

EXCAVATIONS AT A PREHISTORIC INDIAN VILLAGE SITE IN MISSISSIPPI

By HENRY B. COLLINS, Jr.

Assistant Curator, Division of Ethnology, United States National Museum

Archeological work in the Southern States has in the past been confined almost exclusively to the excavation of Indian mounds. As these are the most imposing aboriginal remains of the region, it is natural that they should have received first attention. But there are other remains—Indian village sites—which promise to yield data that will be of considerable value when Southeastern archeology comes finally to be synthesized and interpreted. Due to the obliterating effects of white civilization there is little left to mark the site of the average prehistoric Indian village in the Southeast; usually only a scattering of pottery fragments and stone implements on the surface of the ground. It happens, however, that pottery is the most valuable single criterion for determining the relationships of tribal or regional groups; when, in addition, there is also the possibility of finding traces of ancient habitations, the importance of such village sites is apparent.

In December, 1929, at the request of Dr. Dunbar Rowland, director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, I was detailed by the Bureau of American Ethnology to cooperate with the department in the excavation of an old Indian village site in Yazoo County. The site had been located by Dr. Rowland's representatives, Messrs. Moreau B. Chambers and James A. Ford, with whom I became associated in the work which is outlined below.

Owing to an unusual snowstorm, which left the ground in a soggy condition, we were unable to work longer than a week, but late in the following December we returned and spent three days in further excavation. The site is 1 mile west of Deasonville on the Yazoo City Highway and is located on the property of Mr. Claude H. Pepper in the SE. $\frac{1}{4}$, sec. 17, T. 11, R. 2 E. We are indebted to Mr. Pepper for granting us full permission to excavate and also to Mr. Homer Beall, of Deasonville, who rendered valuable assistance.

Half a mile to the north of the village site is a small mound and half a mile beyond it five other mounds. Several of these had been dug into by treasure seekers and some were further tested by us. However, they proved to have been constructed of unstratified clay and no artifact of any kind, not even a potsherd, was found. The land on which the mounds are located is low and subject to overflow, so that if village-site material occurred about them it has long since been covered over by alluvial deposits. It is not known, therefore, what relation, if any, the mounds had to the village site in Mr. Pepper's field.

The site of the old village is now a cotton field, in which at intervals young pecan trees have been set out. Excavations were confined to the section of the field where potsherds and flint implements were most plentiful, about 150 feet south of the road and 100 to 200 feet west of a 6-foot bank which marks the dividing line between the slightly higher land on which the village was located and the lower land bordering a small near-by stream known as Ellison's Creek. At the first place we dug, the village refuse did not extend below the plowed ground, although a veritable maze of post holes was found sunk into the undisturbed yellow clay subsoil. Some of these post holes were arranged in lines but the ground was so honeycombed with others seemingly placed at random in every possible position that we were not able in the short time at our disposal to extend the excavation sufficiently to see what had been the outline of the structures represented.

HOUSE RING NO. 1

A few yards to the eastward, however, we found an accumulation consisting of rich black earth containing potsherds, animal bones, and other refuse extending to an average depth of $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet. A little digging showed that the accumulation was held in a trench, averaging 19 inches wide, sunk into the clay subsoil. Following this along by shoveling off the plowed surface soil it was seen that the trench curved regularly and took the shape of an almost perfect circle slightly more than 60 feet in diameter. A mule team and scraper were then obtained and all of the loose plowed earth was removed from within and around the circle. When the surface of the undisturbed subsoil had been exposed in this way it was found that instead of one circle there were three, and in addition a number of post holes, the circles and post holes all being filled with the rich black earth and refuse of the village site. As at the first place we had dug, many of the post holes here were also irregularly placed, but some, at about the center of the outer circle, were seen to be definitely arranged in a square. In addition there were numerous

other post holes at more or less regular intervals within the trenches, extending through the refuse and into the clay subsoil below.

An outline of the trenches and post holes is shown in Figure 1. The outer trench, C, averaged 19 inches in width, although at some

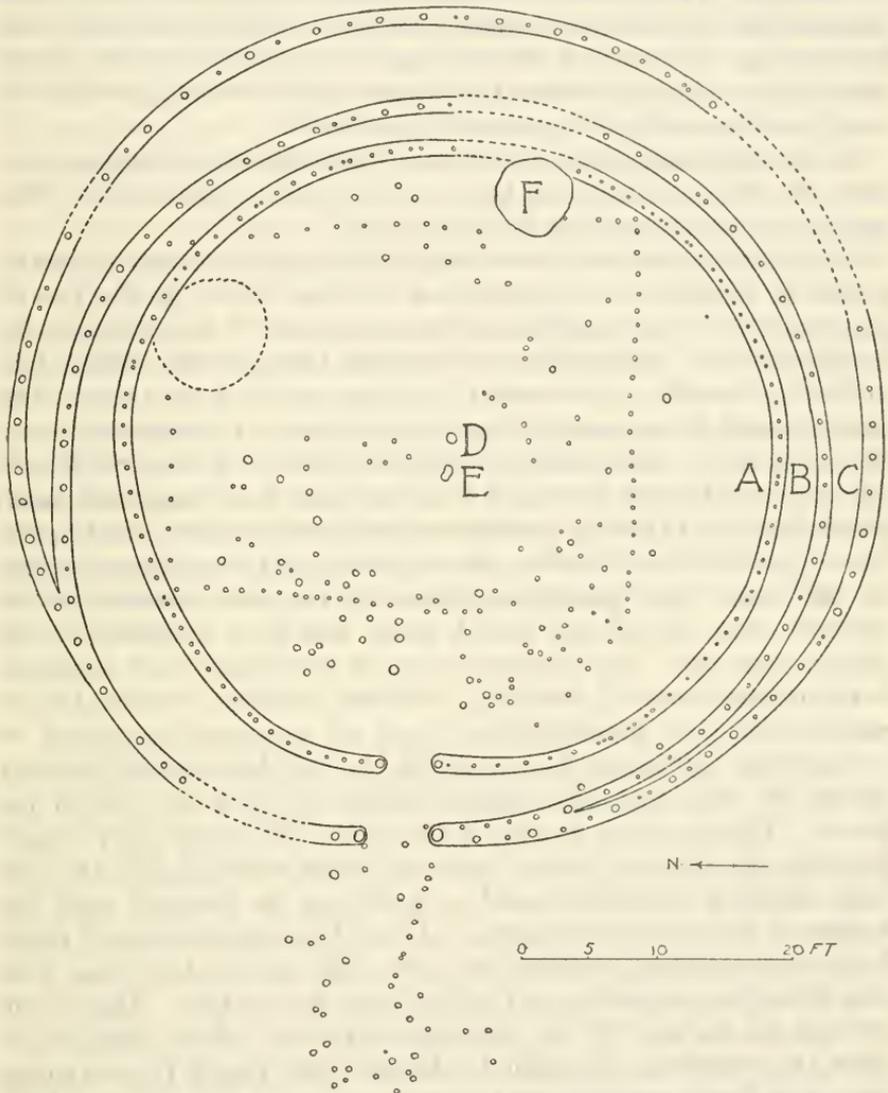


FIGURE 1.—Plan of House Ring No. 1. Broken lines indicate unexcavated areas

places it was as wide as 25 inches. It was filled throughout with rich black earth containing quantities of potsherds, animal bones, and mussel shells; the shells of the small box terrapin (*Terrapene carolina* Lin.) were especially numerous. Extending below the bottom of the trench for a total depth of more than 3 feet (including

the 2½-foot depth of the trench) was a regular series of post holes, as shown on the plan (fig. 1). The larger holes, spaced usually about 5 feet apart, were 12 to 15 inches in diameter. Between these were one and sometimes two smaller post holes, averaging 6 inches in diameter. On the west side was a break in the trench 5 feet wide, representing the entrance, where two posts larger than usual had been set up. In front of the opening, on the outside of the circle, were other post holes arranged as shown on the plan, apparently the remains of an entrance structure of some kind.

On the south side of the trench was found the flexed skeleton of a child, the skull of which had been destroyed a few years earlier when excavation for a pecan tree had been made.

Within the outer trench were two other trenches, A and B, one of which, B, joined the outer trench on the west side. At the line of junction of the two trenches on the south side of the entrance the inner wall of C continued to be traceable through the refuse of B, indicating that the outer trench C had been dug at a later time. The second trench B was smaller than C, being about 15 inches wide and 16 inches deep. Extending through the refuse of the trench and into the clay bottom for about 6 inches were both large and small post holes, 8 to 12 inches in diameter, and spaced about 4 feet apart. These post holes continued on the south side of the entrance, but not on the north side, paralleling those in the outer trench to the entrance even though the trench itself had been annexed by the larger outer one. The smaller trench B contained what appeared to be an intentional fill, consisting of mixed material—clay and black earth—with clay predominating, and an occasional potsherd or animal bone. Through this mixed fill the post holes could be easily traced, for they contained softer, blacker soil than the rest of the trench. This could not be done in the case of the larger outer trench, for there the entire fill was of such soft black material that the post holes afforded no contrast and so could not be detected until the bottom of the trench was reached. A and B, containing mixed earth, had apparently been refilled very soon after having been dug, with clay from the excavation and refuse from the surface. This would account for the scarcity of potsherds and other refuse contained in these two trenches. It might be thought that trench C, containing only soft black material, had likewise received an intentional fill but of surface refuse entirely instead of refuse mixed with clay as in the case of A and B. However, when we consider that the trench held a richer content of potsherds, shells, and animal bones than was characteristic of the surface refuse generally, a better explanation seems to be that the trench had remained open after the posts were set up in the bottom of it and that it became gradually filled with refuse during the occupancy of the house.

The inner trench A, which was 16 to 25 inches from B, was of about the same width, but was slightly shallower, being only 12 inches deep. Like B, it contained a fill of mixed clay and black earth in which the post holes, containing softer and blacker material, were clearly distinguishable. Unlike the post holes in B, these were of a uniform size, 6 to 8 inches in diameter and about 2 feet deep. They were placed from 6 inches to 2 feet apart in no regular order. On the west side was a break in the trench 5 feet wide, representing the entrance, and corresponding exactly with the entrance in C. Here again large post holes, 14 inches in diameter, were found.

Within the inner circle A was a square outlined by four rows of post holes 6 to 8 inches in diameter and placed 8 to 16 inches apart. Within the square and almost exactly at the center of the outer circle C was a large post hole, D, 15 inches in diameter and 22 inches deep. Just to the west of it was a somewhat larger and more irregularly shaped pit, E, 19 inches wide and 30 inches deep. This seemed to have been a small fire pit, for it contained an almost solid fill of ashes and refuse. Extending partly into the inner trench A on the east side was a much larger fire pit, F, approximately circular in outline and about 6 feet in diameter. It extended also over the row of post holes outlining the square inclosure. The fire pit was about 2 feet deep and was filled mostly with ashes, soil, and refuse.

