

## Observations on Two Tomahawk Pipes from the Central Illinois River Valley

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*Tomahawk pipes were an historic period trade item of considerable functional and symbolic importance. As prized personal possessions, they were often curated many years and passed between generations. Thus, their individual significance far exceeds their archaeological visibility. Observations pertinent to two tomahawk pipes found in central Illinois include an examination of the seriation and distributional literature for these rare but diagnostic artifacts and a review of the historic period aboriginal occupations in the central part of the Illinois River Valley between the 1750s and the 1830s.*

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The tomahawk is an historic period weapon that has been enshrined among both the verbal and visual imagery of the North American Indian. Tomahawk pipes were especially popular among the Indian groups of the Northeast, Midwest, and Great Plains. Fitted with an ornate handle, they incorporated the functions and symbolism of both battle axe and pipe. Thus, the tomahawk pipe had a natural appeal for the North American Indians and is perhaps the most pertinent symbol of the critical decisions constantly confronting the leadership of these peoples during the turmoil of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Tomahawk pipes were prized personal possessions and are seen as a recurring element in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century portraits of Indians. Not surprisingly, these weapons were often curated for decades and passed on between generations. In spite of their high historical and ethnographic visibility, tomahawk pipes are not a common archaeological find in Illinois. Thus, it was very surprising when two tomahawk pipes from central Illinois were independently brought to the author's attention only days apart (Figure 1).

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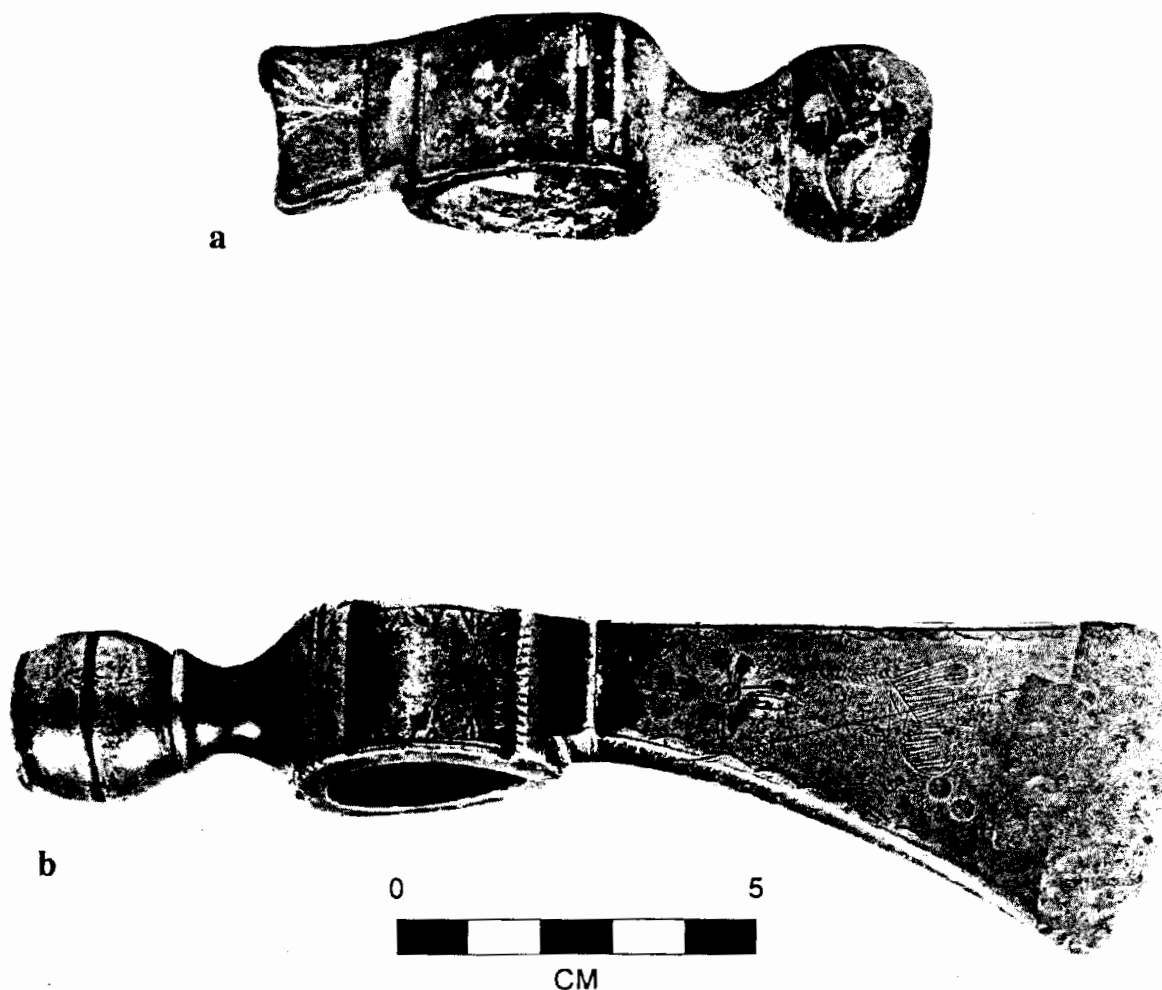


