

CHAPTER IX

THE STONE-GRAVE PEOPLE

There is hardly a writer on prehistoric sites in Kentucky who has not commented to a greater or less extent on the peculiar type of stone grave which is found rather commonly throughout the state. These graves are quite different from the irregular covering of stones which marks most primitive burials and consist of a very definite cyst or cairn with the stones regularly placed in an orderly and uniform fashion. So distinctive are these rock sepulchers and so characteristic are some of the customs which they represent, that again we are choosing to discuss them separately and to designate their builders as the "Stone-Grave People." Doctor Warren K. Moorehead states (Moorehead, 1910):

"Ohio and Kentucky stand as two separate cultures separated by the Ohio River. Yet the Ohio River was made use of by prehistoric man from above Pittsburg to its mouth at Cairo. . . . In Kentucky the Cumberland and Tennessee are in a class by themselves. . . . These two rivers are so long, and as each is navigable far into the State of Tennessee, I feel certain that five or six cultures may be clearly differentiated within their valleys. . . . The stone-grave culture of this region merits further detailed study on the part of archaeologists."

After the examination of a very large number of stone graves, located in different parts of the state, we believe that we are justified in reaching the following conclusions: (1) That this type of stone cyst, wherever it is found, represents a single group of people (2) that these graves are not naturally associated with mounds, even though there may be mounds near them, (3) that the graves are all constructed on the same general pattern, although they may show slight variation in their structure, (4) that the dead were seldom if ever buried with artifacts, and (5) that this group is as distinctive and represents as definite a culture as any one group with which we have to deal.

In support of these conclusions, we may note certain general observations which we believe are worthy of consideration. Regarding the structure of the graves we may say that they are usually close to the surface and shallow. Many have been found

in locations in which there had been little opportunity for erosion from the surface and where there had never been any cultivation or other disturbances of the top soil and even in such locations the tops of the rocks forming the cairn were barely below the surface. The floor of the grave is usually made of a series of stones laid flat and close together on which the body rests. The sides of the grave are built of flat stones set on edge, generally straight but sometimes at an angle so that the upper edge consists of a series of corners of these stones. The head and foot of the grave is fashioned in the same manner and usually, but not always, these head and foot stones are somewhat higher than the others. All of the stones forming the sides and ends of the graves are neatly placed, close together and in line, so that the entire cyst is well enclosed and well made.

The graves are just deep enough and just long enough to contain the body and apparently each had been constructed for the particular corpse which is to occupy it. The top of the skull and ends of the feet in most cases just touch the stones at the head and foot respectively and the tops of the side stones are no higher than would be required for the thickness of the body. Over the body were placed other stones, laid flat, again neatly arranged and so close together that little earth would fall into the grave. If the grave is disturbed, it is of course this top layer which is usually displaced and in many cases where the graves are located in what are now cultivated fields, these stones have been dragged from their original position by the plow. The graves do not seem to be oriented in any definite way in respect to the points of the compass although the majority of them are perhaps more approximately east and west than in any other direction.

The skeletons in all the graves which we have examined were fully extended and lying either on the back or on the side. In rare instances we have found two skeletons in one grave. As is the case with other prehistoric groups, the skeletons represent individuals averaging below rather than above the normal height of modern man. The skulls are the most modern in appearance of any which we have seen and in many particulars are suggestive of present races,

We have never found artifacts of any kind in a stone grave and Mr. W. J. Curtis, who has perhaps investigated as many such graves as any man in Kentucky, states that his experience has been the same. Apparently the stone-grave people did not have the same customs in burial as did other primitive groups and the absence of the usual ornamentation, decorations, weapons or food in the grave is an example of this. Perhaps they were above the savage superstitions or beliefs which in more primitive races demanded these ceremonies. In one or two cases only have we found fragments of pottery in the grave, in