Both within and without the square inclosure were numerous post holes, placed at random as indicated on the plan.

HOUSE RING NO. 2

Two other house rings were excavated at the Deasonville site. No. 2, shown in Figure 2, was 27 feet north-northwest of No. 1. It was 45 feet in diameter with an opening 40 inches wide on the west side. Like the two inner trenches of House Ring No. 1, it contained a mixture of rich black earth and clay. The trench had an average width of 16 inches but was very shallow, no more than 3 inches at the deepest part. This was along the eastern periphery, from which point the trench gradually decreased in depth until at the northwest side it disappeared entirely, being traceable only by the post holes which, sunk into the subsoil, continued across the break. The reduction of the trench and its total disappearance at this one place is due to water erosion, which has produced a general lowering of this section of the field.

The post holes in the bottom of the trench were placed about 3 feet apart and were of a uniform size, about 6 inches in diameter and 16 inches deep.

Within the circular inclosure was a square outlined by post holes as shown on the plan. These were of the same size and depth as

those in the trench; the post holes which should have completed the square at the southeastern corner were lacking.

Within the circular trench, as shown on the plan, was the arc of an inner circle also containing post holes.

Three fire pits, A, B, and C, were found, containing ashes, black earth, and refuse. A post hole, full of ashes, was found beneath C, the fire pit near the entrance.

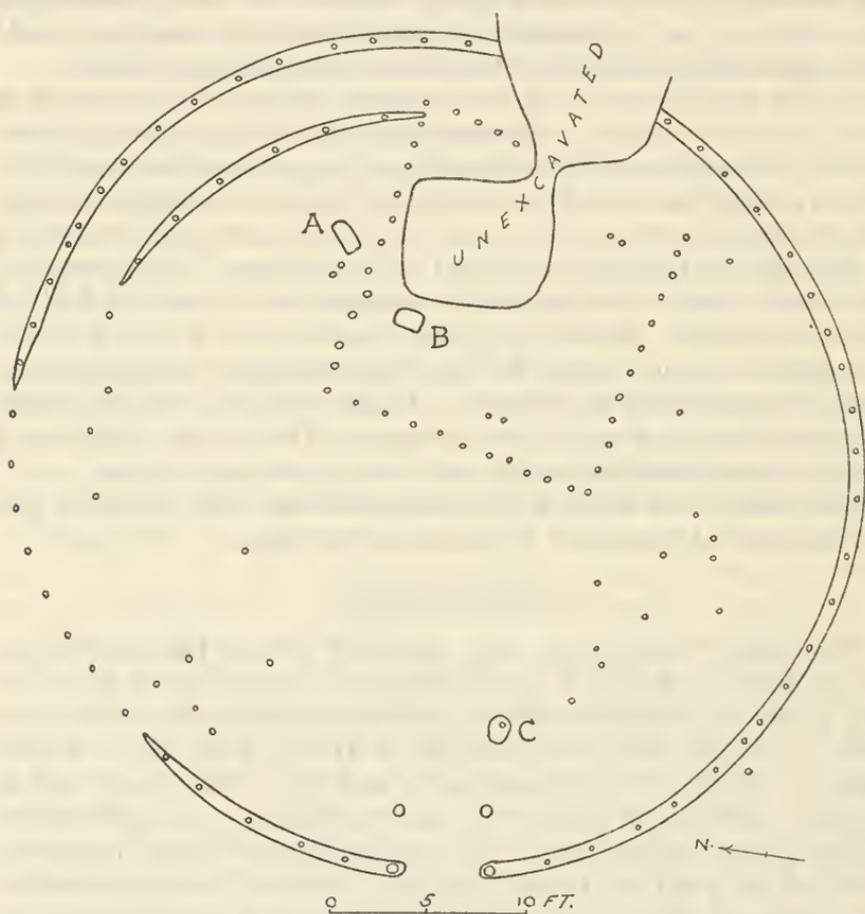


FIGURE 2.—Plan of House Ring No. 2

The positions of random post holes are indicated on the plan. There was no large central post hole as in House Ring No. 1.

HOUSE RING NO. 3

Seventy-eight feet northeast of No. 1 and 75 feet east of No. 2 was House Ring No. 3 (fig. 3). The circle was small, being only 38 feet in diameter, and the trench was only 10 to 12 inches wide and from 2 to 4 inches deep; its fill was similar to that of House Ring No. 2.

On the northeast side the trench lies at a slightly lower slope and a part of it has been so completely eroded as to remove even the deeply sunk post holes. These were usually 3 feet apart; their average diameter was 6 inches and depth 12 to 24 inches.

The entrance, represented by a break in the trench 38 inches wide, was on the western periphery, a little south of west.

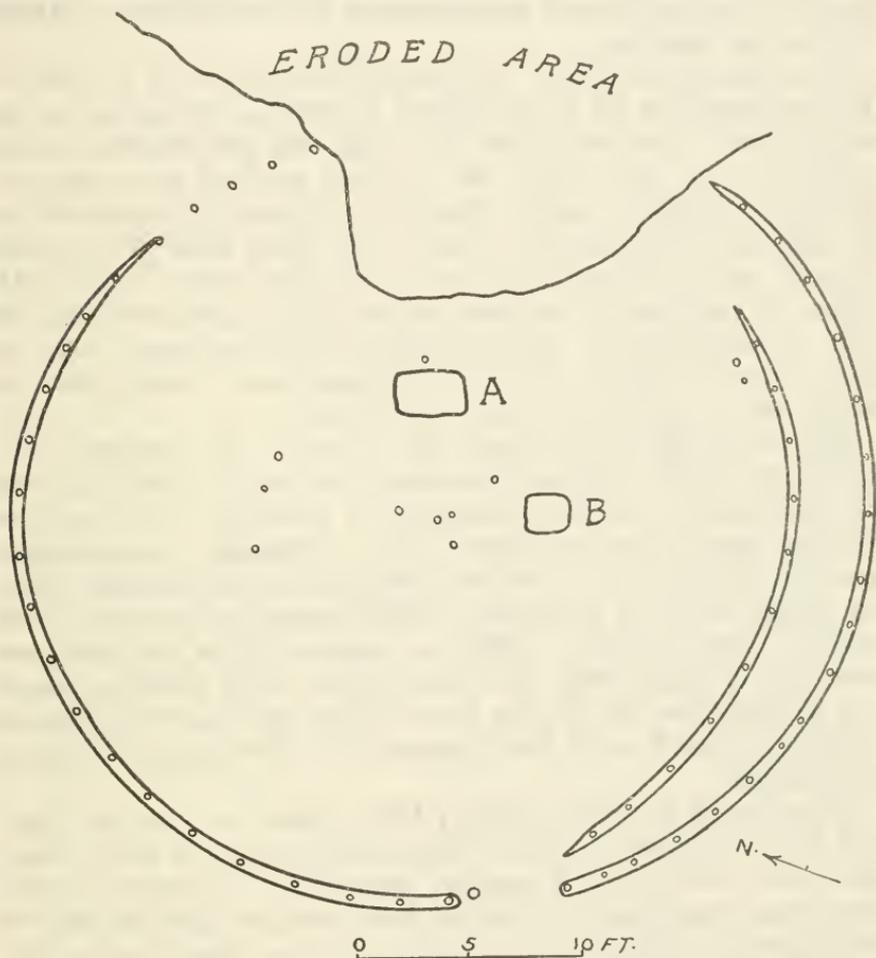


FIGURE 3.—Plan of House Ring No. 3

As in No. 2, there was found a short incomplete section of an inner trench of the same width as the outer one and containing post holes of the usual dimensions.

A rectangular fire pit, A, was 50 inches long, 26 inches wide, and 3 inches deep. B was a smaller but deeper pit, its dimensions being 32 by 26 inches and its depth 40 inches. Instead of ashes it was filled with mixed clay and black earth containing a few potsherds, one of which was found at the bottom.

Near the center of the circle were a few post holes as shown on the plan.

PROBABLE NATURE OF THE HOUSES REPRESENTED

Having described the trenches and post holes of the three house rings as they appear at the present time, it will be in order to attempt an interpretation or reconstruction of the dwellings of which they are the remains.

In one important respect the Deasonville house circles are unique, the posts being set up in the bottom of trenches instead of on the level surface. Trenches of this kind have not been reported archeologically from the region, nor are they referred to in any descriptions of historic Indian structures. Especially remarkable is the fact that the large outer trench C of House Ring No. 1 seems to have remained open and only gradually became filled with refuse. It is difficult to see what purpose could have been served by such an arrangement. The possibility that this trench with its row of posts might have been a stockade seems unlikely for the reason that the posts were spaced too far apart.

The two smaller house rings, Nos. 2 and 3, are apparently the remains of simple circular habitations, the floors of which, above the clay subsoil, had been destroyed by plowing. The fact that an inner square was not found in No. 3 suggests the possibility that the square in No. 2 did not form part of the circular house but might represent a separate small rectangular structure built before or after the other. Still, its position within the circle was such that it might easily have held posts which served as inner roof supports for the circular house. The small sections of inner trenches in Nos. 2 and 3 would appear to be the remains of earlier house circles.

In the larger and more complex House Ring No. 1 we are faced with a more difficult problem. Does this represent a single structure with walls or roof supports arranged in concentric circles around an inner square, or do the three rows of trenches and the inner square represent the remains of buildings constructed at different periods? It is not a question to be decided offhand, for there are facts which seem to favor both explanations. As far as historical evidence goes we might have either four separate structures or a single large structure, for among the Southeastern Indians there were single-walled houses both square and round in outline—both forms being used sometimes in the same villages—and also larger round houses with walls arranged in concentric circles not unlike those belonging to House Ring No. 1.

We will first examine the evidence which seems to indicate that the rows of post holes in House Ring No. 1 represent two or more houses. It will be recalled that on the west side, immediately to the south of the entrance, the outer trench C cut through the fill of B, which from the point of junction decreased in width until at the entrance it had practically disappeared. This shows unmistakably that C was dug later than B. In the same way, the fire pit D would appear to have been used after the walls of A and the inner square had been razed; for the sides of the pit extended into the trench A and across the line of post holes of the square. Under these conditions the fire pit could hardly have been used while either of these walls was standing but must have belonged to B or C. It might also be mentioned that very little burnt wall material (clay) was found in the fire pit, whereas a considerable amount might have been expected had the fire pit been in use while either of the walls was standing. Finally, there are no facts that run counter to the explanation of the inner square and the three circular trenches being the remains of single walls erected at different periods, while if a single complex structure is represented there is uncertainty as to which of the rows of posts was the wall and which merely roof supports. There would be need for only one wall, which would mean that three of the rows of posts had served as roof supports or for some other purpose; it is difficult to see the necessity of such a number of roof supports so close together, especially as on the west side where for a considerable distance the posts of B and C run closely parallel.