Figure 1. Two tomahawk pipes from central Illinois: (top) Dry Run Outlet Site (11-P-355), Peoria County, Illinois, and (bottom) the Stelter tomahawk pipe, Mason County, Illinois.

## Description and Context

### *Dry Run Site Tomahawk Pipe*

A broken brass tomahawk pipe was found in 1991 on the eroded shoreline of the Dry Run Outlet site (ISM 11-P-424A; IAS 11-P-355), an historic Illinois River landing in southern Peoria County (Esarey 1990). Styles of Peoria Pottery ceramics found there (Mansberger with Mounce 1990) and historic records indicate that this site was predominately used during the middle to late nineteenth century. The pilings of a wharf

(vertical logs) and the hull of a wooden boat or barge are embedded in the river's muddy edge. The grade and discarded rails of a narrow-gauge railroad line running from the old Lightbody Coal mines at the Illinois River bluffs to the north are still visible. The site corresponds to the front edge of the Dry Run Creek outwash fan. A late prehistoric Oneota occupation, dating to perhaps the sixteenth century, is within 200 m downstream.

The Dry Run tomahawk pipe is very worn on all edges and generally corroded from repeated immersion and exposure. The blade has been snapped off 2 cm from the eye hole (where the handle was inserted) and ground smooth. The blade was clearly of the standard "half-hatchet" shape (Peterson 1971:35). The pipe bowl, short and wide with rounded sides, is on a stem about 1.5 cm long. The bowl itself is 1.9 cm long above the stem. Outside diameter of the bowl is 2.5 cm and the orifice is 1.7 cm.

The haft area is 2 cm tall. The side walls of the eye hole are generally less than 3 mm thick. The eye hole is a modified teardrop shape (the posterior end being rounded), which is 2.7 cm long and 2.1 cm across. The hole in the pipe bowl is distinctly off center.

The bowl is decorated with a conventionalized holly-wreath band. The sides of the haft area have molded horizontal panels with an indistinct floral motif. This panel is bounded front and back by a small, raised, vertical rectangle. The remaining stub of the blade shows the base of a floral spray.

#### *The Stelter Tomahawk Pipe*

Provenience of this well-preserved brass tomahawk pipe is a matter of family tradition. Diane Stelter states that, according to other family members, the tomahawk pipe was definitely in her grandfather's possession shortly after the end of the nineteenth century. It was said to have been found in Mason County somewhere between the Neteler farm (the famous Middle Woodland "Havana Site," as described by McGregor in 1952) and the resort community of Matanzas Beach (that is, between 2 and 6 km south of Havana, Illinois). The family has had its farm here since the 1840s or 1850s. Given this setting, the tomahawk pipe was probably obtained between 1840 and 1900.

The Stelter tomahawk is 16.5 cm long and has a dovetailed-steel bit. Although the brass surfaces are weathered brown, they have no appreciable corrosion. The surface of the iron bit is pitted and appears to have once been rusted but is now rust free.

One upper and two lower brass rivets run through the half-hatchet-style blade, about 1 cm back from the dovetailed edge of the steel bit. The upper margin of the blade is flat, but the underside has been filed to an evenly beveled keel with large file abrasions clearly evident.