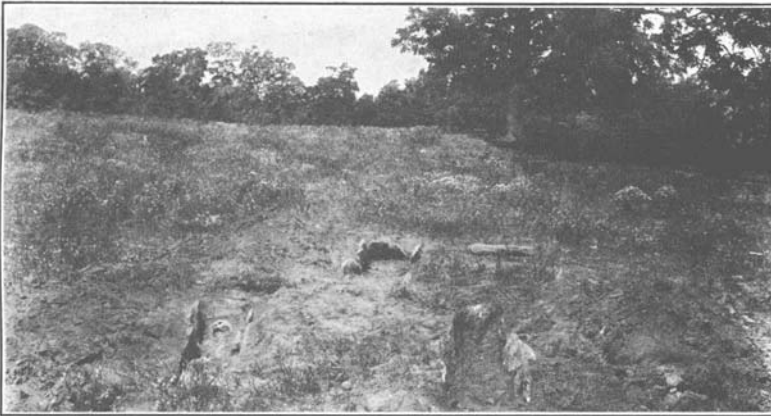


FIG. 79. TYPICAL STONE GRAVES.
Three "east and west" graves in close proximity.

one case what appeared to be a broken cooking-vessel, but in most instances the graves are devoid of accessories.

Since all stone-graves, as we have stated, are very much alike, the description of one typical cemetery of such graves will suffice to give a general idea of this phase of the subject. The collection of these graves which we have had the opportunity of examining most carefully was located in the southern part of Christian County on the farm of Mrs. R. D. Glover about five miles southwest of Trenton. This farm contained, in addition to the stone-graves, a mound, which we believe to be quite old and to represent an entirely different culture, and what was apparently the remains of a race-track which we consider quite recent and probably used by modern Indians in their sports.



FIG. 80. OLD WOMAN WITH ONE TOOTH.

An excellent example of a stone grave burial in which the sides and ends of the grave are made with eight large flat stones.

The stone-graves occupied a low ridge about 1,000 yards long, 100 feet across and approximately 15 feet above the general level of the field. There was no made dirt on the ridge which was simply a natural rise in the rolling country of the region. According to local tradition there had originally been hundreds

of graves on this ridge and we were assured that they had all been opened and that nothing except skeletons had ever been found in them. These skeletons according to the residents of the neighborhood had all been destroyed and we were told that the chances were very unlikely that we could find a grave which had not been ravaged. However, in the hope of finding some which had not been molested, we made a rather careful survey of the ridge and as a result located a number of burials which had never been disturbed and which proved to be very typical of the stone-grave people.

A few extracts from our field notes will serve to describe these graves. In explanation of the names mentioned in these notes it should be stated that we were accompanied on this trip by Doctor M. N. States of the University of Kentucky, a connoisseur of camp cooking, and Mr. J. A. Estes the City Editor of the Lexington Herald. We were taken to the field and assisted in many ways by Mr. S. S. Sherron, Scout Commissioner of Hopkinsville and Rev. Gregory of Trenton and were extended many courtesies by Messrs. R. G. Glover and Armistead Glover the sons of Mrs. R. D. Glover the owner of the farm. A camp was established within a few yards of the burial ridge and with this camp as a center we were able to make trips to a number of other prehistoric sites in the neighborhood. The following notes refer specifically to the burials on the ridge described:

R. D. Glover Farm, Christian County.
June 7-12, 1926.

Grave No. 1.

Opened by Funkhouser. 5 ft., 5 in. long and averaged 17 in. wide (inside measurements). Stones well set and very well proportioned. Skeleton in good condition. Head toward the east. Lying flat on back with arms at side and legs extended straight. Face turned slightly to the right. Adult male.

Grave No. 2.

Opened by States. Under a locust tree the roots of which had forced the stones of the grave out of position. Fragments of two skeletons both in such bad condition that they were undeterminable. It was impossible to secure the measurements of the grave or to be sure of its exact position as the growth of the tree roots had badly disarranged the stones and the bones and the soil was here very wet.

Grave No. 3.

Opened by States. Grave 6 ft. long and 14 inches wide. Stones somewhat out of position at foot and sides. One skeleton very

close to surface. Bones in very bad condition. Adult male. Head pointing a little south of east and face turned slightly to the left. Base of the skull, most of the vertebrae and all of the tarsals, metatarsals and toes entirely rotted. No artifacts.

Grave No. 4.

Opened by Funkhouser. 5 ft. 6 in. long; average width 16 inches. Three stones on each side, one at head and one at foot; the one at the head was visible above the surface, the tops of the others about 2 inches below the surface. Corners of grave well squared. One skeleton 9 inches below tops of side stones. Very old woman with only one tooth—a lower incisor. Jaw bones entirely healed over sockets of other teeth. Head toward the south. Flat on back with body straight. Remains of a shallow pottery vessel with scalloped edges *under* feet. Fragments of pottery at head. No artifacts.

Grave No. 5.

