

INDIAN MOUND BOILING SPRINGS ACADEMY

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The information was compiled from the following sources:

- *Historic Brentwood*, by Vance Little, ©1985; pages 11-17.
- *Granny White and Her Pumpkins*, by Vance Little, ©1993; pages 21 and 22.
- *Historical Markers of Williamson County*, by Rick Warwick, ©1999; page 33.
- *Archaeological Testing at Primm Park, Brentwood, Williamson County, Tennessee Technical Report*, by Kevin E. Smith and Christopher Hogan, ©2004; page 9.

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Indians Of Brentwood

The Shawnee

When the first settlers came to the Brentwood area, they found it relatively free of Indians. At that time, no Indians actually lived in the Great Central Basin of Middle Tennessee. Indians had lived in the area in years past, and several tribes concurrently claimed right to the rich valleys of the Central Basin.

The Shawnee tribes inhabited the Central Basin of Tennessee before the arrival of the White settlers. They had several villages throughout the Central Basin and Cumberland Valley, perhaps one or more in the Brentwood area.

There are numerous accounts of trade with the Shawnee Indians during the late 1600's and early 1700's, especially by the French. One such French trader was Martin Chartier who lived with the Shawnee and traded with them in the late 1600's. By the mid 1700's, the Shawnee were gone from the Central Basin, having been driven out by neighboring Chickasaw and Cherokee. The expulsion of the Shawnee left the Middle Tennessee area a "no man's land", but a prize that the various tribes of Indians, namely the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Chickamauga, and Choctaw were willing to share for hunting and fishing purposes.

The Central Basin of Tennessee may have been a no man's land at the time of the arrival of the settlers, but it had not always been so. Those first settlers found evidence of previous inhabitants and cultures. They found man-made structures such as the Boiling Springs Mounds on what is now Moores Lane in Brentwood that attested to a prior culture.

The Mound Builders

The Mound Builders lived in the Brentwood area perhaps 2,000 years ago. They

were possibly descended from earlier Indian tribes, the earliest of whom were the Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) tribes, who were wandering hunters. Thousands of years ago, possibly as many as 100,000 years, they came out of Asia, crossed the Bering Strait and fanned out across the Americas, possibly in front of an advancing Ice Age.

The earliest nomadic Indians were most noted for their fluted spear points which they have left as a testimony to their presence in the local area. These spear points, known as "Clovis points," were made from chipped flint and have been found in several Middle Tennessee counties. These people were hunters and fishers without permanent home sites. They lived in small bands of around 25 people. The men hunted and made tools and weapons, while the women took care of the children, made clothes, gathered wood and plants, and cooked.

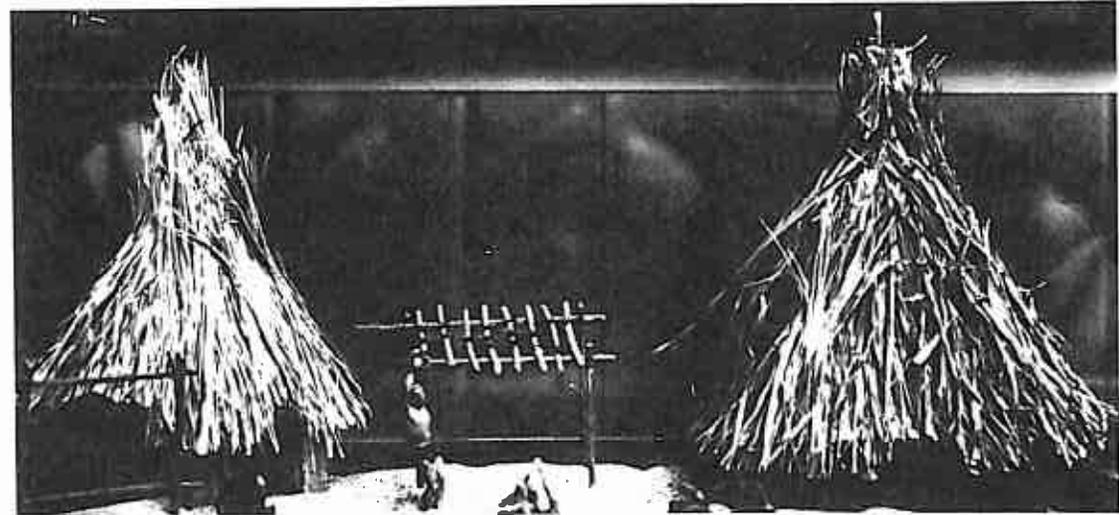
As the ice of the Ice Age receded, the weather moderated, and plants began to grow. The Indians began to lead a more settled existence and built for themselves more substantial homes — more substantial than the temporary lean-to's of their ancestors.