The short, wide bowl has rounded sides and is perched on a stem about 1.5 cm long. A depressed, molded line encircles the bowl's midsection. The bowl itself is about 2.1 cm long (above a molded line at the top of the stem) and has an exterior diameter of 2.5 cm. Orifice diameter is 1.7 cm.

The haft area is stout and thick walled. The eye hole is teardrop shaped and measures 2.8 cm long and 2.1 cm wide. The walls of the eye hole are 4 to 5 mm thick. The hole of the pipe bowl is slightly off center, and an apparent mold line remains just

to one side of this hole. A depressed rectangular panel is present on each exterior side of the haft.

Four types of decorative features are present on this tomahawk pipe. Molded relief, already described, is present on the bowl and haft areas of the tomahawk. Small filed lines decorate the rear vertical border of the eye panel.

Several kinds of decorative engravings are present along the bordering lines of the blade and haft area. Line-filled chevrons are located on the vertical margin at the proximal end of the blade and on all four inner margins of the haft-area side panel. Low arcs are engraved along the upper and lower margins of the blade and the top and bottom of the front of the eye section above and below the stem to the pipe bowl. The blade has an engraved flower with a round, line-filled center and three line-filled petals. The flower has a long, sinuous stem that runs back to the proximal end of the blade.

Additional decorations on the blade were apparently incised by the tool's owner (Figure 2). These decorations are superimposed on the rivets on each side of the blade; they consist of fine-line decorations that are very reminiscent of free-style figures often seen on catlinite disc pipes. On one side, the figure appears to represent a winged being (viewed with the blade's bit end downwards). Descending onto this figure are three lines of tiny rouletting or rocker stamping that diverge slightly from each other, perhaps representing lightning or thunder.

Viewed from the same orientation, the figure on the other side is less clear. An arc or circle filled with cross-hatched lines is placed above a set of tall, horizontal zig-zag lines. Identifying this etching would be speculative, but it might well represent some kind of underworld animal figure with the cross-hatched section being the body and the zig-zag lines representing legs. The peace and war duality inherently expressed in the tomahawk pipe's form may be complemented by commonly invoked symbols of upper- and lower-world duality, such as the thunderers and the underwater panther (e.g., Hudson 1976:122-132; Muller 1986:66; Penny 1985:180-192). Many examples of such graphically opposed dualism exist on Eastern Woodlands art (e.g., Coe 1977:95; Penny 1985:151; Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 1970:76; Sampson 1988; Wilson 1972). Penny (1985:194-198) gives examples of symbolism combined with pipes.

## Chronology of Tomahawk Pipe Styles

A number of studies have noted the considerable range of stylistic variation in tomahawk pipes without providing detailed information of their ages and associations (McGuire 1897; Pohrt 1957; West 1934:317-325). A dicotomy has consistently been made between tomahawk pipes with a hatchet versus a spontoon-type blade. In some literature, these types are referred to as English versus French, respectively (Jensen 1963; McGuire 1897:465; West 1934), but little supporting data for such an important differentiation has been marshalled.

Peterson (1971:13-33) presented a history of various tomahawks in North America and provides a seriation of chronologically sensitive features. He noted that portraits including tomahawk pipes are found as early as the first two decades of the 1700s. Combining not only the functional aspects but the symbolic connotations of both peace and war, tomahawk pipes became popular trade items and were common by 1750.