Opened by M. N. States. 3 feet east of No. 4. Well constructed grave outlined with very heavy stones. Grave extended east-west; 6 ft. 4 in. long; 12 inches wide at one end, 19 inches wide in middle and 16 inches wide at the other end. The stone at the 16 inch end was missing. Grave was empty.

Grave No. 6.

Opened by Webb. 2 ft. south of No. 5. Outlined by heavy stones only one of which projected above the surface. All of the stones had the corners turned upward and the ends of the grave were rounded instead of square, three stones making the curve at each end. The grave was very unusual in its shape and in the position of the stones. Measurements: 6 ft. 7 in. in length; 19 inches in width. One skeleton with head toward the west. Bones almost entirely decomposed. Adult. No artifacts.

Grave No. 7.

Opened by Webb and Funkhouser. 6¼ ft. long and 14 inches wide. Very well made with large stones. One skeleton. Adult male with head toward the east, lying on right side with right arm under body. Legs crossed at the ankles, the right leg under the left. No artifacts. This is the first skeleton we have found in a stone grave in which the legs were crossed.

Grave No. 8.

Opened by Estes and Funkhouser. 6½ ft. long; 16½ inches wide. Grave in bad condition with walls partly broken down and bones very rotten. Contained remains of two skeletons, one in natural position on back with head toward the west, the other fragmentary with the bones out of natural position. Both apparently adults but otherwise undeterminable. No artifacts.

Grave No. 9.

Opened by Estes. 5 ft. 10 in. long; 16 inches wide. Side stones at head of grave out of position. One skeleton. Adult female, flat on back with face turned slightly to the right, arms at sides and legs extended and straight. Head pointing a little south of west. Bones in very bad condition and skull crushed. No artifacts.

Grave No. 10.

Opened by Webb. 6 ft. long; 18 inches wide. Well-built of heavy stones. A large upright rock over the *middle* of the grave



FIG. 81. THE TALLEST OF THE STONE-GRAVE PEOPLE.
An unusually large skeleton in stone grave in western Kentucky.

projected out of the ground and was the only external evidence of the grave. Large skeleton in good condition. Lying on back with arms at sides and legs straight. Head bent over toward the right as though the grave had been too short for the body. Skull crushed in left frontal region. Head pointed slightly south of west. This is the largest skeleton we have found and the individual probably measured close to six feet in height. No artifacts.

Grave No. 11.

Opened by Funkhouser and States. 6 ft. 2 in. long; 23 inches wide. On slope of ridge. Two of the protruding side rocks of

the grave broken. One skeleton with the head toward the west. Skull only two inches below the surface and almost entirely rotted away; lower half of body a foot below surface with bones in much better condition. Adult, sex undeterminable. No artifacts.

Grave No. 12.

Opened by Funkhouser. Side and end walls so badly broken down or missing that exact measurements are impossible. Grave extends north and south. Only fragments of skeleton found and these are apparently bones of a child. No artifacts.



FIG. 82. A STONE GRAVE NEAR CARLISLE.
An opened cyst showing the structure of the side walls.

Grave No. 13.

Opened by Funkhouser. 5 ft. 9 in. long; 14 inches wide. Grave excellently made and stones in good alignment. One skeleton; adult female lying on left side with right leg drawn up over left. Feet missing. Head pointed toward the east. No artifacts.

Grave No. 14.

Opened by Estes. Grave and skeleton in such bad condition that disinterment and measurements not feasible. No artifacts.

The cemetery which we have described above we believe is typical of the stone-grave people and is the largest of that type which we have worked. Smaller groups of such graves are rather common, however, in many other parts of the State. A considerable number have been found in Nicholas County, particularly in the neighborhood of Carlisle, and Mr. Curtis reports them from Robertson County.

Similar graves have been found in Mason County near Mays Lick and several have been reported from Muhlenberg and Logan Counties so that it is apparent that the stone-grave

people had a wide geographical range over the state. In all cases the same kind of data is secured—well built stone cairns, usually in groups; burials generally in open country and not associated with mounds; skeletons extended in the graves and an entire absence of artifacts.

