressed upon by their southern neighbors. (Quoted in R. Silverberg, Mound Builders of Ancient America, p. 116.)

Each of these elements indicate civilization, skill, and cooperation among a large group of people. Squire and Davis sum this point up with this conclusion:
• … there is almost positive evidence that the Mound-Builders were an agricultural people, considerably advanced in the arts, possessing a great uniformity throughout the whole territory which they occupied, in manners, habits, and having a common origin, common modes of life, and, as an almost necessary consequence. Common sympathies, if not a common and consolidated government. (Ancient Monuments, p. 45.) Observers were quick to point out that the Indians did not possess these particular qualities of civilized life. They also felt that Indian legends about an ancient white race of people referred to the Mound Builders. There is much by way of tradition that would indicate that the Indians are not the descendants of the mound building peoples. As Baldwin says: Moreover, the traditional lore of the wild Indians had nothing to say of the Mound-Builders, who appear to have been as unknown and mysterious to these Indians as they are to us. (Ancient America, p. 58.)

Interpretations of the Mound Builders:
The First Interpretations
The first theories to arise concerning these ancient works were that they were constructed by an unknown race of white people, that they were civilized to a relatively high state, that they were connected with the civilizations of Central America and Mexico, and that they were pressed militarily by some enemy, eventually being destroyed or driven to the areas
of civilization in Mexico where they continued to live.

This theory, and variations of it, developed a following of considerable proportions.
There were many who were impressed with the greatness of the accomplishments of these ancient people, while critics of the theory felt that it was a ‘romantic embellishment’ of the truth. Still the idea of a great and glorious past for America was popular, and the theory of the Mound Builders as a great vanished race lingered on.

The Re-interpretation

It is interesting to consider the circumstances that led to the abandonment of this theory as a myth. The fact is that by 1890 the tide of opinion had shifted, and men of science denied that there had ever been a highly cultured white race in America's past. This very radical turn about came as the result of the scientific leadership of one man, Mr. John Wesley Powell. Powell was born in New York in 1834 not far from Palmyra. His father was a Wesleyan preacher who had some difficulty with his parishioners leaving him for the newly organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The senior Mr. Powell wanted his son to become a minister like himself, but young John had an inclination for scientific endeavors. Powell became a Major in the Union army during the Civil War. At the battle of Shiloh he was wounded in the left arm, and as a result it was amputated. His reputation as a scientist and a capable administrator grew, and in 1879 when Congress created the Smithsonian Institution’s Bureau of Ethnology, this Civil War hero, already an influential man, received additional power and prestige as the Bureau’s first Director. Major Powell was disposed to think that the Mound Builders were the ancestors of the Indians. By 1880 he had already made his feelings known in the Bureau’s first annual report, in it he said:

With regard to the mounds so widely scattered between the two oceans, it may also be said that mound-building tribes were known in the early history of discovery of this continent, and that the vestiges of art discovered do not excel in any respect the arts of the Indian tribes known to history. There is, therefore, no reason for us to search for an extra-limital origin through lost tribes for the arts discovered in the mounds of North America. (Bureau of Ethnology First Annual Report, p. 74.)

Within a decade the scientific community had adopted Powell’s opinion as their own. This process of change involved a re-evaluation of the entire accumulation of evidence about America’s past. It did not involve significant new findings. This reversal on the part of the Smithsonian Institution meant that they must discredit a great deal of work that had been done previously. This included the venerable Squire and Davis. whose work “Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley,” was itself a Smithsonian publication. Evidence contrary to Powell’s stated opinion was explained as fraudulent, as buried in the mounds intrusively, or simply re-interpreted to favor the new theory. A good account of the particulars of this re-interpretation may be found in Siverberg’s Mound Builders of Ancient America: The Archaeology of a Myth. ch. 5.

The result of this type of reinterpretation by the federal giant was that the attitude of the scientific community followed. From this point forward, anything that referred to the original glorious Mound Builder theory was considered mythical. It was a very hostile academic environment for anyone who ventured to propose that there had ever been a highly civilized group of people in the New World.

The Mounds of Michigan

It was at this time that the mounds of Michigan began to attract attention, of course much of that attention was negative, the purported artifacts did not fit the popular theory of the day, and therefore they did not receive sufficient serious attention.

Evidence of Early People in Michigan
It is claimed that many of the mounds of Michigan are merely low rounded elevations produced by the uprooting of trees in the primeval forest and the decay of the roots which pried up the soil (American Anthropologist, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 48.) It would therefore be profitable to note evidences of early inhabitants in that state.