Another explanation might be that the outer trench C was a later enlargement of B and that the posts of the inner square and of A had been utilized as roof supports for the later and larger house. But a difficulty is still presented by the large fire pit, for as just noted this could hardly have been in use while the walls of the inner square and A were standing, since it extends over both, and if as therefore seems likely, the pit belonged to either B or C, then at least those posts of the square and A which were contiguous to the fire pit were not standing when C formed the wall of the house.

While the features just mentioned seem to point to the conclusion that several different buildings are represented, the fact remains that the circular trenches and the square are arranged in such an orderly fashion as to suggest a single structure or possibly a single-walled house that was later incorporated as part of a larger and more complex structure. As will be seen, there are several descriptions of Indian houses in the Southeast which had walls and roof supports arranged in much the same way as the lines of post holes in House Ring No. 1.

The closest parallels are found in Bartram's descriptions of the circular council houses of the Cherokee and Creeks. The Cherokee town house or council house at the village of Cowe, visited by Bartram in 1776, is described as follows:

The council or town-house is a large rotunda, capable of accommodating several hundred people. . . . The rotunda is constructed after the following manner: they first fix in the ground a circular range of posts or trunks of trees, about six feet high, at equal distances, which are notched at top, to receive into them from one to another, a range of beams or wall plates; within this is another circular order of very large and strong pillars, above twelve feet high, notched in like manner at top, to receive another range of wall plates; and within this is yet another or third range of stronger and higher pillars, but fewer in number, and standing at a greater distance from each other; and lastly, in the centre stands a very strong pillar, which forms the pinnacle of the building, and to which the rafters are strengthened and bound together by cross beams and laths, which sustain the roof or covering, which is a layer of bark neatly placed, and tight enough to exclude the rain, and sometimes they cast a thin superficies of earth over all. There is but one large door, which serves at the same time to admit light from without and the smoak to escape when a fire is kindled; but as there is but a small fire kept, sufficient to give light at night, and that fed with dry small sound wood divested of its bark, there is but little smoak. All around the inside of the building, betwixt the second range of pillars and the wall, is a range of cabins or sophas, consisting of two or three steps, one above or behind the other, in theatrical order, where the assembly sit or lean down; these sophas are covered with mats or carpets, very curiously made of thin splints of Ash or Oak, woven or platted together; near the great pillar in the centre the fire is kindled for light, near which the musicians seat themselves, and round about this the performers exhibit their dances and other shows at public festivals, which happen almost every night throughout the year.¹

This Cherokee house is similar to House Ring No. 1 in that its posts for walls and roof supports were arranged in circular order (although in only two circles), and that it had a large central roof support. An important difference is that in the Cherokee house the posts of the outer circle, forming the wall, were small, while those of the inner circle, supporting the main weight of the roof, were larger and farther apart. In House Ring No. 1, however, the largest posts were those in the outer circle C; those in B were slightly smaller, while those of A and the inner square were still smaller and more closely placed. Assuming a single structure to be represented, this might be taken as an indication that its roof was comparatively flat, for a conical roof rising toward the center would call for heavier supports there than along the periphery, just as in the Plains earth lodges and other American houses of similar type. The Cherokee example of an elevated range of seats "one above or behind the other, in theatrical order" might possibly explain the inner circles

¹ Bartram, William, *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*, pp. 366-367. London, 1792.

as having held pillars by which such seats or benches, as well as the roof, were supported.

Still more similar to the Deasonville house is Bartram's plan of the circular council house or rotunda of the Creeks in which there were three concentric rows of roof supports, the inner one consisting of eight posts placed around a large central pillar and two larger circles of posts between which were built rows of seats.²

Hawkins has likewise given a description of the method of constructing a circular Creek house but speaks of only two rows of posts.³ From Hawkins's description, as well as the later and more detailed one by Major General Hitchcock,⁴ we see that the roof of the Creek house, like that of the Cherokee, was supported principally by a series of heavy uprights placed near the center of the floor, an arrangement which could not have existed in the Deasonville house since there were no large post holes (except that of the single center post) anywhere near the center.

The Chickasaw of northern Mississippi also had circular winter houses, but these had sunken floors and in other structural features closely resembled the Plains type of earth lodge, while in the Deasonville houses the floors were not sunk below the surface. Choctaw houses have been described as quadrilateral, but from Adair's statement that they were exactly similar to those of the Chickasaw, we may suppose that circular winter houses were also in use. However, no adequate description of Choctaw houses exists.

The houses of the other historic Mississippi tribes furnish no parallels to House Ring No. 1; they are all described as simple, rather lightly constructed buildings, either round or square in outline, with wattlework walls. The Tunica, with their villages on the lower Yazoo River about 50 miles west of what is now Deasonville, were the nearest of the historic tribes. The following meager description of their houses has been left by Gravier, who visited them in 1700:

Their cabins are round and vaulted. They are lathed with canes and plastered with mud from bottom to top, within and without, with a good covering of straw. There is no light except by the door. . . . Their bed is of round canes, raised on 4 posts, 3 feet high, and a cane mat serves as a mattress. . . .⁵

The houses of the Natchez, who lived about 75 miles south of the Tunica on the Mississippi River, have been more fully described by Du Pratz, Charlevoix, and Penicaut.⁶ The dwellings were square in

² Bartram, William, *Observations on the Creek and Cherokee Indians*. Trans. Amer. Ethnol. Soc., Vol. III, pt. 1. p. 54, 1853.

³ Bushnell, D. L., jr., *Native Villages and Village Sites East of the Mississippi*. Bull. 60, Bur. Amer. Ethnol., p. 75, 1919.

⁴ *A Traveler in Indian Territory*. Edited by Grant Foreman. The Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, pp. 114-115, 1930.

⁵ Swanton, John R., *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico*: Bull. 43, Bur. Amer. Ethnol., p. 315, 1911.

⁶ Swanton, John R., *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60, 159.

outline, the sides ranging in length from 15 to more than 30 feet, while the temple was rectangular, 40 feet long by 20 feet wide.

The two smaller Deasonville house rings, Nos. 2 and 3, are not difficult to explain; they might easily be the remains of houses similar to those recorded for the Tunica, the only unique feature being that the wall posts were set up in a trench. From the evidence previously given there is reason also to regard the circles of House Ring No. 1 as the remains of walls of separate buildings erected at different periods. It is only when we consider the Cherokee and Creek houses that there is presented the alternative explanation of House Ring No. 1 being a single complex structure. When it comes to choosing one or the other alternative on the basis of the present evidence no definite conclusion seems to be warranted. In view of a certain resemblance to the Cherokee and Creek council houses described by Bartram and Hawkins it seems safer to conclude that House Ring No. 1 may possibly have been such a structure, even though the bulk of the evidence favors the view that the rows of posts represent the walls of houses erected at different times. Possibly future excavations of Indian village sites in the Southeast may bring to light additional facts which may make possible a more definite and satisfactory explanation of the Deasonville circles.

POTTERY

Potsherds were found in abundance in the trenches and post holes and on the surface of the plowed ground. In order to determine the relative proportions of the various types of ware represented, a surface collection was made by picking up every sherd on and between three cotton rows for a distance of about 100 feet. This resulted in a collection of 398 sherds, as follows:

- 238 undecorated.
- 57 cord marked.
- 50 painted.
- 47 incised.
- 4 punctate.
- 1 roulette or stamped.
- 1 small knob or rim.

These surface sherds were for the most part small, having been for many years plowed over and trampled upon. A larger collection, selected on the basis of decoration or shape, was made both from the trenches and the surface and has been utilized in the following description of the decoration, shape, paste, and color of the ware. There was no distinction between the sherds from different parts of the site; the same mixed type of pottery was found on the

surface, in the three house rings, in the post holes, and in the various sections of House Ring No. 1. The characteristics of the various types of ware will be described below in the order of their occurrence. They are also given in summarized form in Table 1.

On two complete vessels (pl. 1, *a*, *b*) have been found at the site; *a* was found in trench C, House Ring No. 1, and *b* was presented to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History by Mr. Homer Beall, who had dug it up a few years previously.

Undecorated ware.—Vessels of undecorated ware were either rounded bowls, of which Plate 1, *a*, is an example, or steeper-sided jars.

TABLE 1.—CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF DEASONVILLE POTTERY

Kinds of wares	Shapes of vessels	Paste			Surface		Decoration	Rims	
		Texture	Color	Temper	Finish	Color		Shape	Decoration
Undecorated...	Bowls and jars.	Coarse.....	Gray, black, or reddish.	Pulverized potsherds.	Usually smooth.	Drab gray or light brown.	-----	Straight or slightly incurved.	Occasionally a line on top.
Cord marked..	Jars.....	.....do.....	Buff, gray, or black.	.....do.....	Cord marked....	Light brown to dark gray.	-----	Straight or slightly incurved (sel-	Occasionally a line on top.
Painted.....	Conical and rounded bowls.	Fine.....	Blue-gray.....	Pulverized mussel shells.	Smooth.....	Red, white, and gray.	-----	dom everted). Enlarged; slightly overhanging on both sides.	Usually painted red.
Incised (rim only).	Bowls and jars.	Coarse.....	Gray, black, or reddish.	Pulverized potsherds.	Usually smooth.	Gray or brown.	-----	Straight or slightly incurving.	Occasionally a line on top.
Incised (body of vessel).	.....	Usually fine; some porous,.....	Light brown or gray.	Pulverized mussel shells (some vegetable fiber).	S o m e w h a t rough.	Buff or cream.	-----	Straight, incurved, and everted.	Looped handles.
Punctated.....	.....	.....do.....	.....do.....	.....do.....	.....do.....	.....do.....	-----	Usually everted....	Do.
Roulette or stamped.	.....	Fine.....	Gray.....	Pulverized mussel shells.	.....	.....	-----	.....	.....

The paste is coarse and is tempered with pulverized potsherds; only an occasional sherd shows a shell tempering.

In color the paste is mainly of two shades, gray to black or reddish; firing has generally produced on the outside of the vessel a drab gray or light brown color. Both surfaces are polished to some extent. On those sherds in which the paste is of a dark color the polishing of the inner surface often produced a deep black, while the outer surface, subjected to more intense heat in firing, had been burned to a gray or brown color.

Cord-marked ware.—Vessels with cord-marked exteriors were mostly high, straight-sided jars, although a few lower vessels with rounded sides were also represented.

Most of the sherds are light brown in color, while others range from light gray to almost black. The inner surface is smooth and shows a black polish where the paste is of a dark color.