When we consider these data we are forced to conclude that we are dealing with a rather distinct group of people who perhaps represent a culture quite different from that of the other groups which we have discussed. When we further consider the outstanding characteristics of this group we are inclined to the opinion that they are less primitive than the others and perhaps approach in many respects modern man. This is indicated not only by their well-built and rather modern graves but by their skeletons and by the absence of the ornaments and artifacts so characteristic of the savage. And all of this reminds us of the theory to which we referred in an earlier chapter, to the effect that according to the Welsh tradition a colony of that nation reached the Mississippi Valley in very early times and remained there until wiped out or until it had become fused with the aborigines.

Fanciful as such a theory may be thought, we may at least consider whatever merits it may have at this point. In reviewing the arguments which have been advanced to support the theory we find some which are probably founded on fact. The first of these is the legend, which seems fairly well established in history that Prince Madoc of Wales in the latter part of the Twelfth Century, sailed westward with a number of his followers in ten ships and were never heard of again. This part of the tradition may perhaps be accepted without question. The second part of the tradition, namely, that this Welsh Colony entered the Gulf of Mexico, reached the mouth of the Mississippi, and established themselves somewhere in the interior of North America, may be regarded with more suspicion. The second is the rather well authenticated story that Indians were found in the United States in early days who spoke Welsh. One of the earliest of these accounts and one which has often been quoted is that of Lieutenant Joseph Roberts which was published in the "Public

Advertiser" a Louisville newspaper of May 15, 1819. Lieutenant Roberts' report is as follows:

"In the year 1801, being at the City of Washington in America, I happened to be at a hotel, smoking a cigar according to the custom of the country and there was a young lad, a native of Wales, a waiter in the house, and because he had displeased me by bringing me a glass of brandy and water, warm instead of cold, I said to him jocosely in Welsh, 'I'll give thee a good beating.'

"There happened to be at the time in the room one of the secondary Indian Chiefs who on my pronouncing these words, rose in a great hurry stretching forth his hand, at the same time asking me in the ancient British tongue—'Is that thy language? I answered him in the affirmative shaking hands at the same time, and the chief said that was likewise his language and the language of his father and mother and of his nation. I said to him, 'so is it the language of my father and mother and also my country.'

"Upon this the Indian began to inquire from whence I came and I replied from Wales, but he had never heard of such place. I explained that Wales was a principality in the kingdom called England. He had heard of England and of the English, but never of such a place as Wales.

"I asked him if there were any traditions amongst them whence their ancestors had come. He said there were and that they had come from a far distant country, very far in the east and from over the great water. I conversed with him in Welsh and English; he knew better Welsh than I did and I asked him how they had come to retain their language so well from mixing with other Indians. He answered that they had a law or established custom in their nation forbidding any to teach their children another language until they had attained the age of 12 years and after that they were at liberty to learn any language they pleased. I asked him if he would like to go to England and Wales; he replied that he had not the least inclination to leave his native country and that he would sooner live in a wigwam than in a palace. He had ornamented his naked arms with bracelets, on his head were placed ostrich feathers.

"I was astonished and greatly amazed when I heard such a man who had painted his face of yellowish red and of such an appearance speaking the ancient British language as fluently as if he had been born and brought up in the vicinity of Snowden. His head was shaved excepting around the crown of the head and there it was very long and plaited and it was on the crown of his head he had placed the ostrich feather which I mentioned before to ornament himself.

"The situation of those Indians is about 800 miles southwest of Philadelphia, according to his statement and they are called Asguaw Nation.

"The chief courted my society astonishing, seeing that we were descended from the same people. He used to call upon me almost every day and take me to the woods to show me the virtues of the various herbs which grew there; for neither he nor his kindred were acquainted with compound medicine."

A similar account appeared in the "Palladium" a weekly newspaper published at Frankfort, Kentucky on December 12, 1804. This account was written by the Honorable Harry Toul-

min, Secretary of State under Governor Gerrard, and describes the experiences of a certain Maurice Griffiths who was taken prisoner by the Shawnees about 1764 and after living with the Indians for some years went on a hunting trip with a party of young braves. This party after a long and dangerous journey up the Missouri River finally came to a nation of Indians who were of a very light complexion and spoke the Welsh language.

Another account, of like nature, appeared in the "American Pioneer" in 1842 (Vol. I: p. 373). This was written by Thomas S. Hinde, an antiquarian of excellent reputation, who describes six skeletons found in 1799 near Jeffersonville, each of which had a breast plate of brass, each with the Welsh coat-of-arms, the Mermaid and Harp with a Latin inscription.