The Indians of Brentwood thus entered the Mesolithic Period, or the Archaic Period. They still hunted and fished, but they set up semi-permanent residence in caves and crude huts. They are known as "the gatherers." These Indians spread throughout America and lived thusly for thousands of years. Some continued this life style in isolated areas until the coming of the White Man. They became more adept at using the spear and expanded their diets to include shellfish, nuts, greens, and berries. They began to weave and make simple unadorned pottery.

"Brentwood has a fine example of the Mound Builders' craft in the Boiling Springs Mound on Moores Lane."

The immediate ancestors of the Indians who left the most indelible mark, their mounds, on Brentwood were the Neolithic Indians or Early Woodland Indians. They domesticated plants and animals and lived in small villages in circular huts. Their culture advanced to the stage to include arts and crafts. Their villages were larger and more permanent although tribes had not yet formed. They learned the use of the bow and arrow. Their weaving and potting became more advanced. They began to trade with Indians in other parts of the country. In these people, we see the first emergence of religion. In the burying of their dead, they prepared them for an afterlife, placing in their tombs decorated pottery and other artifacts. They buried their dead on top of the ground and covered them with dirt. The next to die was placed on top of the last and covered. Hence, their burial practices gave rise to the burial mounds, which became prominent in a later period.

The Woodland Period gave way to the "golden age" of the Indians of the Brentwood area. This golden age is called the Mississippian Period. The Indians of this period became the Mound Builders and the Stone Box Grave Indians. At the height of this civilization, the Little Harpeth Valley was perhaps as heavily populated as it is today.



Boiling Springs Mound yielded numerous Indian artifacts.

The Mound Builders also lived in other areas of Williamson County. They had towns located on the Lewisburg Pike three miles out of Franklin, known as the DeGraffenreid Site, at Old Town on Natchez Trace and a site on the Del Rio Pike. They lived in fortified towns on streams and built mounds, perhaps for religious reasons. These mounds were built by carrying dirt in baskets and piling basket load on top of basket load. Some mounds were burial mounds and others were for ceremonial purposes. Evidence of fires has been found, the ashes from which were covered with new dirt.

Brentwood has a fine example of the Mound Builders' craft in the Boiling Spring Mound on Moores Lane. This mound, also called the Fewkes Site, named for E. W. Fewkes who led the exploration in 1920, originally consisted of some 15 acres. Like other Mound Builders' towns, this site was located near a stream and several springs that form the head water of the Little Harpeth River. There were originally several mounds at this site. All except the largest, which was the ceremonial mound, were excavated in the 1920 dig. Many items of interest, including vases and idols, were found.

For the most part, the Mound Builders located their towns in areas of rich soil, near streams that were a source of water as well as a natural fortification. There were extensive earthworks on the sides of their towns which were not bordered by rivers, streams, or other natural fortifications.

“The Mound Builders and their culture mysteriously disappeared from Brentwood and the Middle Tennessee area before the first explorers came into the area.”

The mounds in the town sites varied in number and dimension. The smallest were only a few feet high and 30 or so feet in diameter. The largest on the other hand, ranged up to 70 feet high and covered up to two acres of land. The largest of the mounds, such as the Boiling Springs Mound, are called pyramidal mounds and were probably sites of temples or council houses.

The mounds were built in clusters around a large plaza. In the flat area the people gathered for religious ceremonies, games, or other public activities. Some of the towns had 200 to 300 houses, and up to 2,000 residents. A wooden palisade was built on the sides of the towns that did not have natural fortifications. Farming was done outside the fence where they grew corn, squash, pumpkin, and beans. The Indians also made fine pottery and jewelry.

In addition to the spectacular temple mound on Moores Lane, many burial mounds have been found in the Brentwood area. Extensive stone box graves have been found on the Brentwood Country Club property as well as neighboring Meadow Lake Subdivision. Burial mounds have also been found on Kelly road and near Traveler's Rest.