First it should be said that all reliable reporters of ancient works have mentioned that there are authentic mounds in abundance in Michigan, and there are many other indications that ancient peoples did inhabit that state; the following are some of those indications:

Native Copper. One of the unusual natural resources of Michigan is native lake copper. This is not found in ore, but in a natural state of almost pure copper nuggets. Among the remains that indicate the activity of ancient people in Michigan is the evidence that they mined extensively for this product. In describing their efforts Baldwin says:

“...in Upper Michigan, near Lake Superior. Their mining was chiefly surface work; that is to say, they worked the surface of the veins in open pits and trenches, the greatest depth of their excavations was thirty feet; and here, ‘not far below the bottom of a trough-like cavity, among a mass of leaves, sticks, and water, Mr. Knapp discovered a detached mass of copper weighing nearly six tons. It lay upon a cob-work of round longs or skids six or eight inches in diameter, the ends of which showed plainly the marks of a small axe or cutting tool about two and a half inches wide. They soon shriveled and decayed when exposed to the air. The mass of copper had been raised several feet, along the foot of the lode, on timbers, by means of wedges.’ At this place was found a stone maul weighing thirty-six pounds, and also a copper maul or sledge weighing twenty-five pounds. Old trees showing 395 rings of annual growth stood in the debris.

All through this district, wherever modern miners have worked, remains of ancient mining works are abundant; and they are extensive on the adjacent island, known as Isle Royale. The area covered by the ancient works is larger than that which includes the modern mines, (c. 1871) for they are known to exist in the dense forests of other districts, to which the modern mining has not yet been extended. (Ancient America, pp.44-45.)

Fortifications.

Remains of fortifications also exist in Michigan as the following account taken from the Buffalo Pilot reveals:

“...in the town adjoining Cooper, county of Megan, Michigan, about a mile distant from the fertile banks of the Kalamazoo, is a small hamlet, commonly known as Arnold’s Station. The first settlers of this little place, emigrants from the St. Joseph country, found in the township some extensive ruins of what had evidently been the work of human ingenuity, and which they christened the Military Post. “It consists,” says the writer, “of a wall of earth, running north west and southeast, being about the height of a man’s head in the principal part of its length, but varying in some places, as if it had been degraded, either by the hands of assailants or the lapse of time....”

If the neighboring Indians are questioned upon its traditional history, the invariable answer is, that it was there when they came-- more, they either do not or can not say. That it was the labor of an extinct race is pretty evident, and it probably dates from the same era with the extensive works at Rock River. These latter are, however, of brick, a specimen of which material, taken from beneath the roots of an oak tree of great size, the writer has in his possession. (Quoted in Times and Seasons, Vol. 6, p. 906.)

The Soper Type Artifacts

With quotations enough to show that there were people active during Michigan’s prehistory, we now turn to a more detailed account of the development of the Soper-Savage story. In most respects, the information regarding the Soper type articles is fragmentary, being found in
newspaper articles and journals. The late Elder Milton R. Hunter has compiled a great deal of this Information concerning the historical circumstances of the Michigan finds. His work appears to be the best compilation, and the most current on the subject. For these reasons it will be most profitable to quote an extended portion of his research here.

**Historical Background**

It seems that these ancient Americans lived throughout the entire state of Michigan; and that at one time the land was dotted with their towns and cities. As early as 1817, Mr. Brickinridge of Jackson County, Michigan, wrote:

“The great number, and extremely large size of some of them (cities) may be regarded as furnishing, with other circumstances, evidences of antiquity. I have sometimes been induced to think that at the period when they were constructed, there was a population here as numerous as that which once animated the borders of the Nile or Euphrates or of Mexico... . I am perfectly satisfied that cities similar to those of ancient Mexico, of several hundred thousand souls, have existed in this country.” *(History of Jackson County, Michigan. p. 20.)*

The Mound Builders have left thousands of mounds as mute evidence of their historical past. These mounds lay in groups in various parts of the state. For example, Mr. John A. Russell in 1911 wrote:

“One area which has been most productive in results, lies directly north of the city of Detroit, in the village of Highland Park. In this 40-acre wood lot there appear to be upward of 1,200 mounds, of which something more than 400 have been opened.” *(Prehistoric Discoveries in Wayne County, Michigan, p. 6.)* By the time modern Americans became interested in these mounds and began their work of excavations, many of the mounds, no doubt, had become parts of farming lands and thereby had become obscure. Thus, the principle mounds excavated in Michigan have been those that were covered with dense vegetation and even with heavy timber. Our most reliable and best information regarding these ancient mounds comes from the men who excavated them and so in this chapter we shall refer often to their statements. Two of the best authorities are the Reverend James Savage and Mr. Daniel E. Soper, both of Detroit, Michigan. They excavated over 500 mounds between the year of 1907 and the time Father Savage published a small book on the Michigan Mound Builders in 1911.”