As in the case of the plain ware, the paste is coarse and contains ground potsherds as tempering material. In color the paste is buff, gray, or black.

The surface decoration, if it may be called such, was produced usually by means of a cord-wrapped paddle; a few sherds bear impressions of woven textiles. Typical sherds are shown in Plate 2.

Painted ware.—The outstanding type of decorated pottery bears bold patterns in bright red and white pigment applied to both surfaces of the vessel. (Pl. 3.)

The most common shape was a graceful jar or bowl with wide mouth and straight sides which tapered down to a small flat circular base. Shallow rounded bowls appear also to have been present, to judge from the shape of some of the sherds, although no rounded bottoms were actually found. The rim was usually formed of a more or less rounded coil of clay, overhanging on both sides. Almost invariably a line had been incised just below the overhanging rim, sometimes on one side, sometime on both sides. Other rims are merely somewhat enlarged, while a few are straight. All of the rounded rims are painted red.

In contrast to the plain and cord-marked ware the paste is of a smooth, fine texture, being tempered with finely pulverized mussel shells; its color is a light bluish or steel gray.

The decoration, as far as could be judged from the sherds, was mainly of two types. Most commonly there was a red center at the base of the vessel from which radiated red panels, narrow at the bottom and increasing in width toward the top. These were separated by fields of pure white or bluish gray. The white and red combination was the prevailing one, both colors having been applied as a heavy slip. The blue-gray color, which appears less

frequently, was not applied as a slip but was produced by polishing the fine-textured blue-gray paste. The other principal decoration consisted of broad white scallops along both sides of the rim, with the rest of the surface bearing a plain red slip. In some sherds the red slipped decoration was replaced by a light brown or chocolate.

Incised ware.—In the numerical distribution of the pottery types given on page 12, sherds bearing an incised decoration are for convenience all grouped together. There are, however, two clearly differentiated types into which this incised ware falls. First is a type of pottery, represented almost entirely by rim sherds, which in color, paste, and tempering material is identical with the undecorated ware previously described. It differs only in having one to four—usually two—parallel incised lines encircling the vessel immediately below the rim. Some of the sherds have also a line incised along the top of the rim. Most of the lines below the rim are somewhat deep and were made by trailing a sharp stick held straight against the side of the vessel. (Pl. 4, *d-f*, *k-m*.) In some cases, however, the implement had been held with the point toward the rim, resulting in a somewhat wider and beveled line, deeper at the top and having an “overhanging” appearance. (Pl. 4, *a-c*, *g-i*.) The possible significance of this type of decoration will be referred to later.

The body of the vessel below the rim bears no other ornamentation, so it may be regarded as certain that a number of the undecorated sherds, which are identical in color, surface finish, paste, and tempering, were from vessels having this simple incised decoration restricted to the region of the rim.

The shapes of the vessels were usually shallow rounded bowls, although a few steeper-sided jars were represented.

The second variety of incised ware (pl. 5) differs in paste, color, and tempering material, as well as surface finish and decoration. The incised lines, instead of being applied in parallel bands and only to the rims of vessels, are usually curvilinear and are applied over the surface of the vessel generally. Plate 1, *b*, one of the two whole vessels found, is an example of this type.

The color of the paste is usually a light brown or gray, to which firing has brought a more uniformly buff or cream color. The paste is of two kinds, most commonly smooth and fine textured with shell tempering, and less frequently soft and somewhat porous, having had apparently a tempering material, probably vegetable, which had been mostly destroyed in firing.

The surface finish is somewhat rough, not having been polished like the incised ware first described. In that type the surface was

relatively smooth, because polished, even though the paste and tempering material was coarse. Here the reverse is true, for the surface appears rough through lack of polishing, even though the paste and tempering is mostly of fine texture.

The sherds of this type are small and few in number, so that nothing can be learned of the vessel shapes aside from the vase shown on Plate 1.

Punctate decoration.—In paste, tempering material, and color this ware is identical with that just described.

Most of the punctations are arranged in bands, outlined by deeply incised lines. (Pl. 6.) The indentations are round, conical, or elongate, depending on the shape of the point used.

Roulette or stamped decoration.—Only two sherds of this type were found in addition to the one small example from the numbered surface collection.

The paste is smooth, gray in color, and is shell tempered.

The decoration consists of very finely stamped or rouletted areas in bands, inclosed by deeply incised broad lines. (Pl. 5, *n.*)

Effigy head.—No effigy heads were found in addition to the one from the surface collection. This was a crudely modeled head of an animal which had been applied to the rim of a vessel.

Rim knobs and handles.—On Plate 7 are shown examples of the handles and lugs that were attached to some of the vessels. These appear to have been restricted to vessels in which the paste was either somewhat porous or coarse and shell tempered. The surface lacks a polish and the decoration consists of incised lines (of the second variety described above) or of punctations.

Distribution of the pottery types.—The most important immediate problem of Southeastern archeology is to establish a basis for a chronology of prehistoric sites. From the fragmentary nature of the evidence this will have to be for the most part a disjointed and patchwork chronology, far less perfect and comprehensive than that which has been worked out in other areas, notably in the Southwest, where ruins of all periods are well preserved and where at times even such perishable materials as basketry, textiles, and wood are found, and where in addition there still exist native tribes whose customs, social structure, and economic activities continue along much the same lines as those of their direct ancestors, the builders of the prehistoric remains in the same region. The task of working out a chronology for Southeastern archeology will be much more difficult and there is therefore all the more reason for painstaking examination and study of such aboriginal remains as are still available. The obvious beginning toward such a study is to determine wherever possible the nature of the remains left behind by the historic occupants of the area, most of whom have long since dis-

appeared or been removed to reservations. Practically, this means locating exactly from historical sources the sites of old Indian villages and collecting what may be available for comparison with similar material from earlier sites of unknown age. The most valuable material for this purpose is pottery; and broken fragments, if sufficiently numerous, are very nearly as useful as whole vessels, or even more so if the latter should not happen to include the entire range of types present. In 1925, by utilizing the pioneer work of Henry S. Halbert, I was able to locate and make collections from certain historic Choctaw village sites in eastern Mississippi.⁷ The result was the determination of the historic Choctaw type of pottery, on the basis of which comparison with pottery from sites of unknown age is now possible. A few years later similar work was undertaken for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History by Messrs. Moreau B. Chambers and James A. Ford, who were able to locate certain historic Natchez and Tunica sites in western Mississippi. In a forthcoming paper by James A. Ford the potsherds from these historic sites as well as those from neighboring older sites are to be described. Having participated to some extent in locating the Natchez site and having had an opportunity to examine the other materials found by Ford and Chambers, as well as the manuscript referred to, I am able to make use of these additional data as comparative references in the following brief summary.

Red and white painted ware was the most characteristic single type of decorated pottery found at the Deasonville site. Its occurrence elsewhere in the State seems restricted to the Mississippi River section, where it has been reported by Moore from Warren, Bolivar, and Tunica Counties.⁸ At these sites Moore also found vessels of the same shape as some of the red and white painted bowls from Deasonville—inverted truncated cones with small circular bases, low sloping sides and very wide mouths.⁹ Vessels bearing bold designs in red and white have been found more frequently in Arkansas, in Phillips, Lee, Crittenden, and Mississippi Counties along the Mississippi River, and they are also found on the St. Francis, Arkansas, and Red Rivers.¹⁰ European material was found by Moore at several of the sites from which came the red and white painted pottery.¹¹

⁷ Collins, Henry B., jr., Potsherds from Choctaw Village Sites in Mississippi. *Jour. Wash. Acad. Sciences*, vol. 17, No. 10, pp. 259–263, May 19, 1927.

⁸ Moore, Clarence B., Some Aboriginal Sites on Mississippi River. *Jour. Acad. Nat. Sciences, Philadelphia*, Vol. XIV, pp. 383, 387, 393–395, 412.

⁹ Moore, Clarence B., *op. cit.*, pp. 401, 409–410, 441, 458, 476.

¹⁰ Moore, Clarence B., Antiquities of the St. Francis, White, and Black Rivers, Ark. *Jour. Acad. Nat. Sciences, Philadelphia*, Vol. XIV.

Idem, Some Aboriginal Sites on Red River, *ibid.*, Vol. XIV.

Idem, Certain Mounds of Arkansas and Mississippi, *ibid.*, Vol. XIII.

¹¹ Idem, Certain Mounds of Arkansas and Mississippi, pp. 513, 525.

Idem, Some Aboriginal Sites on Mississippi River, p. 431.

In describing the incised ware from Deasonville, mention was made of the fact that some of the lines encircling the rims of vessels otherwise undecorated were applied in such a way as to have an "overhanging" appearance; that is, the lines were deeper at the top than at the bottom. (Pl. 4, *a-c*, *g-i*.) This is a style of decoration which Ford and Chambers have found to be characteristic of certain prehistoric sites in western Mississippi as distinguished from near-by historic sites of the Natchez and Tunica. The presence of this type at Deasonville is therefore of interest, although its full significance can not be understood until its entire range and the relative position it occupies elsewhere is known.

In this same connection it should also be noted that the Deasonville sherds contained no examples of historic Choctaw ware, which is characterized by straight or curving bands of very fine lines applied with a comblike implement;¹² or of Tunica ware in which the decoration consists of somewhat enlarged rims bearing indentations or scallops together with a single encircling line along the top. Typical Natchez pottery with its usually polished surface and scroll or meander decoration is also absent at Deasonville, although some of the incised ware of the second variety (rough surfaced, shell tempered, and sometimes soft and porous) bears a curved line ornamentation of this general type. (Pl. 5.)

The Deasonville collection includes three sherds, which despite their small number are of especial interest. These bear a decoration consisting of finely stamped or rouletted bands outlined by deeply and broadly incised lines. (Pl. 5, *n*.) I have found this style of decoration at Pecan Island, in southwestern Louisiana, and Moore has found it in Sharkey County, Miss., on the Mississippi River.¹³ It is also a design which occurs typically on the pottery of the highly developed Hopewell culture of Ohio.

Study of the potsherds from Deasonville fails to reveal any clues which might be of value as showing the chronological position of the site beyond the mere fact that it is prehistoric. Thus the absence of pottery types definitely attributable to the historic Choctaw, Tunica, or Natchez (as well as the absence of metal or other European material), and the presence of another type which at other Mississippi sites appears just as definitely prehistoric, places the Deasonville site in the latter category. This is a conclusion which might have been expected in view of the fact that Deasonville is in an area not known to have been inhabited by any historic tribe but lies between the territories formerly occupied by the Choctaw on the east and the Tunica and Yazoo on the west.

