

Grand Rapids History & Special Collections

Archives

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Finding Aid for the

Thomas W. Porter Archaeological, Architectural &
Geological Graphics

Collection # 042

June 2007 version

Abstract

Thomas W. Porter (24 March 1827 - 24 May 1911) collected, sold and traded archaeological artifacts from West Michigan during the last third of the nineteenth century. Often working with Wright L. Coffinberry (See GRHSC Coll. 061) and others from the Kent Scientific Institute, he used his skill as a sketcher to draw facsimiles of Native American and other artifacts. Illustrated in this collection are projectile points, tools, ornaments, pots, and other objects. Porter sketched the Indian burial mounds from which these objects were recovered and drew maps locating these mounds, including the "Big Find" in the Converse Mound Group, located on the west side of the Grand River, in May 30, 1885. Porter's work includes some 355 items, primarily graphite drawings on various papers, but also some lists of items. Of these, about 130 are for archaeological items known or believed found in Michigan. Among Porters sketches are also shown items collected in Arizona by Grand Rapids physician Louis Barth. Additionally, Porter sketched from archaeological catalogs or museum collections, including the Peabody Museum, and the local Kent Scientific Institute. A few sketches of early Grand Rapids buildings and scenes, as he remembered them upon his arrival, are also recorded here by Porter. Finally, a large number of geological sketches, some from Kent County, Michigan, but many from Livingston Co., New York, document topography and rock.

Collection #: 42

Accession #: 00.000; old collection P1:A9 (at least in part)

Donor: unknown

Span dates: 1873-1900, n.d.

Processor: Originally arranged and described by Richard H. Harms, August 1989; foldered by William C. Back [sic, Black?]; revised R. Mayne during 1999/2000, to assign each item a unique number, to create a descriptive inventory including each item, to place each in plastic sleeves, to refolder, to arrange for added clarity, and to revise the finding aid. Box Summary, Marcella Beck, August 23, 2000

Size: 1 cu.ft.

Related Information

- Coll. 054-43-06 Grand Rapids Public Library Photo Collection. St. Andrews Church.
Photo of a T.W. Porter sketch of St. Andrews Church, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1849.

Note: Porter's original sketch is not found here with his other drawings of Grand Rapids buildings. The sources of this image & the location of the original sketch are not known.
9/7/2001

- Coll. 061, Wright L. Coffinberry & Coffinberry Family Papers
- Archaeological Atlas of Michigan / W.B. Hinsdale. M912.H59
- "Archaeology" p.14-19. In: History of the City of Grand Rapids / Albert Baxter, 1891.
- "Monuments to a Past Culture" p. 2-3. In: A Grand Rapids Sampler / Gordon L. Olson, 1992.

● Also included with the "Big Find" sketches is a clipping further explaining the find:
"That Archaeological Find" Grand Rapids Eagle, May 31, 1885.

Box Summary

Due to the varying size of the documents, not all of the materials from a series are housed in the same box.

Box No.	Description of Contents	Box Description
1	Drawings	Print 3 x 25 x 21
2	Photos/drawings GR bldg	Clam 3.5 x 12 x 17.5
3	Drawings	Print 1.5 x 21 x 17.5
4	Non-Mich./Geol.Drawings	Clam 3.5 x 12 x 17.5

Processing Notes

In 1999 additional processing was done for this collection to establish a specific number for each item within the collection. Previously, some items had two different numbering systems, some items had none.

For example: New item no. 6 has the old labeling ...

Old Col. No. 105. [Drawing] No. 2. Big Find. May 30, 1885. ? mass of copper.

The old markings, where they exist, are still on the items. The new item numbering allows for better accountability for all of the items and provides a total count for the collection.

It should be noted that Porter sometimes drew items discovered on different dates and/or at different locations on the same sheet of paper. Since the original items can only be located in one place within the collection, a judgment has been made by the processor as to the most logical location within the collection for the item by content. The researcher may wish to review all drawings, however, for additional information which may be relevant to their search.

Holding Note:

No items .58 and .62 were found in the 1999 inventory.

Also, Old Box 2, Folder 7 "Miscellaneous site, 1897, 1898", was missing at the time of rearrangement of this collection.

It is unknown if the items were missing from the collection as received or subsequently misplaced, perhaps in another folder within this collection, or in another collection. No item level inventory was previously found, and item level location labeling was not added until 1999.

Biography

Thomas W. Porter (24 March 1827 - 24 May 1911) left his native London, England, where he had learned the trade of setting stained glass, in 1846. At the invitation of Henry R. Williams, first mayor of Grand Rapids, Porter came to the area during the late fall of 1850 to find land. He returned to New York state and purchased land warrants (for lands near Lowell and Carson City) from War of 1812 veterans. He moved to the area permanently during the winter of 1853-54, arriving in January 1854.

He worked as a painter, wall paper hanger and contractor throughout his life in Grand Rapids. Early he contracted to paint the various steamboats that plied the Grand River. Later he did contract painting for the Detroit & Milwaukee railroad. He also operated a retail paint and wall paper shop in downtown Grand Rapids.

Porter was a member of the first volunteer fire department in Grand Rapids. He collected coins, stamps and especially archaeological artifacts. Porter combined his professional talent with his archaeological avocation to draw facsimiles of artifacts and site maps.

Porter along with numerous other local residents collected, sold and traded archaeological artifacts discovered in West Michigan during the last third of the nineteenth century. Often working as part of expeditions from the Kent Scientific Institute, later Grand Rapids Public Museum/Public Museum of Grand Rapids, Porter was present at the opening of many archaeological sites. Using his skill as a sketcher, he drew facsimiles of some of the uncovered artifacts, of the mounds from which they were recovered, and maps locating these mounds. This collection contains some of these drawings, particularly those from the "Big Find" in the Converse Mound Group in May 30, 1885.