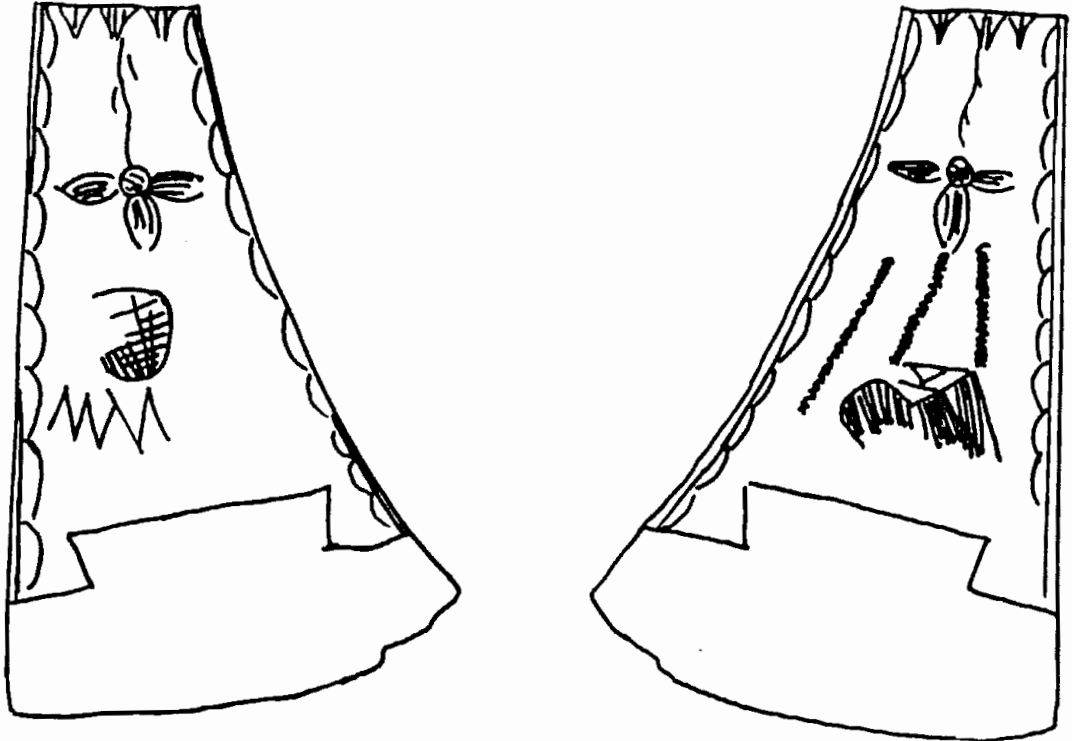


Figure 2. Blade decorations of the Stelter tomahawk pipe.

General trends in technology, morphology, and material provide bracketing dates of various tomahawk pipes (Peterson 1971:35-37). The earlier, heavy, iron and steel tomahawk pipes that were decidedly functional in all aspects gradually gave way to more decorative styles. Although iron and steel tomahawk pipes continued, brass tomahawk pipes with inlaid steel blades were introduced around 1750. Inlaid blades continued until about 1830, when the functional blades were generally discontinued (Peterson 1971:34; Pohrt 1957:31). Blade shapes progressed from symmetrically flared forms to half-hatchet blades that are flared on the bottom margin only. Nonfunctional, thin blades with expanding, straight sides became popular about 1850.

The eye also changed through time. Teardrop-shaped apertures became more circular and narrower, with some early nineteenth-century stems measuring only  $\frac{5}{8}$  in (1.6 cm) in diameter. Oval-shaped eyes became elliptical and then diamond shaped. By 1850, diamond-shaped eyes were almost universal. Pipe bowls evolved from short and round to tall and straight sided, with tall, straight-sided or barrel-shaped bowls being standard by 1850 (Peterson 1971).

### Comparison and Dating

The Dry Run site tomahawk pipe is very similar to a steel-bitted, late-eighteenth-

century brass tomahawk pipe collected from the Chippewa (Peterson 1971:123, Specimen 210). This Chippewa tomahawk pipe, described by Peterson as one of the most common forms of brass tomahawks with dovetailed-steel edges, is mounted on a modern handle or stem. The only observable difference is that the eye shape of the Dry Run site pipe is a modified teardrop form rather than round. The Dry Run site tomahawk pipe appears similar, if not identical, to a brass tomahawk found at the Crawford Farm site, a circa 1790 to 1810 Sauk and Fox site in Rock Island County, Illinois (Jensen 1963:116; Parmalee 1964:167). The Crawford Farm example has a resharpended blade that has lost its inletted steel blade. Other nearly identical brass tomahawk pipes are illustrated from Mississippi (Brown 1926:355) and Canada (Beauchamp 1902:Plate 20). Beauchamp (1902:67) noted that many such tomahawks are known in New York.

The Stelter tomahawk pipe is very similar to a tomahawk from Wisconsin, and there is an identical artifact from Menominee, Michigan, on the western shore of Green Bay (West 1934:Plate 241, Figure 4 and Plate 242, Figure 4). Both of these two tomahawk pipes are only 1 cm shorter than the Stelter tomahawk pipe. The only significant differences are decorative. Only minor decorative differences can be seen on an unprovenienced, late-eighteenth-century tomahawk pipe published by Peterson (1971:123, Specimen 211).

