Archaeological Work in Westmoreland and Fayette Counties 1929

By J. Walter Miles

In recent years we have heard much about the Cro-Magnon Man who probably lived after the fourth and last glacial age. The people of this age buried their dead in caves in which are found stone weapons, ornaments, food and paint. The pigments which they used have endured to this day in the caves of France and Spain. These Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age people have left interesting records on the rocks in their caves and in the subsequent pages describing this year’s work, much will be found to indicate the survival in the later people of the ancient Palaeolithic customs. After the Palaeolithic People disappeared they were replaced by the Neolithic or Late Stone Age people about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. Groups of the Neolithic people migrated north-eastward from south-western Asia and were probably the ancestors of the Chinese and Japanese. Others more adventurous continued north-eastward and finally passed the Behring Strait, which at that time was probably an isthmus, into North America. It is a well known fact that the North American Indian has Mongolian characteristics, which would strengthen the belief that originally they came from south-western Asia, the so-called “cradle of the human race.”

In the Behring Strait migration just mentioned there were doubtless some who continued southward to Mexico, and Central America where they found the climate more congenial and permanent habitations were established. From these may have arisen the wonderful civilization of the Maya who lived in the states of Tabasco, Chipas and Mexico from 500 B. C. until about 500
A. D. They built great cities, pyramids, temples and beautiful palaces. Their ornaments of jade, wood carvings, ceramic and mosaics were remarkable for so early a period. They excelled in the sciences then known to the world. This was in fact a great American empire but like the empires of the old world could not forever endure.

In recent years there has been considerable activity in exploration work in connection with these lost Mayan cities and the recent exploration by airplane of Colonel Lindbergh will doubtless yield rich archaeological returns.

What may we conjecture about those of the Behring Strait migration who tarried on the way and did not follow the vanguard into Mexico and Yucatan to participate in the rapid and luxurious development which came to the Maya? Did some settle on the Pacific Coast and others come inland and northward to become the ancestors of the great Algonquin Nation? Did others remain on the western plains and finally reach the Mississippi? If so, the tradition of the Lenni Lenape, Mengwe and Alligewi would seem to be substantiated.

Or shall we take the early work of the Tertiary man found in Nebraska as evidence of his simultaneous development in the eastern and western hemisphere? May we say the age of man is the same in both hemispheres but that they did not develop equally because of unfavorable environments, and climatic conditions?

If we take the former view, we may look for interesting evidences of the Lenni Lenape, Mengwe, and Alligewi, between the Mississippi River and the Ohio River and its tributaries. Over this territory their fierce conflicts must have occurred. In Ohio the exploration work during the last 20 years has disclosed ancient earth work laid out with scientific skill and we are all familiar with the celebrated mounds in Ohio and their rich archaeological contents.

In western Pennsylvania practically no work has hitherto been done and we have only the reports of the early explorers and others who visited this section and found evidences of ancient habitations many centuries prior to the arrival of the white man.
We read the fascinating history of the occupancy of the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris River north of the Persian Gulf by the Sumerian as early as 6000 B.C. On a similar but much smaller scale we have between the Monongahela and Youghiogheny Rivers a narrow strip which judging from the results of last summer's work must also have teemed with prehistoric life of what age we do not know but certainly it was pre-Columbian.

The writer's active interest in the subject began when he was made chairman of a committee appointed by our parent society to assist in the Indian Survey of Pennsylvania, a work hitherto shamefully neglected when we consider the thorough manner in which our neighboring states, Ohio and New York have done their work. The preliminary survey made in Eastern Pennsylvania revealed the great and immediate need for systematic work, so an appeal was made to the Legislature for financial assistance. This resulted in an appropriation of $10,000 to be distributed by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission.

At an annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies, a resolution was presented and adopted authorizing the appointment of a committee to cooperate with the Historical Commission and an Advisory Board consisting of leading historians and archaeologists to carry on the work. Excellent results were obtained in Eastern Pennsylvania under the untiring leadership of Miss Frances Dorrance, chairman of the committee.

The preliminary survey in Western Pennsylvania was made during April and May of this year, also under the direction of Miss Dorrance, by Mr. Donald Cadzow, a noted explorer and archaeologist. At a meeting in Pittsburgh with Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Potter of our parent society, Mr. Cadzow reported that he had found in the country south of Pittsburgh approximately fifty Indian sites which he classified as "river bottom", "river bench" and "high land sites", and recommended that immediate work be started before these sites were destroyed by industrial developments and amateurs incompetent to do the work methodically.
It was finally decided to request the Westmoreland and Fayette branch to undertake the initial work in Westmoreland and Fayette Counties. The executive committee after careful consideration gave its approval and hearty support but under the state regulations none of its appropriation could be used unless the results became the property of the State Museum at Harrisburg.

For many reasons it was desirable to retain the results of the work in Western Pennsylvania and it then became necessary for our branch society to finance and provide a suitable museum. We were very fortunate, indeed, in having available the old mill at West Overton and a portion of the main floor was assigned to the Archaeological work. The financial plan worked out required the branch society to provide $\frac{1}{3}$ of the funds, the other $\frac{2}{3}$ came as a gift from Miss Frick. Here I wish to say that the major portion which our society provided was subscribed at the solicitation of our efficient and untiring Secretary and Treasurer, Mr. Lynch.

Mr. Cadzow secured for us an experienced man from the University of Chicago, Mr. Robert M. Engberg, who arrived in Pittsburgh May 29, and began work the next day, assisted by Mr. George S. Fisher and Mr. Roy Morgan of Finleyville, Pa. The details of the work are given in Mr. Engberg's report which is very comprehensive and which is printed in the following pages.

Because of the very substantial evidences secured in this summer's work, it is probable that another season's work will reveal much of interest and value in connection with the prehistoric Indians. Investigation of their burial places offers the only solution of the many unanswered questions, and because of the desire to coordinate our work with that already done by Ohio and New York, our branch Society has decided to continue the work during the summer of 1930.