**Father Savage Describes Michigan Mounds**

Perhaps no man helped to open more mounds in Michigan than did the Reverend James Savage, Pastor of the Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Detroit, and so his description of them should be accurate and of much value to us. He described these mounds as follows:

“On these mounds you may find large and aged trees-- oaks, pines, and other varieties. The decayed roots of pine and other trees that grew, thrived and died on these mounds are there. They contain another peculiarity. There is a stria of charcoal and ashes in each mound. This stria often shows the basin-shaped contour of the interior of the mound when its possessor was laid away to rest. There does not appear, as a rule, sufficient charcoal and ashes for cremation, only enough for purification. In some mounds, however, there is a heavy stria.” *(Prehistoric Discoveries in Michigan, pp. 11-12.)*

The Reverend James Savage pointed out that the mounds, or graves, as a rule, were found in groups. The following quotation will illustrate:

“The Silvan Club owns two forty-acre tracks (minus two acres) on the Ausable River, Crawford
County, Michigan. On the west forty acres we found only one group of mounds. This group contained eleven mounds. On the east forty acres we found three groups of mounds—one of three another of seven, and another group which covered an acre or more of ground. In this group some were close together, others from forty to sixty feet apart. We opened every grave we found on this group, and found but one specimen. It was a large, well made chilled copper spear point. In the group of seven mounds, we found two tablets—one of copper, the other of stone; one copper knife, and one medal of sandstone. In the group of three, we found only one specimen—a beautiful medallion of dark stone. In the group of eleven mounds, on the west forty acres, we found six specimens—two slate tablets, three copper spear points and one very handsomely worked ceremonial. We found groups and lonely graves along Ausable as far as we explored. Some of these groups were half a mile or more back from the river.” (Prehistoric Discoveries in Michigan, pp. 11-12.)

The following is a continuation of the Reverend Savage’s description of the Michigan mounds:

“On the mound in which one copper tablet was found there stood the decayed stump of a large pine tree. This mound was eighteen feet by nine, of oval shape, and stood in height three feet. When we came to the roots of the tree the man in the pit remarked:

“We can’t dig any farther here til we get an axe; that hand axe is not heavy enough to cut these roots.”

“I jumped into the pit and directed him to clear away the earth from the end of the root most exposed. When he did so, I got hold of the root. It was so decayed we tore it out and threw it onto the bank. I noticed that the roots of the tree had perforated the basin-shaped stria of charcoal and ashes on the sides of the mounds. Directly beneath the stump there were ten to twelve inches of sand between the lower center of the stump and the stria of charcoal and ashes at the bottom of the mound. There lay this copper tablet, directly beneath the stump on the stria of charcoal and ashes.

“I was the first who saw Tablet No. 14 and 15 of booklet as it lay in its ancient bed. It alone was left to tell the story of the manner of its master’s death, whose bones had long since mingled with the ashes that covered the bottom of his grave. The mound in which this tablet was found was nearly round, ten feet across and flat, and more than eighteen inches in height. On the side of the mound to the northeast stood a tree. One of the roots of this tree had grown across the tablet, binding it solidly down and might in time have broken the tablet as the tree was strong and vigorous. This mound was one of a group of eleven mounds. In this group we found six specimens.” (Prehistoric Discoveries in Michigan, p.

The Reverend James Savage also wrote:

“The Prehistoric mounds of Michigan, which Mr. Soper and myself have opened, are as a rule not more than ten to thirty feet in length. Frequently oval in form. Some, are round or nearly so. These latter are, as a rule, not more than eighteen inches in height. They are flat, with an indication of a moat around them. They are not more than two to three feet in depth. When found on highlands frequently an elongated basin-shaped stria of charcoal and ashes shows the contour of the open grave where the body was laid away. The outer and upper rim of the basin-shaped stria came to within sixteen or eighteen inches of the surface of the ground. In Wayne County the country is flat and the formation of the soil is lake sand. Here the basin-shaped stria is not so marked.” (Prehistoric Discoveries in Michigan. p. 10)

**Shrubbery and Trees Growing on Mounds**

In confirming the genuineness and antiquity of these Michigan relics, it is a fact of great
significance that many newspaper articles of the time of the excavations of the mounds, those who excavated the mounds, and writers in general of that period definitely claim that the ancient mounds were covered with vegetation, shrubbery, and even with trees and stumps hundreds of years old. For example, in 1911 John A. Russell wrote:

‘The mounds are almost invariably overgrown with vegetation, many of them being covered with trees of ancient growth.’ *(Russell, p. 8.)*

And later in his book, Mr. Russell pointed out that the thousands of ancient artifacts which had been dug from the mounds throughout the state of Michigan, are similar to each other in the various locations found. He declared that they are:

“ composed of hardened copper, slate, sandstone, and limestone; that these objects are recovered from timber areas containing trees from ten to two hundred years old; that to follow the ash strata of the opened graves has called for the chopping away of tree roots representing many years of growth; that these objects are ornamented with drawings, fluting and decorations quite out of touch with the culture of the American Indian; and that they carry in great quantity hieroglyphic writings which their finders cannot read and which they have so far found nobody capable of interpreting. This statements represents the sum of all the claims made regarding the discoveries.” *(Ibid., pp. 19-20.)*

**Beginning of Discoveries**

The earliest discoveries of ancient artifacts in Michigan that I have information about were those that were plowed up by a farmer in Gratiot County in 1877. *(new information reveals that the first artifacts brought to light in Michigan was in the year 1858. editor). (Ibid., p. 15.)* Those ancient artifacts seemed not to have caused much excitement nor to have attracted the attention of many people at the time of their discovery.

