

Marietta

Where Ohio's History Resides

Marietta/Washington County
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(above) An artist's depiction of ancient Ohio River Valley settlements.



The Mound Cemetery on Fifth Street consists of a large, conical mound surrounded entirely by a mote-like ditch.

Mounds to Visit Today

- “Conus” at Mound Cemetery
Conical Mound and
Circular Embankment
Fifth Street
- “Quadranaou” at Camp Tupper Park
Platform Mound
Third Street
- “Capitolium” at Washington County
Public Library
Platform Mound
Fifth Street
- “Sacra Via” at
Graded Way (Walled Approach)
700 block of Third Street to the
Muskingum River

The Mounds of Marietta



Ancient Native American cultures once inhabited the Marietta area, and built an amazing group of earthen structures, or mounds, that cover 95 acres. These mounds are believed to have been ceremonial sites, and have been preserved and studied since the 1780s.

When the first American military and civilian settlers arrived at the juncture of the Muskingum and Ohio Rivers in the mid-to-late 1780s, they encountered an intriguing group of earthen structures extending over an area of approximately 95 acres on two high terraces.

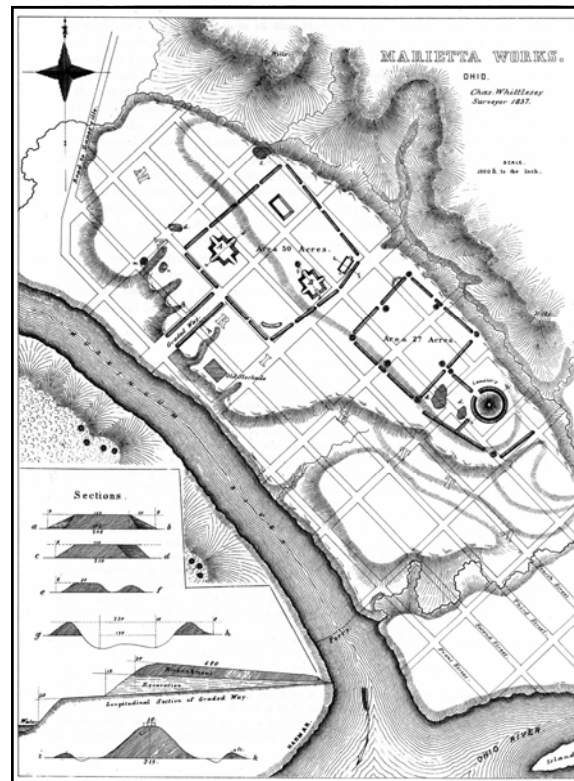
Although early maps sometimes differ on the number and shape of the mounds in the group, the basic elements consisted of two large rectangular enclosures with segmented sides; three polygonal, flat-topped "platform" mounds within the larger enclosure, each having narrow ramps on two or more sides; a passageway marked by long parallel mounds leading from the larger enclosure to the Muskingum River bank; and a large conical mound encircled by a ditch and low embankment. Additional mound elements included linear and arced embankments and smaller circular mounds.

The prehistoric earthworks at Marietta stimulated interest and speculation among the first settlers. They commissioned Rufus Putnam, a professional surveyor, to map the mound group's layout and, in an effort to determine a minimum age for the site, had several large trees growing on the mounds cut down so that the rings could be counted.

Captain Jonathan Heart, stationed at Fort Harmar on the west bank of the Muskingum, produced a map and description of the mound complex, which he published in *Columbian Magazine* in 1787. He concluded that these "prodigious" works had been constructed as defensive fortifications, an interpretation largely unsupported by modern archaeological findings. His publication was widely read at the time, however, and made the Marietta site one of the first subjects of speculation for American antiquarianism.

Sixty-one years later, when the Smithsonian Institution published their monumental *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, a view of

the "Marietta Works" was illustration plate number one.



The early residents of Marietta recognized the earthworks as an important cultural feature worthy of preservation. It is to their credit that as early as 1788 they enacted resolutions that set aside several of the largest mounds for continual preservation on public lands. These aspects of the original mound complex can be appreciated to this day at Mound Cemetery (Fifth Street), Camp Tupper Park (Third Street), the Washington County Public Library (Fifth Street), and in the linear space along Sacra Via Street (west of Third Street).

Although the Marietta Earthworks was among the first mound complexes to be widely reported in America, during the intervening two centuries very

little systematic study has occurred at the site.

The best information so far available on the prehistoric complex was obtained by excavation of a small portion of the platform mound at the county library on Fifth Street in 1990.

The radiocarbon dates, internal mound structure, stone tools, and types of pottery uncovered by this investigation indicate that at least some portions of the Marietta Earthworks were created by the Hopewell Culture, which flourished generally between 100 B.C. and A.D. 400.

The large conical structure in Mound Cemetery, with its associated ditch and embankment, has not been scientifically investigated, but its shape and layout is a "classic" example of the Adena Culture.

In the mid-Ohio Valley region, Adena is generally dated between 800B.C. to A.D. 1.

Current interpretation of the archaeological data from earthworks similar to Marietta's holds that they operated as ceremonial centers which were visited periodically by people living in small settlements in the surrounding region. As such, the Marietta mounds were vitally important to their Native American creators, and their continuing existence provides an irreplaceable link to those ancient cultural traditions.



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