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■ Illinois State Archaeological Survey Research Reports

# Late Woodland Communities in the American Bottom: The Fish Lake Site

edited by Andrew C. Fortier

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Research Report 28

Published by the Illinois State Archaeological Survey. 2015. 340 pp., \$29.00 (paper).

he Fish Lake Locality, located in the central American Bottom floodplain, was the focus of a major concentration of Late Woodland habitation, dating to the Patrick phase or circa cal A.D. 650–900. The most prominent of the occupations fall within the Fish Lake site proper. The Fish Lake site actually consists of at least three distinct community patterns. Excavations by ISAS here have yielded well over 700 pits and structures, including several large public buildings and multiple household units. One of the community patterns consists of a northeast-southwest line of keyhole structures, oriented to the east, bracketed by two public buildings that are surrounded by hundreds of pits. Another pattern consists of a horseshoe shaped cluster of small keyholes and rectilinear post structures surrounding a dense grouping of refuse and storage pits, and marked by a central, deep multi-fill pit with a unique rectilinear plan shape. A third pattern is simply a dispersed cluster of households along a ridge that probably represent a multi-year occupation of individual families or small hamlets. This report introduces the concept of individual household space, i.e., consistent areas of open terrain between houses and pits, regardless of the overall community pattern. The absence of pits inside houses also underscores the differentiation between private and communal space.

The identification of so many settlement types in the same location and same period of time throws a great deal of light on how socially complex this time period was, something that has been undervalued in previous studies. Such diversity has been previously recognized at the nearby Range site but not at smaller encampments from this period. One important result of both excavations is that the larger more complex settlements such as Fish Lake and Range were not dependent on maize agriculture, i.e., large population growth in the American Bottom prior to cal A.D. 900 was not economically based on a single crop. We now must look for other explanations for how communities like Fish Lake and Range were able to take root in this area, and provide for the basis of the eventual events that led to the development of Cahokia. Community harvests and hunts and social/ritual fandangos may have had as much to do about the emergence of complexity as economy and landscape stability. One of the significant aspects of this report is the presentation of Late Woodland materiality in great detail. Hopefully this report will provide a baseline for future research and a better understanding of the Late Woodland period in general.

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Back: Limestone hoe/spade and Late Woodland arrow points.

Front: Bone awl, dog effigy, aquatic bird effigy, canid effigy, pinch pot, decorated bone shuttle, gabrro discoidal, and limestone disk with engraved sunburst pattern.

All photography by Linda Alexander.