These accounts of Indians who could speak Welsh are so numerous and in many cases are from such reliable sources, that we must be very skeptical indeed to doubt their authenticity. A statement which we have secured on this subject and which is absolutely reliable is the following:

"My father, A. H. Ward, was born in Harrison county in 1815 and died in 1904. A lawyer, a member of Congress, a scholar when men had time to be scholars, he was always interested in history, and his unpublished Reminiscences are among my treasures.

"His father, Andrew Ward, was of Welsh descent. He was an Indian fighter serving under various enlistments from young manhood until wounded at Fort Meigs while serving in the Army of the North West Territory under General Harrison.

"He told my father *that he had met and talked with Welsh Indians, that they understood him and he understood them.*

(Signed) Mrs. W. T. Lafferty,

Head of Women's Division, University Extension.
Chairman of History, Kentucky Federation of
Women's Clubs.

State of Kentucky
County of Fayette

I, Mrs. W. T. Lafferty, hereby certify that the statement given above is correct.

(Signed) Mrs. W. T. Lafferty.

Subscribed and sworn to before me on this 18th day of February, 1926.

(Signed) Cella Taylor,

Notary Public,

My commission expires July 22, 1928.

We believe, therefore, that there can be little doubt but that there were American Indians in very early days who were

familiar with the Welsh language, so that this part of the theory must be taken seriously.

The third part of the theory has to do with the tradition concerning the "White Indians" who were supposed to have inhabited this part of the country in prehistoric times and who were destroyed at last by their enemies. Again we find facts to support such a theory which carry considerable weight. The first part of this tradition which deals with the long war of extermination between the Red Indians and the White Indians and the characteristics of the latter can perhaps never be verified or refuted. There is, however, no lack of evidence to indicate that even in comparatively recent times there were occasional individuals among the Indians who had light hair and blue eyes. Concerning the rest of the tradition which tells of the final battle at the Falls of the Ohio at which the White Indians made their last stand on Sand Island and were there entirely exterminated, there are a good many supporting facts.

There is no doubt that there was a battle, apparently involving a large number of warriors, fought at this spot, but of course what peoples took part in the fray we do not know. General George Rogers Clark, Colonel James F. Moore, John Filson, Daniel Boone, Levi Todd, James Harrod and other prominent authorities on early Kentucky history apparently believed that this battle was between a white and a red race but their sources of information were of course not absolutely authentic and their statements regarding the matter are in most cases quite vague. Chief Tobacco of the Piankashaws insisted that an entire white tribe were driven to the island and slaughtered. However that may be, the thousands of human bones which for many years were to be found there, and the multitudes of weapons which certainly were to be picked up around the Falls proves that there certainly was a great battle at this place at some long forgotten period in the past.

A fourth point to be considered, and one which bears directly on the subject of the stone grave people, is the fact that there are to be found in Wales ancient stone cairns very similar in construction to those found in the New World. Such a similarity might of course be entirely a coincidence, since this type of sepulcher would not be beyond the imagination of a primitive

race in any part of the world, but according to those who have examined the cysts both in Wales and in the United States, the resemblance between the two is quite remarkable and deserving of consideration.

We have, then, a very interesting series of traditions and facts which suggest associations. We have the migration from Wales, the traditional Welsh colonists in the New World and the characteristic Welsh stone cyst; we also have the American Indians who spoke Welsh, the legendary prehistoric "white race" in the Mississippi Valley and the stone graves in Kentucky, containing skeletons of rather modern type. It is therefore difficult to refrain from drawing conclusions which would tend to support the Welsh Theory.

Additional arguments which have been presented on this subject call attention to the fact that there have undoubtedly been found in this country objects which seem to indicate a European influence long before there is any historical record of the presence of Europeans on the American continent. It has been claimed that artifacts bearing Masonic emblems have been discovered in prehistoric sites; that certain Aztec designs are strongly suggestive of Old World artists; that the cliff-dwellings in the southwestern part of the United States would indicate an association with European culture; and, in fact, our own discovery in Kentucky of the Maltese Cross on bear's teeth and gorget are difficult to explain in any other way. All of which strongly point to the theory that there was some European influence in the prehistoric cultures in this part of the United States.

Such a supposition may be entirely fanciful but it is not entirely illogical and certainly not impossible. Could it be that the Welsh really were among the earliest of the known inhabitants of Kentucky and that they were the ones whom we are calling the "Stone-Grave People"?