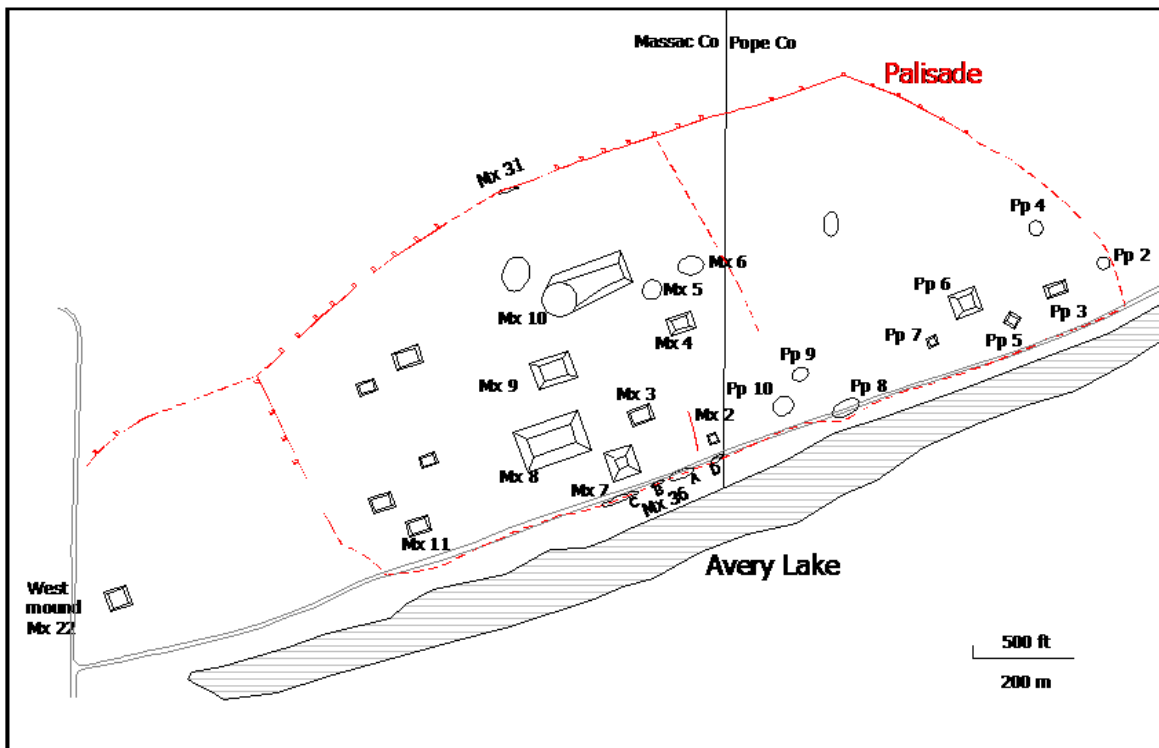
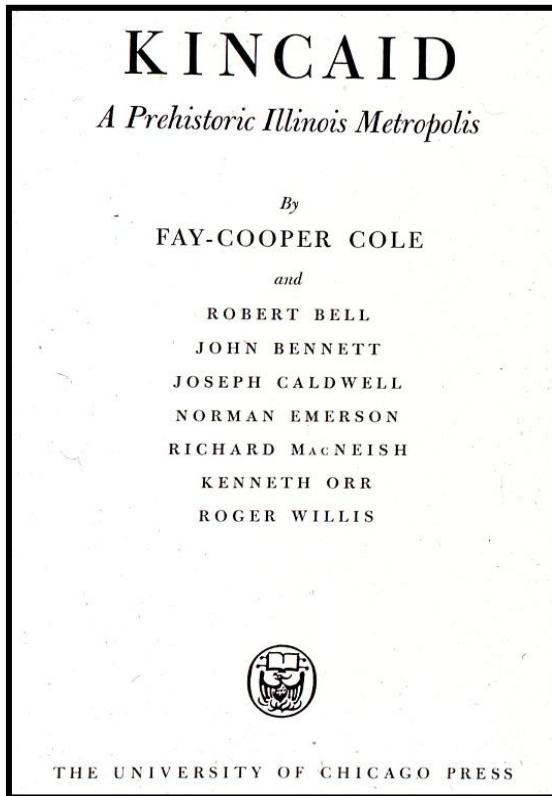


Kincaid Mounds and the SIUC Archaeological Field School

Kincaid is one of the two major political centers of the Mississippian period (ca. AD 1000-1500) in the lower Ohio Valley. The other, the Angel site, lies in a state park just outside of Evansville, Indiana. The Kincaid site is located on Avery Lake in the Black Bottom of Illinois, a large expanse of the Ohio River's floodplain opposite Paducah, Kentucky.