¹² Collins, Henry B., jr., *op. cit.*

¹³ Moore, Clarence B., *Certain Mounds of Arkansas and Mississippi*, p. 587.

As for the spatial distribution of the ceramic types represented, all that can be said is that the affinities of those which are sufficiently distinct to have a correlative value appear to be with the West—western Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana—rather than with Alabama or Florida. While it is to be regretted that the conclusions arrived at are so indefinite, the nature of the material available for comparison precludes for the present any more exact interpretations. We must know, for instance, much more about the geographical range of the various types of Southeastern pottery and the relative position occupied by each, and especially we must know which types are found associated with European material and which types are never found in such association. Eventually, no doubt, these things will be known and it will be a comparatively simple matter to assign newly found material to its proper position. Meanwhile, the Deasonville sherds are presented descriptively until such time as interpretations may be in order.

Bone implements.—The only bone implements found were awls and scrapers. In Plate 8, *a*, is shown a rather blunt pointed awl of antler; *d* is made from the ulna of a deer, and *e*, *f*, and *g* from a piece of deer leg bone, antler, and bird bone, respectively; *b* and *c* of the same plate are scrapers fashioned from the metapodial bones of deer.

Stone implements.—Flint implements, weapons, unfinished pieces and fragments were found in abundance. Plate 9, *a*, is probably an unfinished knife blade and *b* an unfinished scraper; *c* shows a scraper made from petrified wood and *d* and *e* are scrapers of flint. Two knife blades are represented in *f* and *g*. Projectile points in a variety of shapes and sizes are shown on the same plate, *h* to *v*.

Hammerstones of more or less rounded shape with a central depression for a finger grip were present in considerable numbers. Typical examples are shown on Plate 10, *a-e*.

On Plate 10, *f*, is shown a small polished celt or ax of quartzite.

Tobacco pipes.—Fragments of three tobacco pipes of the common elbow shape were found, an example of which is shown on Plate 11, *a*.

Miscellaneous.—Plate 11, *b*, represents a small pottery object of mushroom shape. These objects are usually referred to either as smoothing implements for use in pottery making or as stoppers for narrow-mouthed jars. The former explanation appears more applicable in the present case, since narrow-necked jars do not seem to have been represented among the Deasonville pottery forms.

In *c-e* are shown three small disks fashioned from potsherds and used no doubt in the same way as *b*; *f* is a rounded sandstone pebble, also probably used as a pottery smoother.

In *g* is shown a piece of fire-burned clay from a house wall, with clearly visible impressions made by the split canes over which the clay had been daubed.

Charred corncobs.—In some of the post holes which contained charcoal and ashes, pieces of charred corncobs were found. (Pl. 11, *h-m*.) These were submitted for examination to Dr. G. N. Collins, of the Department of Agriculture, a foremost authority on maize, who has kindly submitted the following statement:

The specimens of maize are pieces of cobs of 12-rowed ears. The cobs are small for 12-rowed ears. Of the modern varieties grown by the North American Indians, all that we have seen with such small cobs have only 8 rows of seed. The only types with small cobs and more than 8 rows with which we are familiar are from Peru.

The best preserved of the Mississippi specimens has very prominent glumes resembling in this particular specimens from the caves of the Ozark Mountains.

No statements are warranted regarding the antiquity or primitive nature of the types represented by any of the specimens. It should be kept in mind, in this connection, that the early stages in domestication and improvement of maize are unknown. Prehistoric examples may differ from modern types but it may not be said they are more primitive.

ANIMAL REMAINS

In the trenches and post holes were found quantities of the bones and shells of animals that had been eaten by the Indians. Many of the mammal bones had been split and broken to obtain the marrow, and some had been burned. The animal remains, in order of their relative abundance, occurred as follows: Mammal bones, mollusk shells, turtle shells, bird bones, fish bones. For the identification of the animal remains I am indebted to Dr. Leonhard Stejneger, Dr. Herbert Freidmann, Messrs. H. H. Shamel, W. B. Marshall, and E. D. Reid, all of the United States National Museum.

To judge from the relatively great number of deer bones (*Odocoileus virginianus louisianae*), this was the most common food animal. Other forms represented were: Beaver (*Castor canadensis*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), black bear (*Euarctos americanus*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), opossum (*Didelphis virginiana pigra*), skunk (*Mephitis mesomelas*), bob cat (*Lynx rufus*). No dog bones were found.

Fresh-water mussel shells were fairly abundant. The common form was *Plectomerus trapezoides*, with some representatives of the genus *Lampsilis*.

Large numbers of unbroken turtle carapaces were found in the trenches. These were of the small box turtle (*Terrapene carolina* Lin.). Others represented by shell fragments were the soft-shelled turtle (*Amyda spinifera* Le Sueur), the snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina* Lin.), and a slider (*Pseudemys* sp.).

Very few bird bones were found, due no doubt in part to the fact that being fragile they were not preserved, although birds were probably never a very common article of diet in this region. The only bird bones found were the comparatively large and heavy wing and leg bones of the wild turkey (*Meleagris gallapavo*.)

The only fish bones found were mandibles of the gar pike (*Lepisosteus osseus* Lin.). The absence of other fish bones may almost certainly be attributed to their extremely fragile nature, which makes them, of all animal bones, the least adapted to preservation.