Taken as a body, these brass tomahawk pipes with rounded bowls, half-hatchet blades, and inletted steel blades are thought to have been manufactured between 1750 and 1830 (Peterson 1971:34–35). In general, the most specific archaeological associations of these particular styles of tomahawk pipe seem to point towards post-Revolutionary War distribution through the Great Lakes English trade network. Bass et. al (1971:20, 127, Plate 15) and Herrick (1958) illustrated iron tomahawk pipes from archaeological contexts dated between 1803 and 1832 and 1820 and 1850, respectively, that have significantly taller bowls than these central Illinois examples. Likewise, taller bowls can be seen on McKenney and Hall and Catlin portraits painted in the 1820s and 1830s (e.g., Catlin 1844:105; Hodge and Bushnell 1934:106). This probably indicates that these two central Illinois examples were manufactured earlier. This is also supported by their relatively large eye holes, in as much as eye holes had shrunk considerably by the early nineteenth century (Peterson 1971). A bracketing period for the manufacture of the Stelter and Dry Run tomahawks is probably 1750 to 1800. Of course, the date of their loss may be significantly later.

### Historical Possibilities

Evidence is lacking that either of these tomahawk pipes was in a primary context with other material dating to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The Stelter tomahawk pipe appears to have been in the ground for no great length of time, although the inletted steel bit had been rusted at some point. The pipe may even have been directly procured in the decade that Indian occupations continued after the influx of American settlers into this area, 1821–1831.

The Dry Run site tomahawk's manufacture date may be 100 years prior to the main period of activity at this late-nineteenth-century landing. Tomahawk pipes could theoretically have been lost many years or even generations after they were made, but,

in this case, the forced removal of the Indian groups that owned most of these weapons seems to rule out a late-nineteenth-century date of deposit. Either the tomahawk pipe was deposited at this location prior to the 1830s or it was lost later by one who had collected it from earlier owners. That this latter kind of transfer often took place is made clear by examining the documentation on many of the published tomahawk pipes (e.g., Gilman 1982:101; Peterson 1971:102-138). Peterson (1971:43) discussed several cases of non-Indian use of the tomahawk pipe.

Lack of context aside, seriation dates assigned these tomahawk pipes accord with historic Indian activities in this region. Assuming these tomahawks could have been made as early as 1750, Illinois Indians could have owned one or both. The Peoria tribe of the Illini Indians certainly held this part of the Illinois Valley until at least 1763 (Temple 1966:48), although the only recorded locations of Illini occupation between Peoria and Naples are small villages of winter dispersal (e.g., see Kellogg 1953). Reduced population and pressure from northern and northeastern tribes caused the Peoria to withdraw after this time (Bauxar 1978:599-600). The latest upper Illinois River valley record of the Peoria is 1769 at Starved Rock (Tanner 1987:63), but they are recorded as wintering along the lower Illinois River one day's travel downstream of an island named "Piere a Fleche" in 1773 (Kennedy 1904:123) and at a place called "The Bad Land" (or Mauvaise Terre, in French) in 1777 (Mason 1890:261). Both of these locations appear to correspond to the region around Naples, Illinois. It is of note that the Peoria remained very anti-British after the end of the French regime.

More likely, these brass tomahawks were associated with the subsequent aboriginal occupants of the Illinois Valley. One case of the importation of a tomahawk pipe into Illinois was recorded to be soon after the beginning of British occupation of Illinois. A listing of "1 Pipe Tom Hawk" is found on a 1768 inventory of the merchants Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan (Alvord and Carter 1921:397) who were trading at Fort de Chartres and Kaskaskia. The relative value of this tomahawk pipe, priced at one pound "New York currency" was roughly half the value of a "fuzee" (gun) but about equivalent to 2.5 lbs of powder, 15 lbs of lead shot, or 100 gunflints. Other approximately equivalent goods were 2.5 lbs of tobacco, 14 knives, one matchcoat, a petticoat, four silver crosses, 250 wampum beads, four dozen "jews harps," or somewhat less than 1 gal of rum.