The site, which is split by the Massac-Pope county line, consists of a central plaza ringed by five major platform mounds and several small ones. Additional small mounds lie east and west of the large central group. Habitation areas surround these mounds, and the site was fortified with a wooden palisade. The course of the palisade, and the extent of the site, changed over time; at its largest the site extended for one mile along the edge of Avery Lake and covered at least 150 acres.

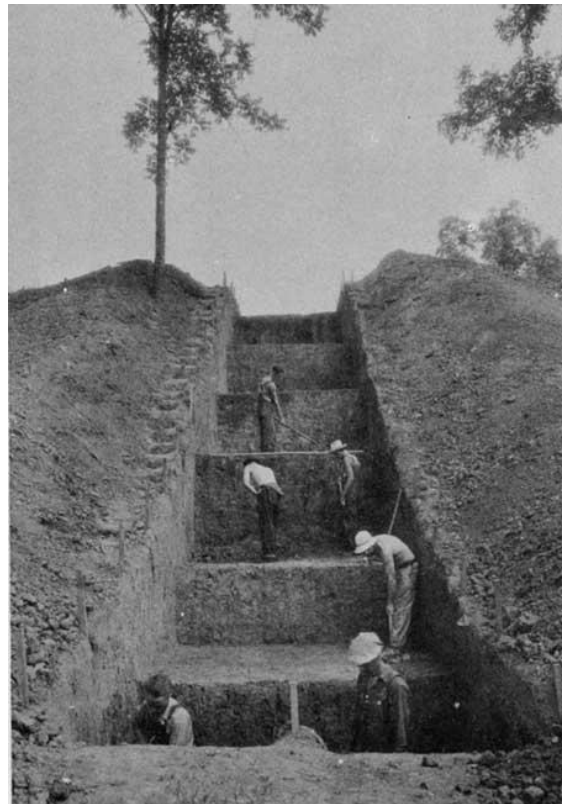




The site has long been known to archaeologists because the University of Chicago conducted work there from 1934 to 1944, and reported their work in a book published in 1951. After the Chicago investigations, little work was done at the site until 2003. In the 1970s and early 1980s Jon Muller and his graduate students at SIUC focused their research on the Mississippian settlements that surrounded and supported the Kincaid site. That work provided a very detailed picture of the supporting settlements and population outside of the mound center, but the only work done at Kincaid itself was small-scale salvage of a strip along the lake edge bulldozed by a landowner.

Left: Title page of the 1951 report of Univ. of Chicago excavations at Kincaid

Right and below: Excavation of a step trench on the side of mound Mx^o8, 1936



In 1975 the state purchased the bulk of the Massac County portion of the site, including the main plaza and mounds and an area to the west then thought to lie beyond the site boundary. The state-owned portion of Kincaid is now a state historic site under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA). The eastern part of the site remains in private ownership.

Recently, SIUC archaeologists (Butler and Welch) have begun a new phase of research at the site. In July and August 2003 we conducted a small investigation at the southeast corner of the main plaza to assist the IHPA and the Kincaid Mounds Support Organization, which is a local support group that helps protect and manage the property. We tested a location for the construction of a proposed parking area. Geophysical survey and small-scale excavation demonstrated the existence of rich cultural deposits, including many Early/Middle Woodland (Baumer culture) pits, as well as the plowed down remnants of a small Mississippian mound.



Left: Conducting magnetometry survey beside mounds

In October 2003, we began a geophysical survey of the state-owned land at Kincaid. Our goal is to learn about the layout of the community—the sizes and locations of buildings—as well as to locate plowed-down mounds, the palisade line(s), and other features. Our principal instrument for this work is a fluxgate gradiometer. This instrument measures minute variations in the strength of the local magnetic

field which are caused by subsurface features such as hearths, pits, and burned houses. In our geophysical survey sessions to date we have covered 29.9 hectares, or about 75 acres.

The geophysical survey suggested that the site is more extensive and more complex than we had previously understood. Most notably, the occupation appeared to extend much farther west than we had realized, with a western extension of the palisade enclosing this area. Our field school excavations in 2005, 2006, and 2008 confirmed what the magnetometry imagery suggested.

In the summer of 2007, the SIUC field school excavated atop Mx^o8, the second largest mound at the site. Once again, our work was informed by geophysical survey, which had revealed a 22-m-diameter circle on the summit of this 9-m-tall mound. This large circle is the wall trench, or foundation, for a very large circular building dating to the last episode of use of the mound. The limited extent of our 2007 excavations does not allow us to determine whether this was a council house, a religious building, or the residence of an important person. We will need to expose more of the building's floor to be able to assess how the building was used.

Below: Mound Mx^o8 in March, 2007 (normal human standing on left side of mound for scale)