In 1892, Mr. M.E. Cornell quotes from a newspaper article published in Genesee County, Michigan, which shows that much great interest was now being shown in such finds. The quotation is as follows:

“An Interesting product of one of the lost arts has just been discovered in this vicinity. Mr. Robert Hon, while plowing on his farm a few miles south of this village, unearthed a perfectly formed and well preserved copper dagger. The blade is nine and one half inches in length, one and one fourth inches broad at, the hilt, double-edged, tapering to a fine point, and bearing unmistakable evidence of great skill and efficiency in its maker. No smith or artist of this or any other period of science can show evidence of higher attainment. It is wrought of pure copper, and is as hard today as the finest steel.’

From what people this wonderful relic came, or at what remote age they inhabited this country, and to what plane of civilization they attained, are but matters of conjecture and speculation, Mr. Dean Hawley of this village, is the possessor of this interesting souvenir. Hundreds have called to examine it.”

*(Prehistoric Relics of the Mound Builders, p. 27.)*

**First Discovery in Montcalm County**

In 1890 a discovery was made which caused tremendous excitement. A young man named James O. Scotford discovered a mound by accident while in the employ of Mr. Steward. James A. Remick owned in Montcalm County a large track of land called “Slashings,” i.e. land upon which the piece had been cut. Mr. Scotford was hired to erect a fence around a track of this land for a cattle range. While he was in the process of building the fence, his line ran over a small hill some thirty feet across. When digging a posthole on this hill, the auger struck something hard. He
recognized that it was too hard to be a root, and there were no stones in the place. Prompted by curiosity, he borrowed a spade from his companion, who was setting posts for him. Upon digging the object up, he found it to be a large earthen casket. He had broken the cover of the casket with the auger; however, the casket was unbroken. This was the first discovery in the Michigan mounds to cause excitement and attract the attention of the public.

Mr. Scotford took the casket and hurried to his home-town Edmore which was situated nearby. He was as wild in excitement as if he had discovered a gold mine. There in Edmore he displayed the ancient relic to the villagers, as he did in the neighboring town of Wyman a few days later. This discovery interested many of the people in those two villages which lay only three miles apart. They searched the woodlands near by and found numerous small mounds and hills. They were all covered with dense vegetation, including many large trees.

**Other Discoveries in Montcalm County**

Before much time elapsed, these people who became so excited about Scotford’s discovery had opened up 400 to 500 mounds and discovered approximately 100 caskets, tablets, augers, copper relics, and numerous other archaeological artifacts. All of these ancient relics were discovered by the citizens of Wyman and Edmore in Montcalm County, Michigan. These artifacts were composed of clay, slate, sandstone and copper. They were all beautifully carved with ancient Bible scenes, historic scenes, writing, and symbols.

**Description and Contents of Mounds in Montcalm County**

In 1892, only two years after Mr. Scotford made the first archaeological discovery in Montcalm County, Mr. M.E. Cornell wrote a small book describing the numerous discoveries made by the citizens of Wyman and Edmore. In this booklet, he wrote:

“The mounds vary in size from twelve to sixty feet in diameter, and from four to twelve feet high. Charcoal and ashes are found in many of the mounds, supposed to be the result of some ancient idolatrous ceremony of burning sacrifices over their dead. But only in a few instances have bones or skeleton been found, though in nearly all are seen stains of where bodies have been decayed and dissolved during the long ages.” (Ibid., pp. 6-7.)

Mr. Cornell described the contents of the mounds as follows:

“Many curious things were unearthed, such as caskets, tablets, amulets of slate stone, cups. vases. altars, lamps of burnt clay, copper coins hammered out, and rudely engraved with hieroglyphics. The caskets are of sun-dried clay, and are covered with picture writing and hieroglyphics. The caskets seem to be intended as receptacles for the tablets of record. They have close-fitting covers, which are cemented on with Assyrian-like cement. and various figures were molded on the top, the ancient Sphinx, beasts, serpents, human faces with head dresses or crowns, etc (Ibid., p. 5.)

A little later in his book, Mr. Cornell wrote:

“Scores of the citizens of Wyman and Edmore are familiar with all the circumstances of the discovery and have been eyewitnesses of the excavating and taking out of the relics; and to them the evidence of genuineness is so clear that doubts are never entertained for a moment.

“On this point take as a specimen the fact-that a casket was found under the roots of a pine tree which by the concentric circles was shown to be about three hundred years old; and that one of the roots of the tree had grown through the corner of the casket. Three caskets have been found pierced by roots of trees growing on the mounds over them. We found one with the cover broken in by a root of a tree and the casket was filled with sand. The root was coiled up inside the box, but
so decayed that it was broken with a touch. Only the decayed stump of the tree, and a few rotten roots were left. Professor Wessels, the writer, and three others were present, and took part in the diggings, and the Professor lifted the casket from its ancient bed with his own hands, exclaiming, Gentlemen, this is no fraud!” (Ibid., pp. 5, 7-8.)

