



JAMES KELLY HAMPSON — 1877-1956

The death on October 8, 1956, of Dr. James K. Hampson of Nodena Plantation, near Wilson, Arkansas, leaves the northeast Arkansas region bereft of one of its most dedicated archaeological scholars and one of its most generous and gracious personalities. From his childhood Dr. Hampson collected and preserved archaeological specimens, and at the time of his death his collection contained more than 40,000 items, found and cataloged under his supervision. I spent 3 months in the fall of 1953 studying this remarkable assemblage, and I am very grateful for the opportunity which that study gave me to become acquainted with him and his family.

James K. Hampson was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on July 9, 1877, and spent his youth in that city at Shadowlawn, the home of Louis Hanover, his maternal grandfather. When 10 years old he traded a cat's eye agate marble for an arrowhead and thus his collection started. He began to pick up arrowheads on his grandfather's place in Memphis and later excavated some burials on the family's plantation, Nodena, in Mississippi County, Arkansas, where he was to spend a great portion of his life.

In 1898 he graduated from the old College of Medicine, now a part of the University of Tennessee Medical School, and after attending New York Polyclinic School practiced medicine for more than a quarter of a century at Nodena, Memphis, and Fort Smith, Arkansas. One of his deepest regrets was that during his residence at Fort Smith he did not have the interest or time to work at the nearby site of Spiro, which was to be plundered some years later. However, it was not till 1927, after a short sojourn in California, that Dr. Hampson returned to Nodena and took up again his boyhood hobby of collecting Indian relics. He turned his avocation into a sincere and painstaking study of the local aboriginal remains.

As chance would have it, Upper Nodena, the north third of the plantation, included a large Mississippian village site (10-Q-1), which was untouched save for the washing out of some pottery vessels in the burial area, during a levee break in 1897. Unaccountably, Clarence B. Moore and his good ship, *Gopher*, passed it by after making local inquiries, and the study of archaeology was thus enriched, for the site was left to Dr. Hampson's careful research which extended over a period of more than 15 years, not including his boyhood excavations around the turn of the century.

In 1932 the excavations at the site were increased through the generosity of Dr. Hampson when he permitted the Alabama Museum of Natural History under the direction of Walter B. Jones and the University of Arkansas under the direction of Samuel S. Dellinger to uncover some 1300 graves, with the hundreds of associated pottery vessels and other artifacts going to the respective institutions. This cooperation with members of the archaeological profession characterized Dr. Hampson's whole outlook; James A. Ford, George I. Quimby, James B. Griffin, and Philip Phillips are among those who have benefited from his generous nature.

Dr. Hampson also profited from this encounter with professional archaeologists in the early thirties, and his cataloging system, methods of excavation, and recording of burial data were improved. By 1942 Dr. Hampson had excavated more than 1000 burials at this one site, 785 of which were carefully located on a master site plan, along with the 62 structures he had also uncovered. He excavated a low mound which proved to be the base for a large circular structure probably of ceremonial nature, and he made extensive test digs in the main temple mound and the village area.

While confining his major interest to the Nodena site, he also made minor excavations at a half a dozen other sites within the vicinity, including two across the river in Tennessee. These sites all yielded material attributable to the Nodena phase of the Late Mississippi period. Only for a short time did he venture very far afield, and that was to excavate several caves in the Ozark Plateau where he encountered Ozark Bluff Dweller material.

By 1937 the collection had grown so large that it was necessary to move it from the house to the old plantation commissary nearby, where it remains today, a monument to his patience and hours of work. In 1946 the building was formally dedicated as the Henry Clay Hampson II Memorial Museum, in memory of Dr. Hampson's son, shot down over Burma in the last war. The Nodena Foundation, with Kenneth L. Beaudoin as its president, has attempted to raise funds to install this valuable collection within a fireproof structure, but has not yet succeeded in its goal. It is a cruel circumstance that, despite the fact that Northeast Arkansas is one of the richest archaeological areas in this country, there is not a single museum in the area, save for the Hampson collection, which can adequately present this portion of its prehistoric heritage to the public.

Dr. Hampson brought an inquiring mind and a sound knowledge of the scientific method to the subject of archaeology. He was acquainted with the basic literature in the field, and his own methods equaled those of his professional colleagues working in the area at the same time. He was not prone to idle or fanciful speculation and never over-valued any of his discoveries just because they were his own. Indeed, his treatment of the Island 35 Mastodon and its possible associated artifacts (see the article in this issue) was an example of this

attitude. He fully understood the implications of this find and told them to any one who would listen. But he always presented the information in such a restrained and cautious way that one was apt to underestimate its worth.

He never published anything on his work; that will be the task of others, and I am proud to be one of them. He did write several short papers for oral presentation and began a manuscript on the archaeology of the area. I have incorporated these writings in an Introduction for the Nodena report, and before his death he saw and approved this section of the volume now in progress.

Dr. Hampson had suffered from heart trouble for almost 10 years. He was bedridden for some years, but until recently he had recovered with amazing vitality. His mind remained active and inquisitive, and his memory was almost unailing. He is survived by his wife, Frances Lacost Hampson; 2 daughters, Dixie Durham of Nodena and Mary Louise Melody of Little Rock; 2 sisters and 2 grandchildren. His field work in Northeast Arkansas stands as a remarkable contribution to archaeology by one of its devoted friends.

STEPHEN WILLIAMS