**Boiling Springs Mound
on Moores Lane.**



Recognized archaeologists and Indian authorities such as William Edward Myer and Gates P. Thurston have stated that some of the most significant remains of prehistoric Indian civilizations are to be found within a 30 mile radius of Nashville. This area is the richest in such sites in the Southeastern United States. Nashville served as a focal point for Mound Builder villages located in what are now surrounding counties of Middle Tennessee, including Williamson County.

Old roads and Indian trails connected the towns of the Mound Builders. One such Indian trail ran east of Wilson Pike crossing Old Smyrna Road at the Frost Place. The trail continued on to the Boiling Springs site on Moores Lane and then on to the so-called DeGraffenreid Site, located on the Lewisburg Pike, southeast of Franklin.

The Mound Builders and their culture mysteriously disappeared from Brentwood and the Middle Tennessee area before the first explorers came into the area in the 1500's. These explorers, who included DeSoto and his Spanish entourage as well as French hunters and traders, mentioned having found abandoned forts; but none of them mentioned the people who built and lived in these forts. We can only assume that the Mound Builders were wiped out by war, pestilence, or famine, or possibly migrated to Mexico and Central America to join the Aztec and the Mayan. The latter is a possibility since the civilization of the Middle Tennessee Mound Builders was a crude and rustic version of the more advanced civilization of the Aztec and Mayan.

The Owl Creek People

Local Indian authority Malcolm Parker has stated that more pre-historic Indian artifacts have been found in Tennessee than any other state in the Union. He goes on to say that the Cumberland country of Middle Tennessee must have been their "Garden of Eden." He further states that Williamson County must have been a favorite corner in that garden.

The Owl Creek site is located just off Concord Road near the confluence of Mill Creek and Owl Creek, about three miles outside the city limits of Brentwood. This site was discovered in 1972 and excavated during the following two years. The results of this excavation revealed that the Indians who lived at the site were primarily of the Mesolithic Period, also called Archaic Period and early Woodland Period. The several styles of tools and weapons unearthed indicated that the Owl Creek site was occupied as early as 6,000 B.C.

The Owl Creek People were hunters and gatherers. Their garbage found near

"The Owl Creek site is located just off Concord Road . . . about three miles outside the city limits."

the "kitchen" area of the site suggested a diet of primarily mussels, supplemented by fish, turtle, and water snails taken from the Owl and Mill Creeks. Diets also included such wildlife as turkey, deer, and beaver, which was theirs for the taking. Their debris indicates that acorns and hazelnuts were also eaten in abundance. Remnants of charcoal are evidence that they cooked their food over open fires.

The Owl Creek People used the bow and arrow as well as the atlatl, a throwing device attached to spears. Many flint projectiles, knife blades, and scrapers were also found at the site. No less than 300 limestone hammers and pestles were found. There was evidence that after roasted deer was eaten, the Owl Creek People would split the bones and eat the marrow for dessert.

A large number of polished bone awls, flakers, and needles were found, as well as grooved sandstone whet stones and abraders. No ornaments of shell, stone or bone were found, nor was there any form of agriculture. These arts were for a later generation.

Evidence at the Owl Creek Site indicated that these people lived in lean-to huts and shelters. Post moulds at 45 degree angles were found. The dead were buried in the earth in a flexed position, that is, the knees were drawn up under the chin. Caches of flint knife blades and spearheads were buried with the dead. Some stone box graves were found at Owl Creek indicating that the site was also inhabited by Indians of a later period, perhaps as recent as 1,000 A.D.

The Historic Period

With the passing of the Mound Builders, the Indians seemed to pass into a period of cultural regression or dark ages. The Indians of the Historic Period, whom the White Settlers found as they migrated westward, had more of the customs and characteristics of the Woodland Period, which pre-dated the Mound Builders. They hunted and fished, and seem to have lost the sophisticated social structure of their predecessors.

“The two tribes that had the most influence on the Middle Tennessee area were the Chickasaw and the Cherokee.”

The Indians of the Historic Period in Tennessee included such familiar names as Shawnee, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Chickamauga, and Choctaw. The Shawnee, who were driven out of the Central Basin in the mid-1700's, and who were known for their propensity to cover great distances, migrated to Ohio. They were also found in Maryland and Pennsylvania. They later terrorized the Northwest, and were always known for their hatred of the White Man.