**Other Mounds In Michigan**

In 1896 and 1898 a number of other mounds were found and excavated in several other localities in Michigan. During the early years of the twentieth century, a general revival of interest in the ancient mounds occurred. Detroit became the center of interest for the people who were seeking out these ancient relics. Many mounds were found within a few miles of that city. These mounds, or graves, as a rule, were found in groups. Some groups of mounds were discovered at considerable distances from Detroit, however. In 1911 the Reverend James Savage reported his activities in conjunction with those of Daniel E. Soper as follows:

“We have opened more than 500 of these mounds in the four counties in which we have worked--a territory exceeding over 260 miles. We have diligently inquired regarding the locality of other finds and have so far located sixteen counties in Michigan in which these specimens have been found. We are confident that we are only on the border land of the great prehistoric people.” (Savage, op. cit., p. 10)

Reverend Savage wrote the foregoing only four years after he started excavating in the Michigan forests. If he and Mr. Soper had excavated 500 mounds during that short period, it is difficult to estimate the large number of mounds that they opened during the following nine years’ period of time. They continued their work until about 1920 (died ml 926), when Father Savage died.

Between 1898 and 1920 many thousands of mounds, or graves were opened. The vast majority of them were empty. To quote from a small book published by John A. Russell in 1911:

“It must not be imagined that every mound opened has been a storehouse of objects of interest. On the contrary, the proportion of productive to non-productive mounds has not been greater than as one to ten.” (Russell, pp. cit., p. 7.)

However, many thousands of ancient relics were found in these numerous tombs or mounds. As time passed and descriptions of relics found in mounds appeared in newspapers, many people throughout the state reported that they also had found similar relics.

**Big Cemetery Theory**

On August 26, 1911, an article entitled “Still Finding Soper Relics” appeared in a newspaper in Detroit which maintained that much of Michigan was a great ancient burial ground. So many mounds had been opened by this time that it looked as if thousands of people had been buried in this state in ancient times. The paper stated that Father Savage and John Russell, of the Home Telephone Company, are still searching diligently in the mounds for ancient relics of the prehistoric race which once lived in Michigan. They are thoroughly convinced that the tablets being found are genuine and are ancient. To quote:

“Development within a few days has cheered the investigators, a farmer named Michael Cunie, plowing on his farm near Newberry in the upper peninsula, has turned up a number of ancient objects... And a farmer on the sixth miles road in Wayne County named Ruppe, several days ago, discovered a pendant similar to several in the Savage collection. Men are now at work digging in a number of mounds near the Lozier Plant. One tablet in excellent condition on which is definitely located and will eventually be explored.”

“I have personal knowledge of more than 3000 articles that have been found,’ says Mr. Russell, ‘and if they are fakes and were buried to be found, whoever buried them has been a very busy person, because they have been found throughout the state by hundreds of different people.
There are one or two things that Professor Star did not explain in his attack on these relics. I have myself several articles of tempered copper and have seen many others, and yet today we have not the secret of hardening copper. We are continuing our exploration and hardly a day goes by that something isn’t found. Lately we have been getting word from all parts of the state of finds, some of them recent and some made years ago. In many cases farmers had articles, but believed them to be relics of the Indians. It was not until a description of the antiques which Mr. Soper and Father James Savage had found was published that those people realized that the relics were not of the Indian period but antedate the Indians by thousands of years.” (Still Finding Soper Relics. August 26, 1911.)

**Contents of the Mounds**

Reverend James Savage, speaking of the contents of the mounds, wrote:

“These prehistoric mounds of Michigan contain caskets, lamps, bowls, pipes, tablets. etc. of clay; battle-axes, knives, spears, daggers and arrow-points. domestic utensils, saws, chisels, spades. etc., and a variety of ornamental wearing apparel-- all of chilled copper; stone tablets, medallions, metals, skinning knives, various implements and of strange design, the object of which we can not imagine. One remarkable feature of these mounds-- they contain no flint implements of any kind, nor have I seen any stone or copper beads; other ornamental wearing apparel is frequent.” (Savage, op. cit., p. 11.)

Mr. John A. Russell described the relics taken from the Michigan mounds as follows:

“The objects recovered from the mounds are, variously, of copper, sandstone, limestone, burned clay and slate. The copper and slate objects predominate. The copper appears to be true mass lake copper. Of the slates the grayish black variety predominates, this being of the quality which outcrops near Baraga, in northern Michigan. The sandstone is of fine texture, quite of the quality of the material known as Amherst bluff stone, now quarried at Amherst, in Ohio. Red and green slates appear with comparative frequency. Only a few examples of limestone appear. These being of an argillaceous character and having a good polish.” (Russell, op. cit., p. 9.)

