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## **THE FICKAS FARM PROJECT: MISSISSIPPIAN FARMSTEADS IN THE VICINITY OF THE ANGEL SITE, VANDERBURGH COUNTY, INDIANA**

In May 1987, the Indiana University, Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology Field School students and staff surveyed approximately 55 acres of the Frank Fickas farm in Knight Township of Vanderburgh County, Indiana. This tract of land is situated approximately two miles west of the Angel Mounds site.

The survey located a cluster of 11 sites which extended across a portion of an arm-like section of eroded terrace that lay just above and outside the limits of the current floodplain. These sites are situated on the tops and slopes of finger-like ridges that protrude from this relict terrace. The soils underlying eight of the sites are Princeton fine sandy loams; the three sites in the northwestern corner of the area surveyed are on Wheeling loam soils. Both types are deep, well-drained soils that possess moderate natural fertility.

The ground on which the sites are located lies approximately eight feet above the average elevation of the lower floodplain and is approximately one and one-third miles northwest of the current course of the Ohio River. Proximity to the Ohio River and an elevation that places them above annual flooding possibly explains the concentration of sites and their prehistoric inhabitants in this location.

As a result of three days of intensive survey by the field school participants, two sites previously recorded were resurveyed and nine new sites were located and described. A minimum of 32 prehistoric components were identified on the basis of diagnostic artifact types. A summary of these components are as follows:

3 Early Archaic, 1 Middle Archaic, 5 Late Archaic; 1 indeterminate Late Archaic to Early or Middle Woodland; 3 Early Woodland, 3 Middle Woodland, from 4 to 6 Late Woodland; 2 Yankeetown, and 8 Mississippian.

Historic materials also were recovered from 5 sites.

The Mississippian components were recognized by the presence of diagnostic shell-tempered ceramics and small polished flakes that resulted from the resharpening of Dover and Mill Creek agricultural hoes. The Mississippian components at the Fickas farm probably represent a group of farmsteads. According to Tom Green and Cheryl Munson (in *Mississippian Settlement Patterns*, Bruce Smith, editor, Academic Press, New York, 1978, pp. 293-330), a farmstead is characterized by: 1) small size-less than .25 hectares, 2) no mounds, 3) low density of surface debris, 4) horticultural and hunting/ gathering activities, 5) houses present, and 6) an estimated population of five to ten people. This characterization accurately describes what we presently know about the Mississippian components located on the Fickas Farm.

The bottoms in which the Fickas sites are situated, as well as the bottoms across the river in Kentucky, would have been considered prime agricultural land by the population that lived at the nearby Angel Mounds center. The inhabitants of these farmsteads may have lived permanently outside of the protection of the fortified Angel settlement in times of peace, or they may have moved out of Angel seasonally, during the time of planting, cultivating, and harvesting their crops. In either case, continued intensive survey of these bottoms should yield important information on Angel phase settlement and subsistence. Thus far the Fickas tract is one of the few that has been intensively surveyed in these bottoms.