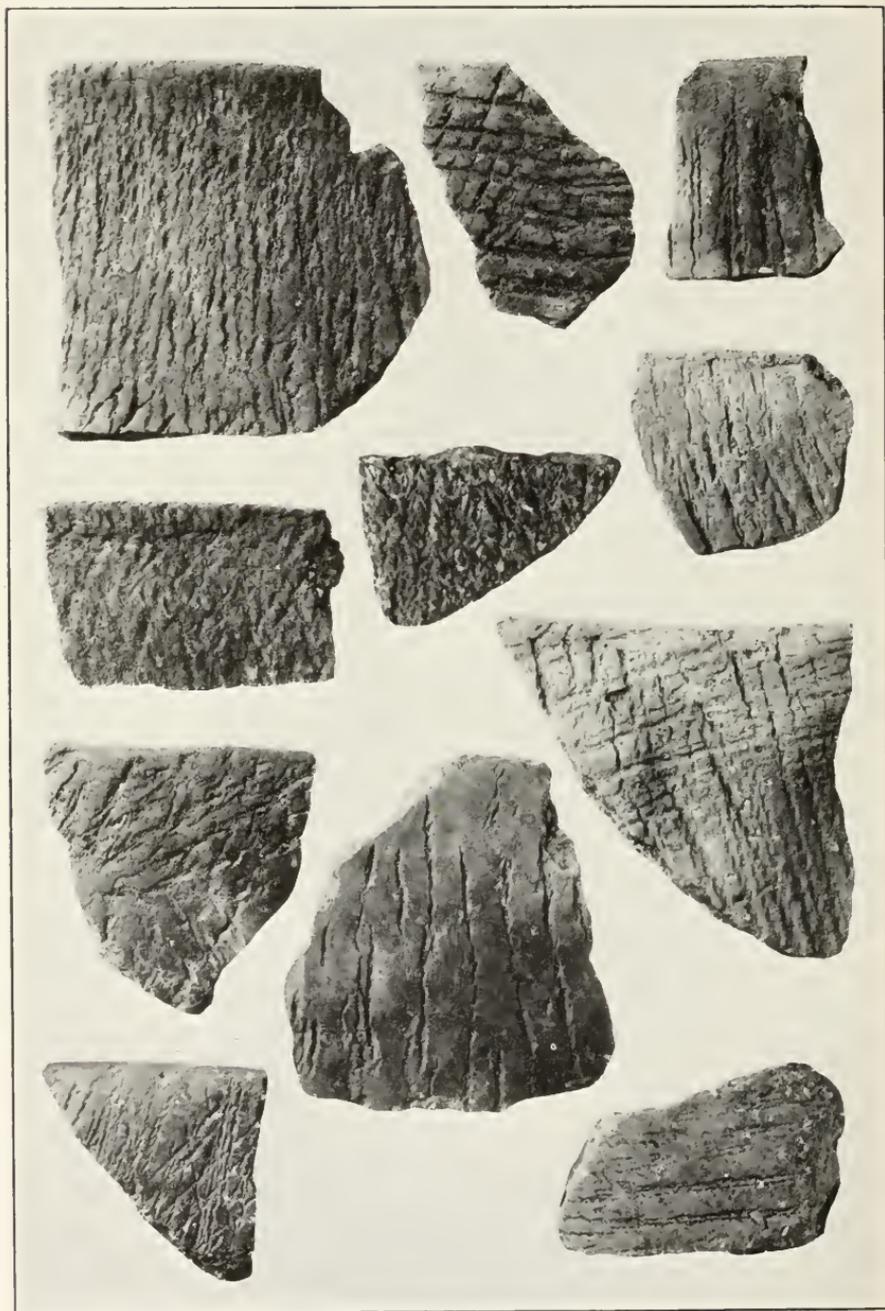


a

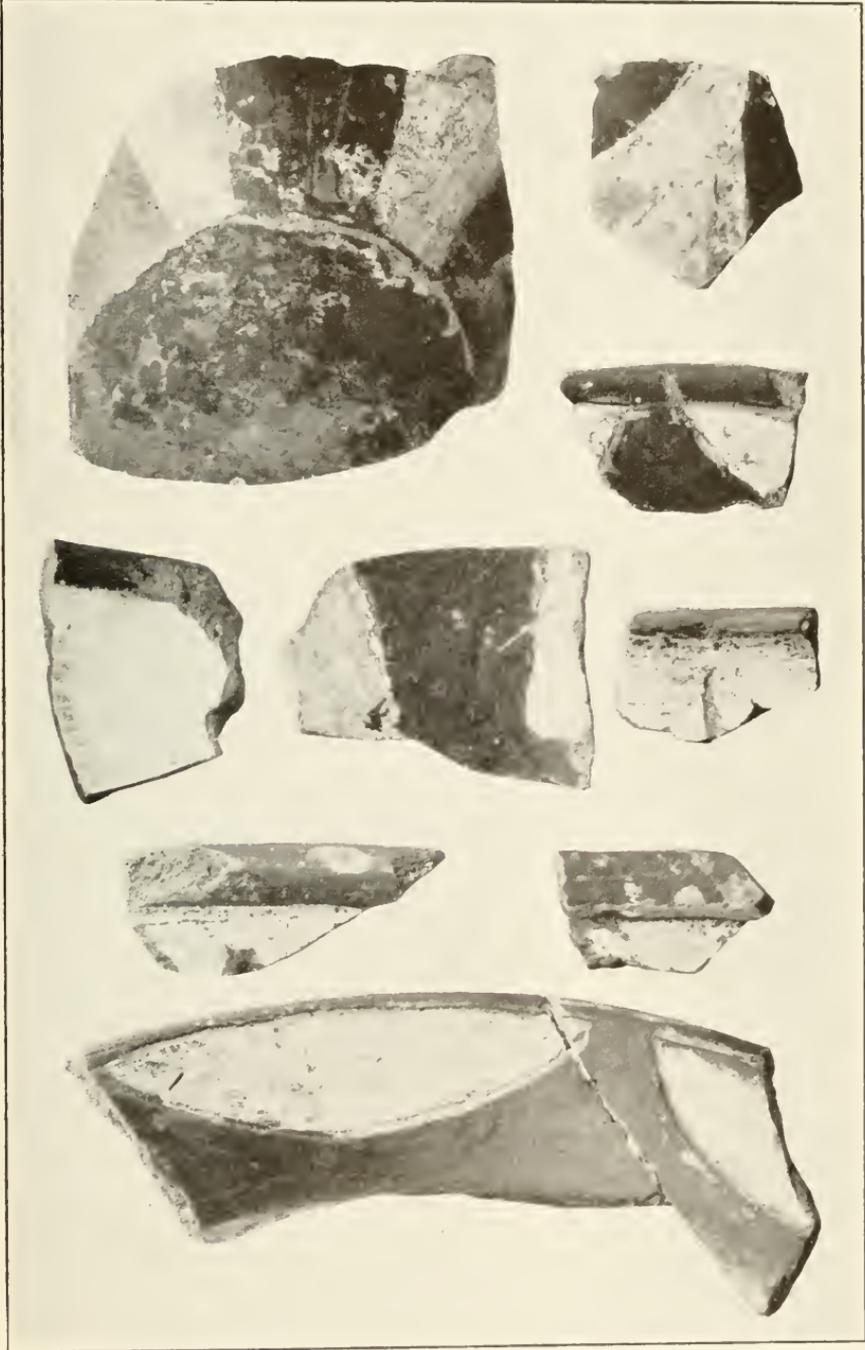


b

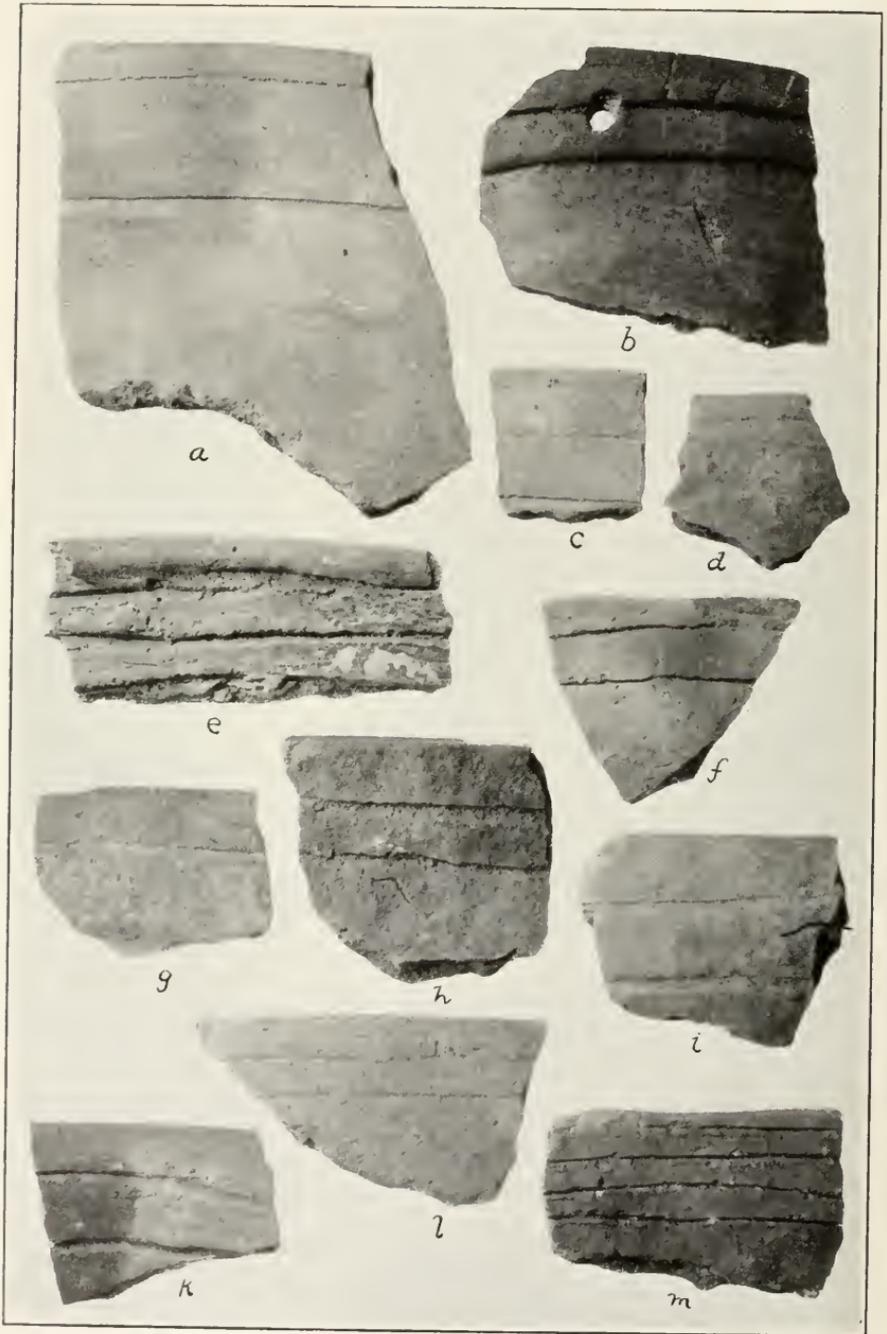
VESSELS FROM THE DEASONVILLE SITE



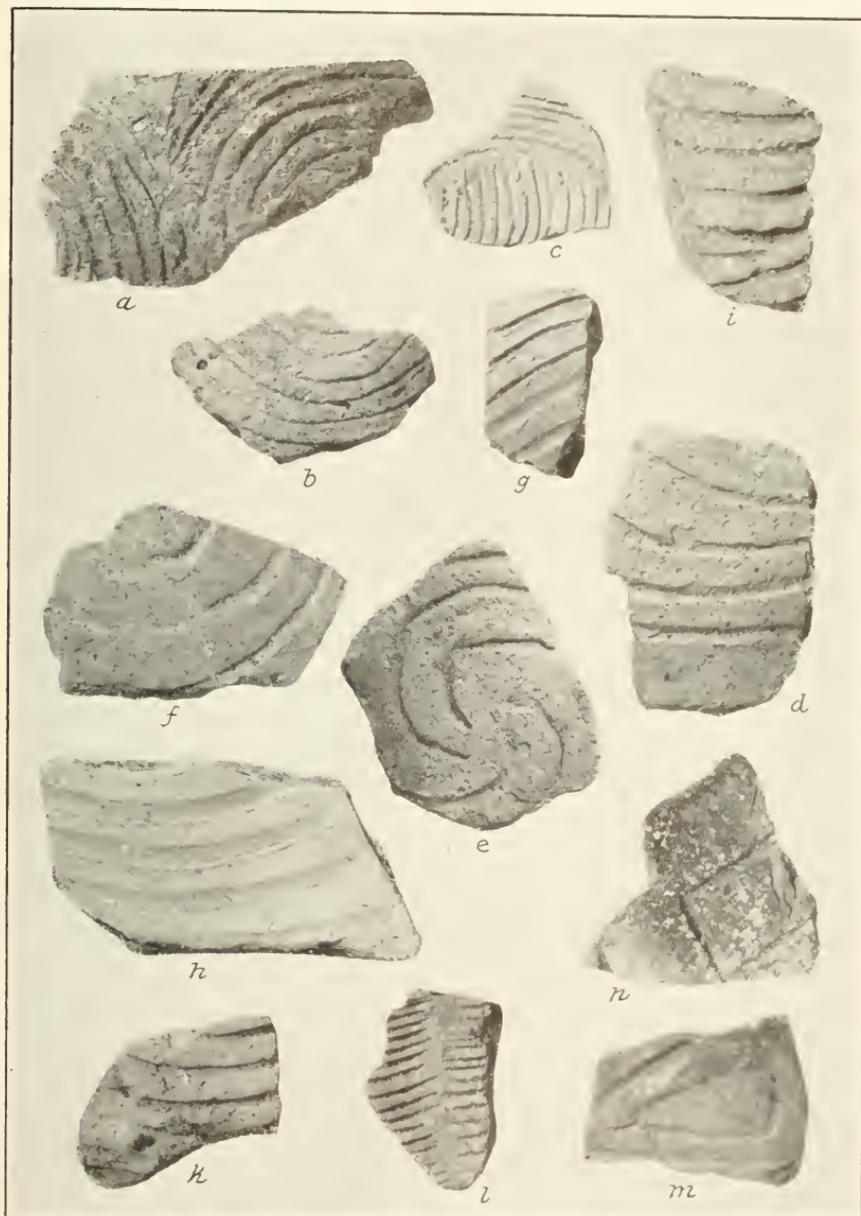
POTSHERDS SHOWING CORD-MARKED EXTERIORS