Also, John A. Russell classified the contents of the Michigan mounds as follows:

1. Written records, incised upon copper or stone, or stampd in clay, subsequently baked or sun-dried.
2. Records partly written and partly pictorial engraved upon the same material.
3. Articles of personal adornment, composed of copper, slate and sandstone.
4. Articles for use in warfare, of copper and slate.
5. Articles of domestic use, of copper and slate.

“Of the first class there are entire plates of copper, certain panels of stone tablets containing other matter, and entire tablets of sun-burnt clay, upon which are inscribed what appears to be a regular language, uniform in character... in the second general classification which the writer has suggested comes the most interesting of the recoveries, from various points of view. Their interest lies mainly in their pictorial presentation of the Old Testament story

“It may be stated that these records, whether on copper or slate, are almost wholly pictorial. When they appear on copper, but one side of the tablet is utilized; when they appear on slate, both sides of the tablet form their backgrounds. The subjects of these inscriptions are of three classes,
namely, those which are purely scriptural, in the light of our knowledge of the Old Testament as a record of ancient history; those which depict scenes of war; and lastly, those which are composed of what seems to be circular annual calendars, their circumferences being divided into thirteen moons, each of the spaces so divided carrying a cuneiform legend of greater or less extent” (Ibid., pp. 9-11)

Again we read in Mr. Russell’s book:

“It is worthy of note that the fabrication of these objects shows a high state of civilization. The copper objects are invariably composed of hardened copper hold an edge and ring like bells. The various degrees of tempering of hardening may be recognized by the metallurgist when it is stated that from the variety of objects every note of the scale may be struck.

A causal examination of a few specimens by Mr. W.P. Putnam, of the Detroit Testing Laboratory, the foremost analytical metallurgist of his city, led to the conclusion that the objects were undoubtedly tempered, and that some form of heat treatment, now unknown, had been employed to convert them into their existent state.

In the cases of slate implements of apparent domestic utility every example shows that much time was spent upon its ornamentation. They are bonded with ornamental lines, geometrically precise, engraved with helmeted heads or the figures of birds and animals and invariably marked with the racial or cultural signature, if they contain no other mark.” (Ibid., pp. 16-17.)

**Mound Excavators and Relic Collectors**

A number of important citizens of Michigan became prominent in excavating mounds and making collections of archaeological artifacts. Among those of outstanding importance were the Reverend James Savage, pastor of the Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Trinity, in Detroit, and Daniel E. Soper, ex-secretary of State of Michigan. Both of these men for many years prior to their becoming interested in the mounds and in collecting artifacts there from had been collectors of objects representing the social and domestic economy of purely Indian era. While working at that hobby, they had collected thousands of pieces. James O. Scotford retained his interest continuously in the mounds after the discoveries he made in Montcalm County. To these may be added other enthusiasts from time to time, among them were Mr. Daniel L. Case, a mining engineer by training; I . W. Welbon, special agent of the Home Telephone Company of Michigan; John T. Belanger of the same company; Rudolph Etzenhouser, missionary for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of-Latter-day Saints.

From outside of Detroit several gentlemen of importance participated in excavations and also came to observe from a scientific standpoint. The more prominent of these were Dr. Roland B. Orr, Curator of the Ontario Professional Museum; Mr. Carlton C. Jones, Secretary to the Minister of Education of Ontario, also of Toronto; Dr. William C. Hills, of the Ohio State University at Columbus and Sean C. Kinnaman of Benton Harbor College, the editor of the *American Antiquarian*.

In addition to these men, many others throughout the state, too numerous to name-- dug into mounds, and found archaeological artifacts. Many of these artifacts became lost or destroyed. Their finders did not recognize their value and did nothing to preserve them, especially during the early years when the value of such relics was not generally known.

**Affidavit Affirming Michigan Finds Genuine**

Since some people doubted the authenticity of these archaeological finds, claiming them to be frauds, the Honorable Daniel E. Soper and the Reverend James Savage and others had some of the excavations made in the presence of a number of witnesses and a notary public. An article appeared in a Detroit newspaper under the title:
“Believers in Soper Swear He Found Relics in Highland Park.” The account gave the following information and affidavit:

“Daniel E. Soper on June 9, 1911 opened a mound near Highland Park and disinterred four more specimens similar to those previously unearthed.” The article gives a list of names of the people who were present at the time. The following statement was written and signed and notarized. It was signed by all of the people present and countersigned by Ira W. Welbon as Notary Public:

“We, the undersigned, do solemnly affirm and declare that we were present on the property known as the Steven’s Estate, situated on the west side of Hamilton Boulevard within the village of Highland Park, distance five and one half miles from the city of Detroit in the state of Michigan U.S.A., on the 9th day of June, in the year of our Lord 1911, and did personally see certain mounds opened and four specimens taken therefrom to wit: One copper spear head, one stone pipe and two stone ornaments,

“Reverend Etzenhouser, Independence. Missouri; Ira W. Welbon, Notary Public, Detroit; John A. Russell, Detroit, Michigan; Dr. Roland D. Orr, University of Toronto, Ontario; Professor Mike, Custodian of Tools, Detroit, Michigan; Reverend James Savage. Detroit, Michigan; Chauffeur; Clarkston W. James, Secretary Department of Education, Toronto, Ontario; Daniel E. Soper, Detroit, Michigan. Countersigned by Ira W. Welbon. Notary Public.”