Of significance may be that many of the tomahawk pipes most similar to these Illinois specimens are from the Great Lakes region to the north and northeast of central Illinois. By the 1760s, northern tribes were encroaching on the Illinois River. Some Potawatomi and Chippewa were reported on the central part of the Illinois River as early as 1765 and 1769 (Temple 1966:130-131), and the Mascouten and Kickapoo had moved into the central Illinois prairies east of the Illinois River and north of the Sangamon River by the 1760s (Tanner 1987:106). In 1769, the Kickapoo and the tribes of the Three Fires (Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa) joined to drive the Peoria from the Illinois Valley (Bauxar 1978:599).

Sizable Potawatomi villages were built on the upper Illinois and Kankakee rivers by the 1770s, and they had expanded to just above Peoria by the 1790s (Bauxar 1978:600; Temple 1966). Evidence that they were firmly established on the Illinois River below Peoria is present only after 1810. At various times between 1811 and 1831, Potawatomi villages are known to have been present in the vicinity of Beardstown, at a number of



locations in the Spoon River region around Lewistown and Havana, and "30 miles south of Peoria on the River de Sheesheequen" (Ross 1899; Tanner 1987:106 and 140; Temple 1966:141). Temple stated the "River de Sheesheequen" (note the French nomenclature) has not been identified, but this would have to be Copperas Creek, which is 43 km (27 mi) from the 1813 location of Peoria and was known as "Seseme-quian" in 1773 (Kennedy 1904:126). Copperas Creek is about 9 km downstream from Dry Run Creek.

The Potawatomi and Kickapoo occupation of Illinois continued only until the early 1830s, after the last of the major land cessions. These negotiations were finalized in an atmosphere of racist backlash after the Black Hawk War that left no opportunity for the Potawatomi to remain in Illinois (Tanner 1987:139-142 and 154; Temple 1966:150-151 and 171). Temple implied that the Potawatomi occupants along this part of the Illinois River removed to the area of Logansport, Indiana, immediately after the governor of Illinois ordered them to leave the state in December 1832.

A first-hand description of Potawatomi occupations of the Spoon River region mentions Potawatomi activities just north and south of Havana, as well as in central Fulton County (Ross 1899). Interestingly, the importation of a tomahawk pipe is also mentioned. Harvey Lee Ross related that his father, who had a trading post at Havana, was friends with a Potawatomi man named Chief Osopin, who in the winter of 1830-1831 lived along Spoon River, 4 mi west of Havana. Ross (1899:53) related:

My father often made Racoon [Osopin] handsome presents. I remember that he once brought him from St. Louis a tomahawk with the handle striped off in red, white, and blue, with an iron pipe on the hammer part of the tomahawk, there being an opening through the handle, so the chief could use his beautiful tomahawk as a pipe in which to smoke his tobacco.

## Summary

Tomahawk pipes were an historic period trade good of considerable functional and symbolic importance. As prized personal possessions, they were often kept for many years and passed between generations. Thus, the individual significance of tomahawk pipes far exceeds their archaeological visibility.

Seriation brackets the date of manufacture for these two tomahawk pipes between the 1750s and the 1830s, while specific morphological features may indicate they were made in the earlier part of this period. Based on the history of Illinois River occupations during that period, assigning a definite ethnic association is not possible, but the circa 1810 to 1832 Potawatomi occupations in this locality are the most likely explanation for these artifacts. Most of the similar documented specimens are from the regions to the north and northeast of Illinois, which further supports the Potawatomi association.

## Acknowledgments

Most importantly, I must acknowledge Diane Stelter of Havana and David Stiles of Mapleton, Illinois, for bringing these artifacts to my attention. Diane patiently allowed



me to keep a family heirloom for many months. David, a local amateur archaeologist, has been actively helping us gather information on riverbank occupations in central Illinois for several years. He was well aware he had recovered something unusual, and I appreciate his interest and cooperation. Lawrence A. Conrad brought Peterson's definitive study on tomahawks to my attention and supplied me his personal copy. I wish to thank Jerry Jacobson, Floyd Mansberger, and John Walthall for their constructive comments on this manuscript. Photographs were taken by Kelvin W. Sampson and produced at the proper scale by Marlin Roos of the Illinois State Museum.

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