



HENRY CLYDE SHETRONE — 1876–1954

My introduction to “Harry” Shetrone was an interview in the early spring of 1925, during my freshman year at Ohio State University. A professor of mechanical drawing suggested that if I desired outdoor work during the summer vacation, I should apply to Dr. Shetrone, then Curator of Archaeology at the Ohio State Museum. My only qualifications were camping experience, an inordinate desire to outwit any fresh water fish, and a strong back. This first interview never reached beyond the second qualification. At a subsequent meeting I was told to be at the museum soon after the close of school and to bring my fishing tackle. The work assignment, however, called upon all the muscles of my back in learning how to use the shovel and mattock during a 10-hour day.

Henry Clyde Shetrone was born August 10, 1876, and spent his early youth in Millersport, near Buckeye Lake, some thirty miles east of Columbus, Ohio. The proximity of Buckeye Lake must have influenced his adult fondness for small- and largemouthed bass. Attending Denison University, a few miles west of the famous prehistoric earthworks at Newark, Ohio, may have aroused the interest which eventually led him into his chosen field of archaeology. The anthropological careers

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of George A. Dorsey and Warren K. Moorehead, former students at Denison, certainly served as an inspiration, even though he could not foresee that he would follow so closely in the footsteps of the latter.

At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War he enlisted, at the age of 22, in the U.S. Volunteer Signal Corps. Just as the present generation of young men are intrigued with electronics, the young Shetrone mastered the relatively new medium of telegraphy. He returned to Columbus in 1903, where he served as press telegrapher, telegraph editor, financial editor, and feature writer on various newspapers.

During this period, Professor William C. Mills was excavating the Adena, Gartner, Edwin Harness, and Seip mounds for the Ohio State Museum. Shetrone found these excavations not only of interest to his newspaper, but they rekindled a dormant spark which so consumed him that he terminated his newspaper career, at the age of 37, and joined Professor Mills as his assistant at the Ohio State Museum in 1913.

One of his first tasks was a survey of petroglyphs, mounds, and village sites along the Ohio River. This led to a comprehensive tabulation of archaeological sites throughout the state, based on data accumulated over many years by such men as Whittlesey, Thomas, and Moorehead. Beginning in 1897 Mills conducted a systematic survey, county by county, which resulted in the now famous "Archeological Atlas of Ohio," published by the Society in 1914. Mills acknowledged his obligations to Shetrone for assembling the records of the 5396 sites.

Shetrone's first published contribution appeared in 1918, "The Indian in Ohio," and 2 years later he published "The Culture Problem in Ohio Archaeology." Shetrone was beginning to realize the significance of the prehistoric material within the state and of the need for a study of the chronology of the various prehistoric complexes in Ohio.

In 1921 Mills was made Director of the then Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, and his assistant, Shetrone, was promoted to Curator of Archaeology. By this time he was a skilled and competent field director. Mills had established an enviable record of publishing the results of his own and their

combined research practically every year from 1902 to 1922. Archaeologists working in other parts of the Mississippi Valley, such as Barrett, Keyes, Hooton, Willoughby, Moorehead, Hinsdale, Parker, and Moore, soon realized that arbitrary state lines were of no significance to the prehistoric and historic Indian tribes. A serious attempt was being made to establish a nationwide chronology and to trace the various artifactual complexes beyond their state boundaries.

During the subsequent 6 years Shetrone directed and published the results of excavations at the Campbell Island village site, Hine Mound, Wright Mounds, Ginther Mound, Miesse Mound, the Hopewell group, and Seip Mound 1, formerly known as the Pricer Mound.

One Saturday afternoon in August, 1926, a most serious accident occurred which many of us thought would bring an untimely death to Shetrone. During this field season we had reached beyond the apex of the large Seip Mound, giving us a vertical face of some 30 feet near the center. Very few interments had been recovered. Our method of undercutting huge slabs of earth had been used on 2 levels, each about 15 feet in height. During the previous week a trench had been cut to pry off a large segment near the top of the mound. As it sometimes happened, nothing could budge it. Two nights previously it had rained, and water had settled in the prying trench. On this particular day a small grave was discovered on the hard packed floor.

