

NORTHERN KENTUCKY VIEWS PRESENTS:

Owen County



W. D. Funkhouser and W.S. Webb



Excerpted From

Reports in Archeology and Anthropology, V. II
University of Kentucky
September, 1932

www.nkyviews.com

OWEN COUNTY

Owen County is situated in the central part of northern Kentucky in the Outer Bluegrass Region. It has an area of 367 square miles and elevations which range from 450 feet above sea level on the flood plain of the Kentucky River near the Carroll County line to 1,000 feet at Owenton, the county seat, which is situated on the uplands.

Physiographically the county represents a maturely dissected upland with a topography which is in general rolling to hilly. The drainage in the southern and western parts of the county is afforded by numerous streams flowing into the Kentucky River while waters on the north and east find their way through local tributaries into Eagle Creek.

The geology of the county is typical of the Outer Bluegrass Region in which the outcrops are limited to Ordovician limestones, thin sandstones and shales. The flood plain of the Kentucky River and the lower reaches of Eagle Creek show large areas of Pleistocene and Recent alluviums. Structurally the region is a monocline with a dip to the northwest. The principal mineral resource of the county is limestone together with excellent sands and gravels from the Kentucky River.

Owen County has few archaeological sites and shows but little evidence of prehistoric occupation. The following are all which have come to the attention of the authors:

1. A mound on the farm of Edgar McClure, a quarter of a mile east of Monterey. The mound was forty-five feet in diameter and six feet high and was made entirely of earth. A cellar was dug in this mound in 1915 and it is said that on that occasion several skeletons were removed. In 1930 the mound was entirely removed and the earth used for grading the yard. When visited by one of the authors while this work was in progress, one skeleton was found which had been only partially disturbed by the plows and scrapers. Associated with this skeleton was an arrowhead and a barium sulphide cone. Many bones were scattered through the mound and a considerable amount of debris including charcoal and burned limestone.
2. A mound on the farm of John R. Parker, two hundred yards from the town limits of Monterey on the southeast side of Cedar Creek. The mound is on the top of a high bluff known as "Point of Rock" which overlooks the town. This mound is fifty feet in diameter and has never been excavated but has been plowed over regularly.

When visited by the authors in 1930 it showed a small amount of fragmentary material on the surface.

3. A village site on the farm of W. O. Loudermilk at Pleasant Home. In addition to the usual kitchen midden material this site has yielded a rather large collection of artifacts, including pestles and axes.
4. A group of mounds and a village site formerly occupied by what is now parts of the farms of B. L. Hancock and T. T. Vallandingham, one and one-half miles east of Owenton. These mounds have now been destroyed but the site has long been a favorite collecting ground for surface artifacts.
5. A group of mounds, now destroyed, on the farm of W. T. Forsee, one mile north of Owenton. This mound is well remembered by the older inhabitants of the community and according to local tradition was a burial mound.

A considerable number of interesting artifacts have been found in Owen County some of which are to be seen in local collections but most of which are not credited to any particular sites and probably represent surface finds. Mr. W. O. Loudermilk of Pleasant Home had such a collection and good material has been found in the neighborhood of Gratz on the Kentucky River. One of the most interesting of these isolated artifacts is the peculiar stone mask figured and described by Bennett Young. Concerning this specimen Young states:¹

"In Owen County, about sixty years since, a superb mask was plowed up in a field and became the property of Doctor Baxter, and he in turn bequeathed it to his son, Doctor W. E. Baxter, of Frankfort, Kentucky, who now has it in his possession. An illustration of this remarkable work is found on page 266. The peculiar stone which enters into this face is somewhat unusual in this line of work. It is quite smooth and hard. The whole pose of the mask is dignified, and creates the impression that the artist had a conception of the higher and better forms of the human countenance. It seems that he was not simply making a representation of a face, but more likely he was giving expression to some living form that had come within his observation. The whole mask has an intellectual cast or expression. The mouth is firm, the forehead broad, full and straight, and the nose might be safely styled of the aquiline type. The forehead, which is massive and well developed, together with the whole expression, gives not only at first glance, but after close study, the impression of a splendid reproduction of a face that indicates a high degree of mind, force and dignity."

It may be noted, in connection with the above description, that in the figure which Young shows of the mask, the nose is not at all "aquiline" but is in fact unusually straight.

¹ Young, Bennett, *Prehistoric Men of Kentucky*, pp. 266 and 269. 1910.