(Newsaper Account Published in Detroit, June 9, 1911)

Daniel E. Soper

From time to time there appeared in the newspapers in Michigan articles announcing and describing discoveries of archaeological artifacts in mounds. These reports came from various parts of the state.

In the year 1907, the Honorable Daniel E. Soper, ex-secretary of State, became interested in these finds. From that point forward throughout his life, he became an active participator in excavating mounds and in collecting these ancient relics. He was a man with a high reputation for honesty and integrity, being i-care! as one of the outstanding citizens of Detroit, and of the state of Michigan. Speaking of him in his booklet Prehistoric Man. Mr. 0. Major Taher wrote:

“A gentleman in Detroit, who has been a collector of curios for thirty-five years, became interested in these wonderful relics of a prehistoric race. By personal effort he opened up 117 mounds some of them within a radius of ten miles of (lie city of Detroit. This gentleman’s name is Daniel E. Soper. ex-secretary of State, whom I have known for twenty-five years, and I have always found him honest and reliable. Some very remarkable implements he found in the woods belonging to the estate of a prominent resident of Detroit.

In several mounds he found fourteen clay pipes. no two alike, and on a stone tablet there is displayed representations of Adam and Eve, the flood, Noah’s Ark with the dove seeking dry land, and animals leaving the ark, besides the temple of Sun worshippers.” (Prehistoric Man, p. 7.)

On March 1, 1916, an article appeared in The Chattanooga News which announced
that recently Daniel E. Soper had made his home in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The article is entitled, *Chattanoogan’s Wonderful Collection of Ancient Relics.* The article pointed out that Mr. Soper had spent nine years in Michigan digging in the various mounds of the ancient Mound Builders, and as a result he had collected hundreds of “...remarkable relics of the mysterious race that once inhabited Michigan and the Great Lakes Basin of North America.” *The Chattanooga News, March 1, 1916.* The writer has in his possession newspaper clippings which indicate that Mr. Soper made many trips to Michigan after this date to continue excavating in the mounds. The article in *The Chattanooga News* lists a number of items that Mr. Soper had in his collection as follows:

“Made of copper are tablets, sandals, spears, arrows, knives, chisels, compasses, spoons, saws, boxes, crowns, and other Implements of domestic belligerent, or ornamental use. There are stone tablets, stone lamps, axes, sun-dials, caskets, omelets, and strangest of all, stone pipes for smoking tobacco or some other nepenthe perhaps lost to civilization. There are also imperfect preservation of duplicates of all these articles In burnt clay and blue slate. The significance of Mr. Soper’s collection and those similar to it is enormous. The history of them is naturally buried along with the bones of the people that made them, and made conjecture inspired by inscriptions on them is all that can ever be advanced to explain them. However, the stone tablets bear numerous representations of men at work constructing buildings, and there have been recovered many saws, chisels, and even compasses, or dividers showing that they were skilled in building and that large numbers of them were so employed. Evidently, they had a literature, crude and meager, as it must necessarily have been inscribed so laboriously upon stone and clay. Yet, they made ingenuous use of their alphabet, for among Mr. Soper’s specimens are many little uses for printing characters upon plates while it was yet plastic. These types were tediously hand-wrought out of a sort of sandstone, and remarkably accurate duplicates in reverse of some of the characters found on the specimens.” (Ibid.)

After the death of Mr. Daniel E. Soper, his son, Ellis Clarke Soper inherited his father’s collection of ancient relics. Mr. Ellis Clark Soper made his home in Franklin, North Carolina. He moved the collection from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Franklin. There it remained until 1963 when it was sent to the writer (Milton R. Hunter was the recipient of the collection, both, Soper’s and Savage).

**Reverend James Savage**

During the early part of the twentieth century and about the time that the Honorable Daniel E. Soper became interested in the ancient archaeological relics of Michigan, another prominent and honorable citizen of Detroit also became intensely interested in the same activity. He became closely associated with Mr. Soper throughout the remainder of their lives. His name was the Reverend James Savage, pastor of the Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Trinity, in Detroit, Michigan. He, like Mr. Soper, had been for many years prior to their interest in the Michigan ancient relics a collector of Indian artifacts.

Father Savage continued his exploration of the mounds and collection of ancient relics in Michigan throughout the remainder of his life. He made a great collection of archaeological artifacts--thousands of them... In doing so, he opened hundreds and hundreds of mounds, exploring throughout the state of Michigan.

In the meantime, numerous other people were making collections by digging in the mounds of Michigan but perhaps none of them had as large a collection as did Father Savage.