The two Indian tribes that had the most influence on the Middle Tennessee area were the Chickasaw and the Cherokee. The Chickasaw lived west of the Tennessee River were related to the Choctaw tribe of North Mississippi. The Choctaw were settled farmers, while their Chickasaw cousins were warriors.

The Cherokee lived in East Tennessee, the Carolinas, and North Georgia. They had a long history of conflict with the White Man, particularly the Watauga Settlement in East Tennessee.

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One of the South's Finest Indian Sites Is Located on Moores Lane

One of the finest relics of an ancient Indian culture in the South is to be found in Brentwood. It is the Boiling Springs Mound located on Moores Lane next to the two story brick building that once housed Boiling Springs Academy and Boiling Springs Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The Boiling Springs Mound is called the "Fewkes Site," in archaeological circles, for E. W. Fewkes who led an expedition to explore this site in 1920. It was built perhaps 2,000 years ago by Indians who inhabited all of the Ohio Basin, including Middle Tennessee. They were called Mound Builders for obvious reasons. They are also sometimes called Stone Box Grave Indians, for their burial practices.

The Mound Builders were descended from peoples who came out of Asia across the Bering Straight, maybe 100,000 years ago. The first of these peoples were nomadic tribes who roamed about without permanent homes and "hunted and gathered" for subsistence. They lived thusly for thousands of years, fanning out all over America.

As time went on the nomadic Indians began to develop more sophisticated tools and weapons. They domesticated animals and plants and began to live in semi-permanent homes. They learned to weave and make simple pottery.

As the Mound Builders' culture became more advanced they began to live in villages and more permanent homes. They learned to use the bow and arrow. Their weaving and potting became more advanced. They traded with peoples in other parts of the country. The first signs of religion appeared in their burial customs. They prepared their dead for the afterlife by placing pottery and other artifacts in their graves.

The "golden age" of the Mound Builders in Brentwood was called the Mississippian Period. At the height of their civilization the

population of Brentwood was probably as great as it is today. The Boiling Springs site and all along the Little Harpeth River were ideal for their purposes. They loved to build their towns near streams and areas of natural fortifications.

At the Moores Lane site there were originally a number of mounds built in a cluster around the central ceremonial plaza. In that area the people gathered for religious ceremonies, games and other public activities. A wooden palisade was built around the part of the town that was not naturally fortified. In its heyday there were 200 to 300 houses in the "town." Farming was done outside the fence where they grew corn, squash, pumpkin, and beans. They also made fine pottery and jewelry.

By the time the first settlers came into the Brentwood area in the mid to late 1700's the Mound Builders and their culture had mysteriously disappeared. Early explorers such as De Soto who came through the area in the 1500's mentions abandoned forts, but no mention is made of the people who lived in the forts.

It has been speculated that the Mound Builders may have been wiped out by war, pestilence, or famine. Some have theorized that they may have gone to Mexico or Central America to join their Aztec or Mayan cousins there. There is evidence that they traded with these peoples.

Oh, yes, the big question is: Why did the Mound Builders build mounds? Other than the fact that it was good exercise (they transported the dirt by hand in baskets—before the wheel was known), it was probably done for religious purposes. Remember that the Egyptians built magnificent pyramids as did the Mayans and Aztecs (and it is a small world). It could be that the Boiling Springs Mound is a rustic version of those structures and was built for the same reasons.

And some day our posterity will be wondering what those buildings were that had steeples on them.



Boiling Springs Academy, 1853

THE BOILING SPRINGS SITE

Once five significant mounds marked the site of an ancient Indian village here. The mounds were between Little Harpeth River and a branch of the Boiling Springs. When the four burial mounds were excavated in 1895 and again in 1920, artifacts were found dating back to the Mississippian Period of Indian culture in Tennessee. Relics from the second excavation were placed in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. The ceremonial mound by Boiling Springs Academy was left undisturbed.