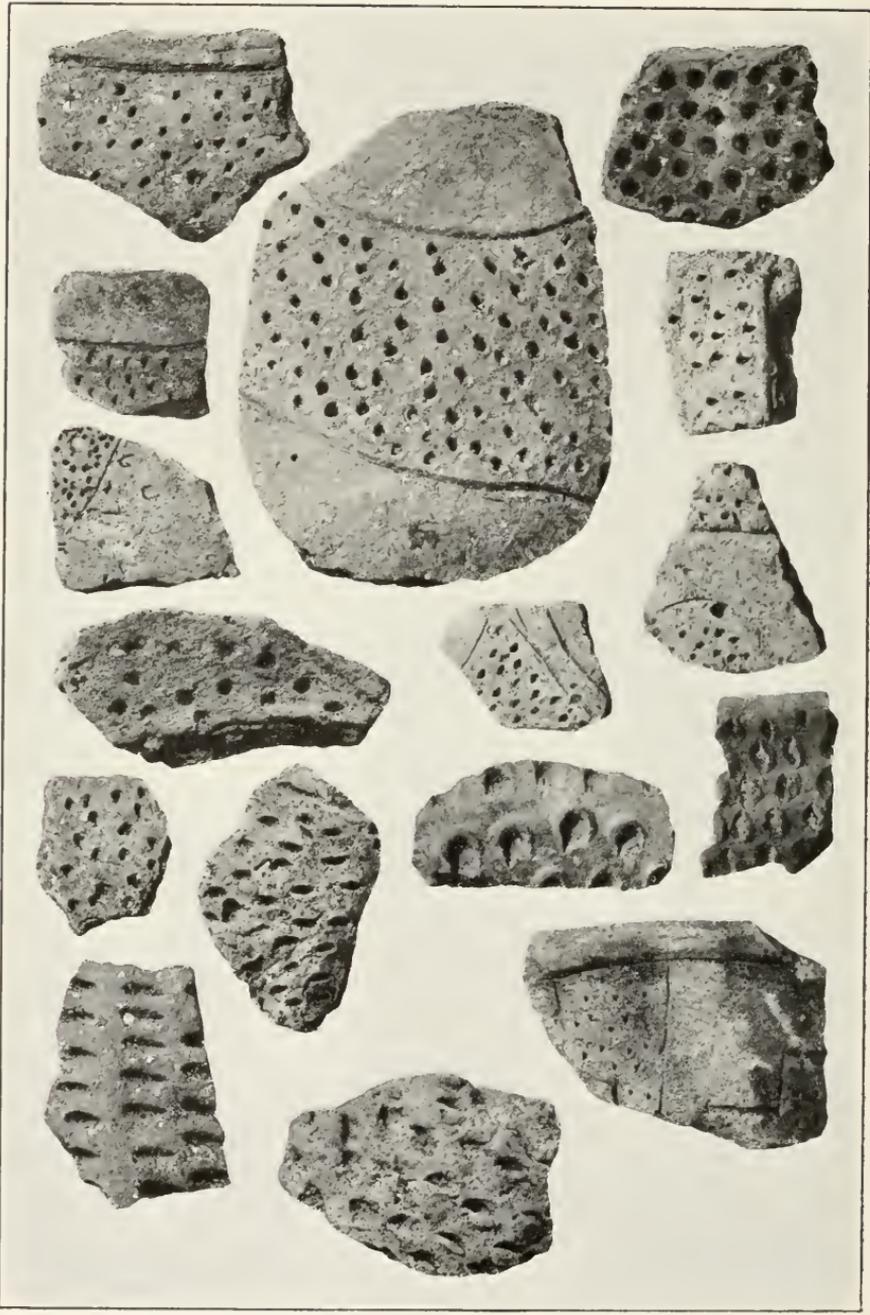
POTSHERDS WITH BOLD DESIGNS IN RED AND WHITE PIGMENT



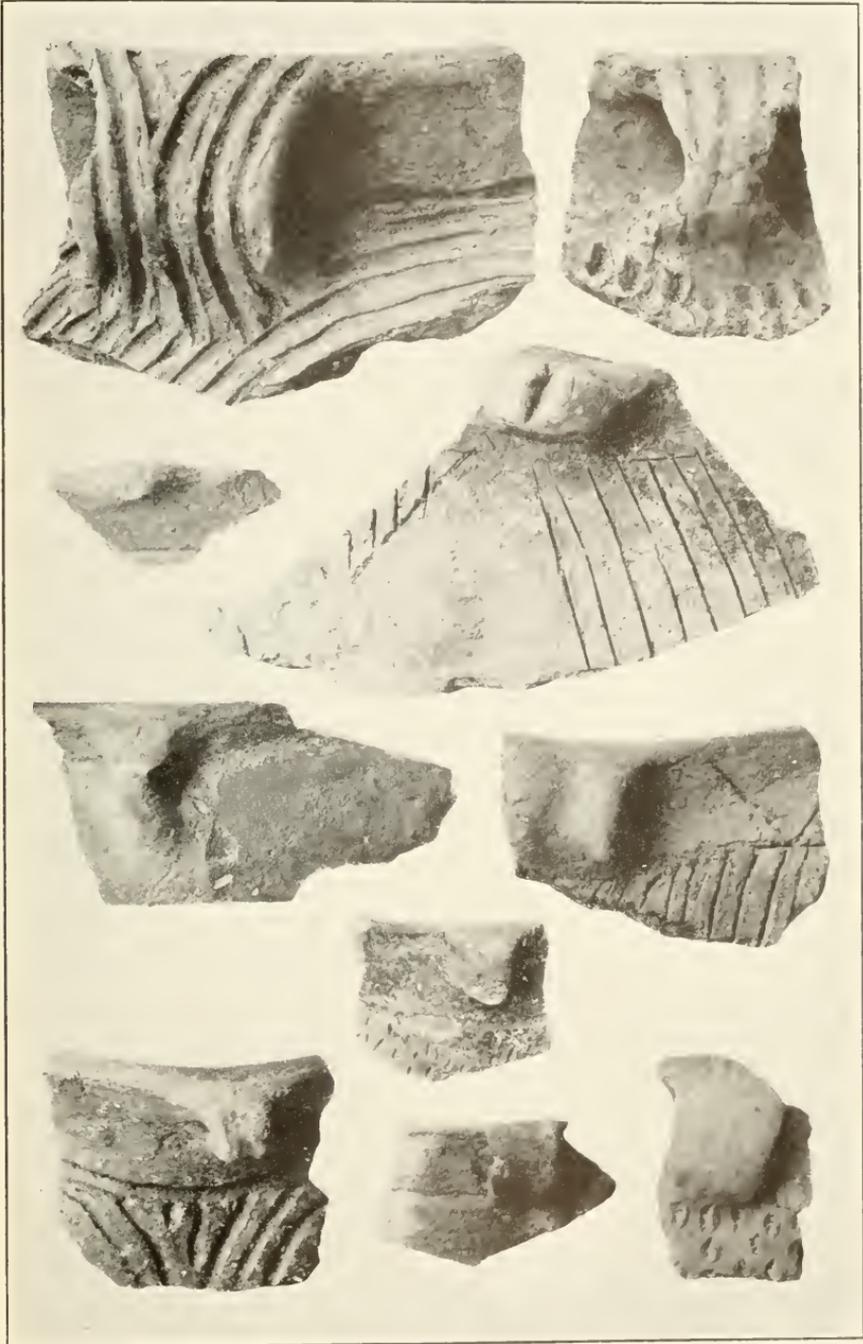
POTSHERDS WITH INCISED LINES AT RIMS



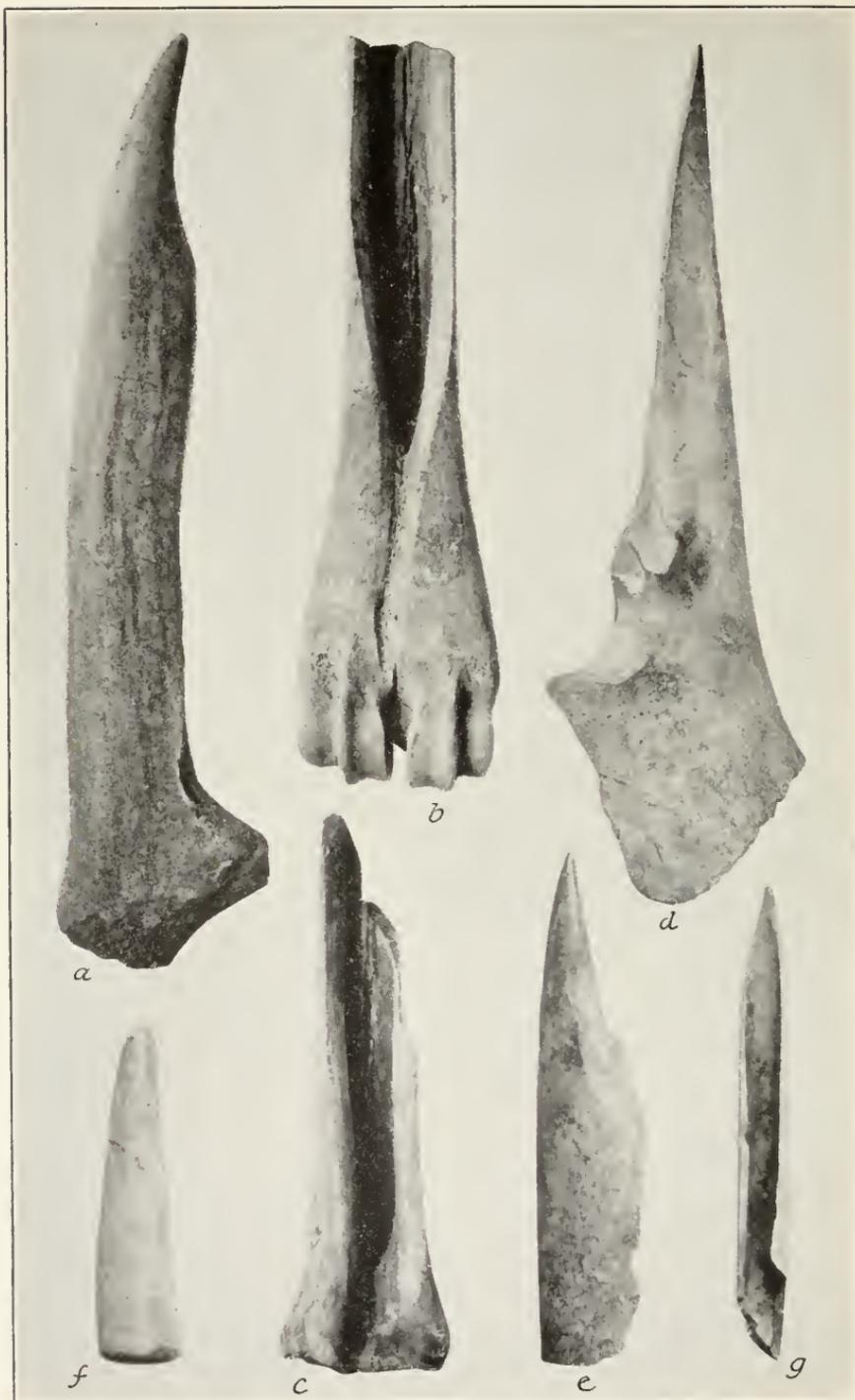
POTSHERDS SHOWING INCISED DECORATION OVER BODY OF VESSEL