The Reverend James died about 1926. His collection was taken over by another Catholic Father who worked in the same church as Father Savage had served. The new owner retained the collection for ten years. About 1930 he gave the Savage Collection to Notre Dame University at Notre Dame, Indiana. There it set in the attic of one of their buildings, packed in boxes (cracker
barrels) for more than thirty years time.

**Hyvernat and Laurentis Discover Relics**

On September 18, 1916, the *Washington Post* described the discovery of more ancient artifacts in Michigan in an article entitled *Prehistoric Tablets of Great Value Found* by Dr. Hyvernat in Michigan. This newspaper account mentions the fact that: “on September 12, Dr. Henri Hyvernat of the Catholic University of Washington, D.C. took from a mound in the woods north of Detroit a slate tablet about a foot long with a circular calendar engraved on one side... This interesting tablet will belong, to the museum of which Dr. Hyvernat is in charge at the Catholic University, as will any others he may personally remove from their ancient resting places.” (*The Washington Post*, September 18, 1916.)

Several other people were with him at the time he made the discovery. Among them were Dean James Savage of Detroit, and Mr. Daniel E. Soper of Chattanooga; Mr. Edward Harrigan of Detroit, and Miss Mary Pellan of Washington, D.C. Several mounds were opened that day. A few small pieces of pottery were found, but only this one unusual beautiful slate tablet.

The sub-heading “Non-Indlar Type Shown” also appears in the same article, To quote: “In June, Father Laurentius Scheidl, O.S.B., of St. Benedict, Louisiana took from a mound in a woods near the same part of the Detroit suburbs a blue slate tablet seven and one-half by twenty-five inches, on one side of which is a large figure of an important personage with ornate headgear and robe. The full lips and long beard indicate the non-Indian type. Two other persons of royal or priestly casts, with many lines of writing, are engraved on the reversed side of the monumental stone. A red slate tablet was also removed by Father Laurentius, which is engraved on one side with pictures of Noah and his family leaving the ark, a rainbow, and groups of people in adoring posture. Below these three lines are six lines of the ancient writing.” (Ibid.)

**Summary Statement**

The evidence clearly shows that an ancient race of Mound Builders lived in the state of Michigan and were exterminated, perhaps by the Indians. It seems likely that for many years during their history they dotted the entire state with their towns and cities and left thousands and thousands of mounds as mute evidence of their ancient past.

These Mound Builders attained a rather high state of culture. They had a written language which they inscribed on metal plates and stone tablets. Those tablets thoroughly demonstrate the fact that these ancient Americans possessed Egyptian culture and the Hebrew religion.

Such honorable men as Catholic priests and others of high character were the excavators of the mounds. They bore testimony continuously in newspaper accounts and in books to the antiquity of the Mound Builders and to the genuineness of their records. They knew the soil that composed the mounds was virgin soil, having not been disturbed for hundreds of years. One refutable evidence to this effect was the large trees-many of them hundreds of years old-were growing upon the mounds when these men dug into them and found the ancient relics.

**Current Evidence**

The empirical evidence in relation to the Michigan artifacts is limited because they are composed of inorganic materials. Still there ought to be evidence, either in their materials, (which are copper, slate, sandstone, and clay) or in their inscriptions (which is a mystifying mixture of various languages) that would lend some information.

**Linguistic Evidence**

Several attempts have in fact been made to discover new evidence. First, linguistic expertise was
sought from Dr. Sami A. Hanna of the Middle East Center, University of Utah. His opinion was that many of the characters were authentic from various Semitic languages. He further slated that they show order, that while he could not vouch for the authenticity of the artifacts, he could say that if they were forged, they were copied from something that was authentic and therefore deserve further study.
**Physical Evidence**

Material information was sought from Dr. Charles Pitt, the metallurgist, also from the University of Utah. Several tests were conducted by him on copper samples. He determined from an examination of the micro-structure, that the object (a knife blade) had been formed by a cold
hammering process, and that the copper was hardened to a certain extent, probably from the hammering. Under an optical microscope the copper appeared to be almost pure with the exception that there were specks of a silver colored substance embedded in the copper matrix. An X-ray scanning microscope confirmed that the sample was almost pure copper, but did not reveal the silver content.

An interesting characteristic of native lake copper is that it does have a separate silver content, as this quote indicates:

“We have proven also that the Mound Builders worked the copper mines of Lake Superior and the lead mines near Lexington, Kentucky, etc. The copper found in mounds shows speck of silver, found only in copper of Lake Superior. (M.F. Cornell. Prehistoric Relics of the Mound Builders, p. 25.)”

Baldwin also mentions this characteristic indication of native lake copper:

“The Mound Builders used large quantities of copper such as that taken from the copper beds on Lake Superior, where the extensive mines yield copper, not in the ore, but as pure metal... the Mound-Builders worked this copper without smelting it. Spots of pure silver are frequently found studding the surface of Lake Superior copper, and appearing as if welded to it, but not alloyed with it.” (Ancient America, p. 43.)