ERECTED BY BRENTWOOD ROTARY CLUB, 1976
Location: Moores Lane, Brentwood

Prehistoric artifacts included variable amount of shell tempered ceramics, lithic debitage, animal bone, charcoal, and fragments of fired clay. Shovel Tests 11 and 12, located close to the Little Harpeth River, contained a very small amount of prehistoric material in a shallow plow zone overlying sterile subsoil. Quantities of prehistoric artifacts increased in shovel tests located further south. All of these units were located near the base of Mound 2. The density of artifacts did not decrease until Shovel Test 20, which contained only 6 shell tempered sherds and 3 chert flakes.

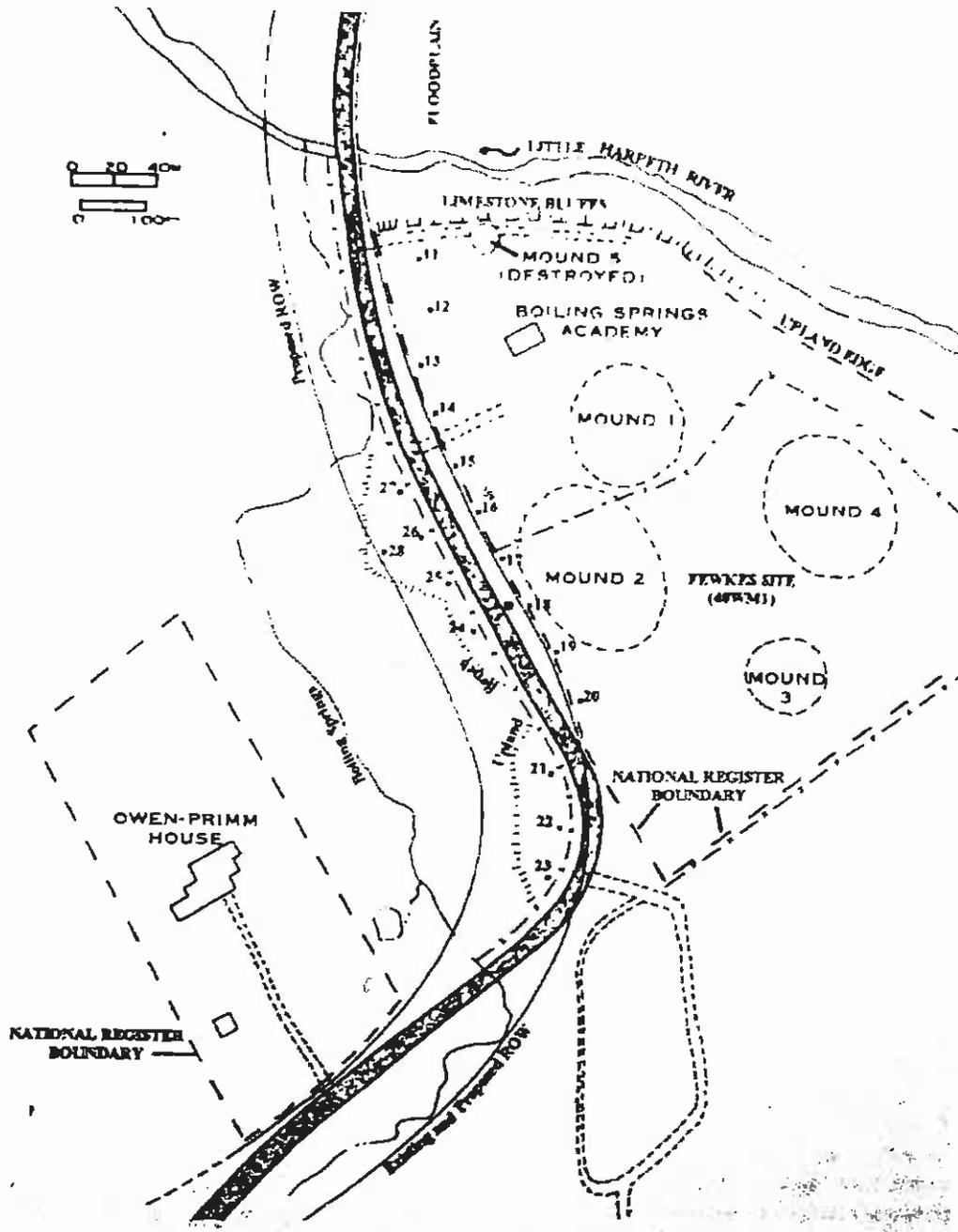


Figure 9. Shovel Test Locations (DuVall & Associates 1996: Figure 5).