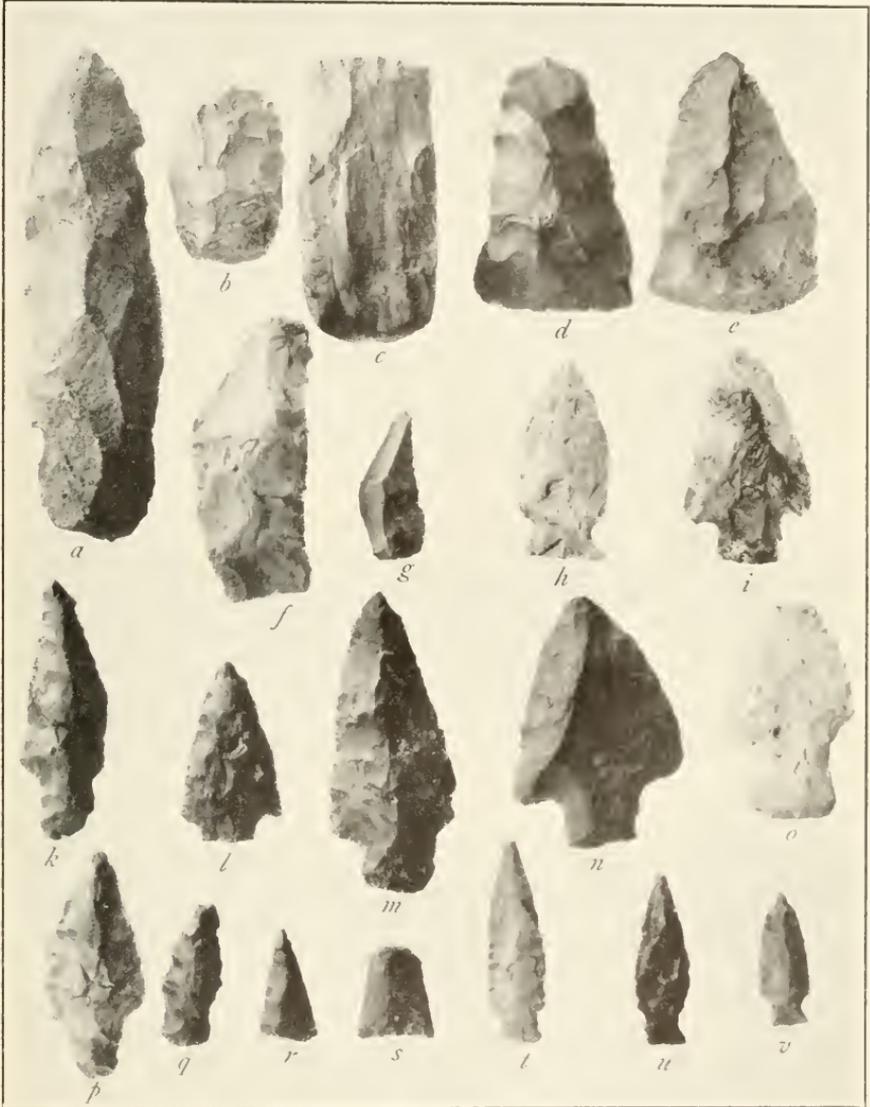
POTSHERDS WITH PUNCTATE ORNAMENTATION



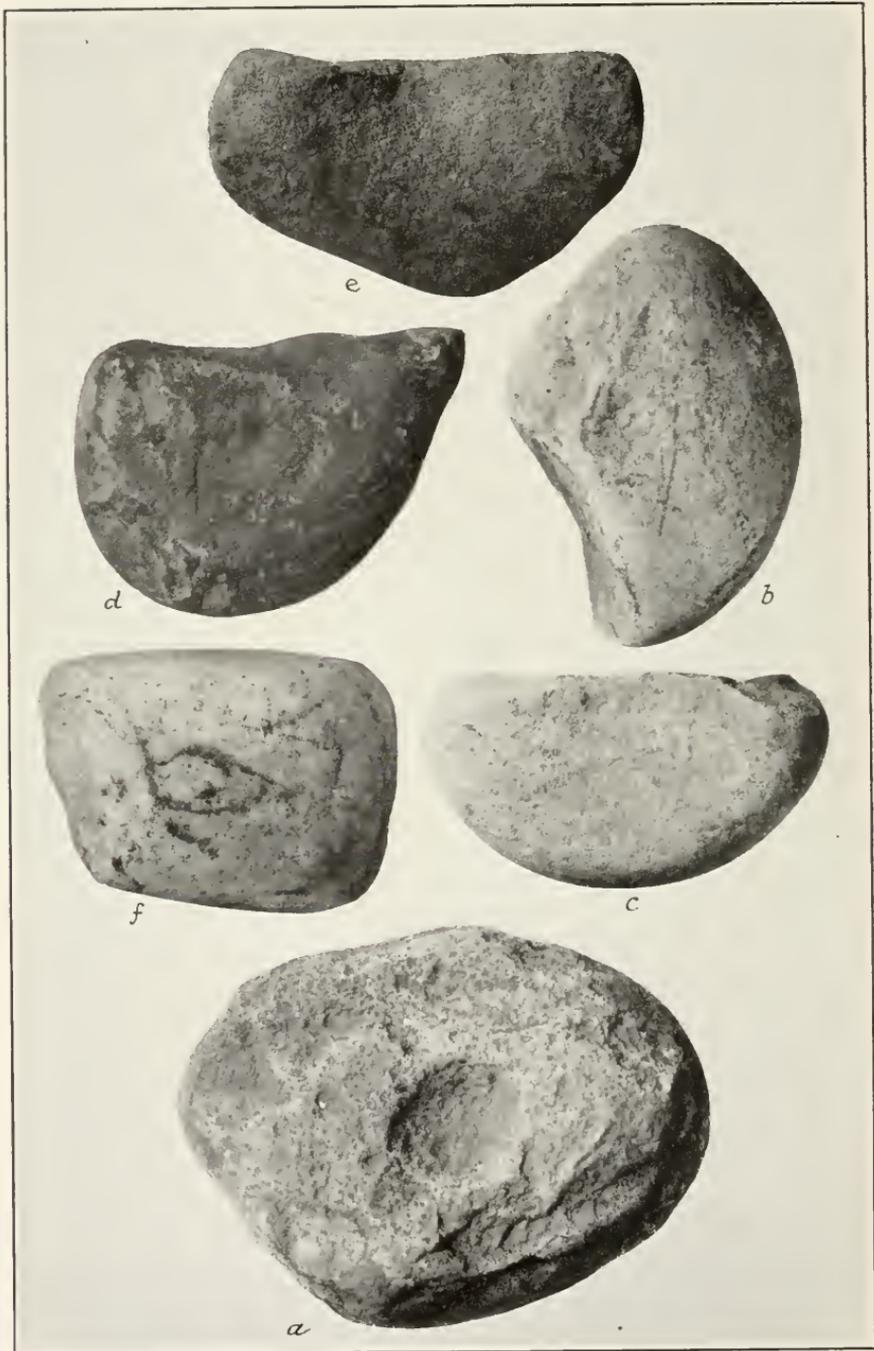
EXAMPLES OF HANDLES AND LUGS ON POTTERY



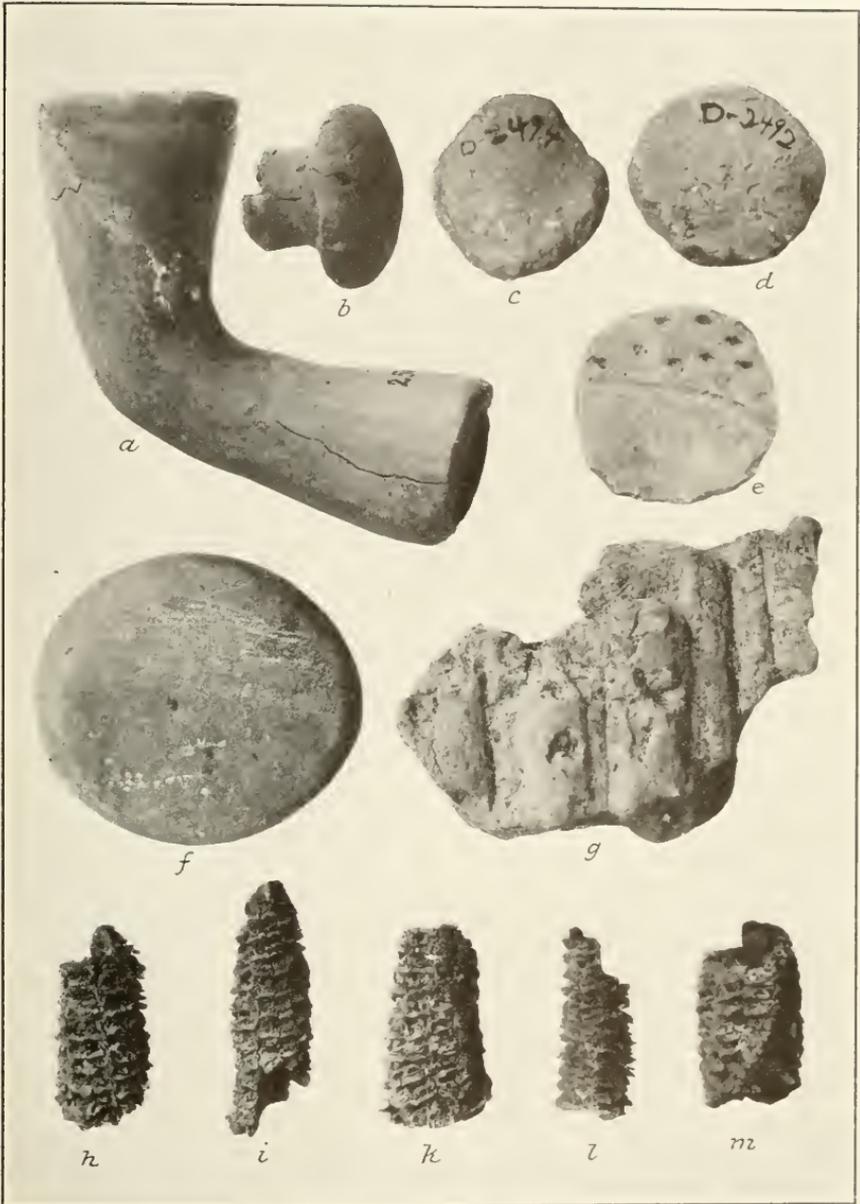
AWLS AND SCRAPERS MADE OF ANTLER AND BONE



KNIVES, SCRAPERS, AND PROJECTILE POINTS OF STONE



a-e, HAMMERSTONES; f, STONE CELT OR AX



a, POTTERY PIPE; *b*, POTTERY OBJECT, PROBABLY FOR SMOOTHING POTTERY; *c-e*, ROUNDED POT-SHERDS FOR SMOOTHING POTTERY; *f*, STONE DISK, PROBABLY FOR SMOOTHING POTTERY; *g*, PIECE OF FIRE-BURNED WALL CLAY; *h-m*, CHARRED CORNCOBS



a, EXCAVATION OF HOUSE RING NO. 1



b, PARTIALLY EXCAVATED TRENCHES IN HOUSE RING NO. 1



a. ROW OF POST HOLES OF INNER SQUARE AT CENTER OF HOUSE RING NO. 1



b. POST HOLES AT BOTTOM OF TRENCH IN HOUSE RING NO. 2