Shetrone was anxious to remove the contents of the grave so as not to leave it exposed over the weekend. A lady and her daughter were sitting on a box a few feet behind us while Shetrone and I were cleaning out the powdery dust from the decomposed log timbers on either side of the burial platform. I had just come out of the burial arch when several tons of dirt from directly above crashed down. When I turned around there was nothing but a pile of dirt. The lady and her daughter were covered but soon removed, whereas we had no idea where to look for Shetrone. To dig with a shovel could cause additional injury, so 3 of us dug with our hands as rapidly as possible. We found him in a kneeling position, unconscious but breathing. When revived he felt no pain except in his foot. Subsequent X-rays at the Chillicothe hospital, however, made us realize

what a narrow escape he had. Fortunately he recovered, except for a slight limp, to contribute to American archaeology and serve the Ohio State Museum for an additional 27 years.

In 1928 Mills died and Shetrone was appointed Director of the Museum and Society. Even though administrative duties prevented him from actively participating in excavations, he never lost interest in archaeology. During his 18 years as Director he continued to publish archaeological papers, but on a wider scope. Two years after he assumed the Directorship of the Society, D. Appleton published his monumental book, *The Moundbuilders*. This beautifully illustrated synthesis served as one of the most important references for the prehistoric cultures of the eastern United States. He collaborated with the new Curator of Archaeology, E. F. Greenman, in the Seip Mound report. After the discovery of diagnostic projectile points associated with extinct animals, commonly known as the Folsom point, Shetrone in 1935 surveyed the large projectile point collections from Ohio in order to determine whether such points had been found associated with any of the mound cultures. These results were published in "The Folsom Phenomena as Seen in Ohio."

In order to carry forward the detailed analysis of stone objects and to learn something of the type of material used by the prehistoric Indians, Shetrone organized a Lithic Laboratory for the Eastern United States. To familiarize himself with the problems, he visited England, where he studied and photographed the obsolescent art of flint-knapping at Brandon, Suffolk. From here he journeyed to Paris, participating in a field trip with the American School of Prehistoric Research. Then he went to the south of France to view the famous classical cave paintings at Les Eyzies in the Dordogne. Upon his return, the Lithic Laboratory was established in 1938.

In 1944 he spent 3 months in Arizona studying prehistoric irrigation systems along the Salt and Gila River valleys. An account of this was published as an appendix in the 1945 Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution.

During his lifetime he was awarded an honorary Master of Arts from Ohio University, and from his alma mater, Denison University, an honorary Doctor of Science. He was elected a Fellow in the American Association for the

Advancement of Science and the American Anthropological Association. He served as President of the Ohio Academy of Science, was a member of Sigma Xi, and a Council member of the American Association of Museums.

Here then was a man with a college background acquired during the 1890's, who served in the Spanish-American War, and then, after 10 years of newspaper work, began a scientific career in archaeology at the age of 37. His instinct for newsworthy items stood him in good stead. To obtain the funds to carry forward his excavations and museum projects, he diplomatically cajoled state legislative bodies and businessmen. After his retirement in 1946 he was appointed Director Emeritus, a position he held until his death, November 23, 1954. He was available at all times to assist the Society to which he had been so passionately devoted for 33 years.

Retirement provided the leisure he deserved. Several winters were spent in Florida, where he became interested in a phase of marine life, conchology. He assembled and identified a large collection of marine and fresh water shells similar to those used by the prehistoric Indians.

The results of his 15 years of active archaeological field work and 18 years as Director of the Ohio State Museum are manifest. During this time a new wing was added to the Museum, and the reputation of the Society has been greatly enhanced, in the field of archaeology, in its emphasis on historical houses and properties, and as a museum. Such an impressive contribution is due to the driving force and zeal of Henry Clyde Shetrone.

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