The Converse Mounds, located along the west side of the Grand River from present-day Bridge Street to south of Fulton Street, was the larger to the two mound groups in the Grand Rapids area. Its location in the path of Grand Rapids' growth marked the mound groups early demise. As early as the 1850s the tops of the mounds were leveled with many artifacts removed and skeletal remains reburied. In 1885 while laying a utility line to the Phoenix Furniture plant, workmen excavated the sub-surface artifacts from these mounds.

Concerning the Hopewell/Adena material the Kent County & area mounds explored by Wright L. Coffinberry, were roughly dated by him in 1875 to a culture at least 250 to 300 years early. This dating was based upon the estimated age of the trees often found growing over these mounds. However, as Coffinberry noted, these mound builders could have lived much earlier. It is also known that the Ottawa & Chippawa tribes, living in this area of the country in the 19th century, often desired to bury their remains in or near these more ancient mounds.

Porter also prepared sketches for artifacts collected from Arizona by Grand Rapids physician Louis Barth and sketches of archaeological artifacts from around the world. He sketched early Grand Rapids buildings and scenes as he remembered them upon his arrival.

Series Descriptions

Series I. Those Michigan items attributed to the prehistoric Hopewell/Adena cultures.

Subseries A. Converse Mound Group, West side of Grand River

Subseries B. Grand Rapids finds and/or Pulcher ownership

Subseries C. Kent County Finds

Subseries D. Other Michigan Counties

Series II. Non-Hopewell/Adena archaeological or Non Michigan archaeological materials.

Subseries A. Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and others

Subseries B. Miscellaneous Archaeology

Subseries C. Report to the Peabody Museum, 1893.

Subseries D. Arizona artifacts; 1883, 1884, 1888, 1889, 1897, n.d. Bath or Bark, Pulcher, Pritcher,

Subseries E. Smithsonian Reports,

Series III. Geological sketches.

Subseries A. Livingston Co., N.W.

Subseries B.

Subseries C.

Subseries D.

Series IV. Building sketches & family photographs.

Subseries A. Grand Rapids building sketches

Subseries B. Photographs

Contents

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
Series I. Michigan finds, attributed to Prehistoric Hopewell/Adena cultures, 1873-1898, n.d.		
Subseries A. Converse Mounds Group, west side of Grand River, Grand Rapids		
2	1	Reference Articles, 1-3.(Includes item .1, original clipping)
1	1	Orientation drawings by Porter
		.3 Location of the Mound Builders Village
		.24 Nos. 1-5 Mounds
		Items found before the "Big Find", pre-May 1885:Dated:
1	2	.44 Oversized. Pestle found 1867 in Grand River
2	2	.20-.23 [Mound 9] sketches Aug. 2, 1876 finds
2	3	.35 Feb. 1878, various
		.29-.30 Oct. 1879 Coffinbury Fulton to Butterworth finds
		.26 Mar. 1880 Kitchen Mount
		.27 1880 Front St. find
		.31 June 4, 1883, No. 5
		.19 Apr. 18, 1885 pipe stem find
		Attributed:
		.25 Fulton St., n.d.
		.28 Watson ST., btw. Fulton & Butterworth, n.d.
		The Big Find, May 30, 1885
1	3	.2 Diagram, as the surface looked in 1850
2	4	.4 Site maps, 1885 vs 1853
		.5-.7 Artifacts
1	3	.8-.9 Artifacts
2	4	.10-.16 Artifacts
1	3	.17-.18 Artifacts
2	5	Converse Mound Group, after the "Big Find", post May 1885:
		Dated:
		.32 Mar. 18, 1890, Arrowhead
		.33-34 Apr. 17, 1890, vase fragments
		Attributed:
		.40n.d. Pipe

**Series I. Michigan finds, attributed to Prehistoric Hopewell/Adena
cultures, 1873-1898, n.d.**

Subseries B. Grand Rapids finds and/or Pulcher ownership

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 6 | Pulcher items, annotated as his or drawn on his letterhead
.39 Pulcher ownership attribution
.43 Drawing date Apr. 11, 1884
.45 Drawing date Sept. 3, 1884, found at Wright (Waite)
.50 Drawing date Sept. 3, 1884, found at Wright
Attributed |
| 3 | 1 | .55 Oversized. Pulcher ownership, including items found in Alpine
Twp./Kent Co./Mich., Barry Co./Mich. & in Ohio. |
| 2 | 6 | .73 Sand Creek
Coffinberry items |
| 2 | 7 | .36 Obsidian arrow head or volcanic glass
.37 2 stones |
| 3 | 2 | .38 Axe. Oversized |
| 2 | 7 | .42 |
| | | Porter items |
| 2 | 7 | .47 Ax, found on S. Prospect St. |

Series I. Michigan finds, attributed to Prehistoric Hopewell/Adena cultures, 1873-1898, n.d.

Subseries C. Kent County Finds

- | | | |
|---|----|--|
| 2 | 8 | Porter items
.41 Spear head, Lowell Farm + a Coffinbury item
.46 Skinner
.54 Ceremonial Axe, found in Graton Twp. + others
.57 Found in town of Graton, Mar. 3, 1885 |
| 2 | 9 | Coffinbury
.51 Found at Norton Mound near Grandville
.148 Found at Norton Mound near Grandville; includes also another image, bead with Ohio, Coffinbury/Le Metayer de Guichainville association.
.52 Rocking knife. Found at the Workhouse. |
| 2 | 10 | Other
.48 Pestle
.49 Pipe, found by Dr. McNalb, given to Coffinbury
.53 Axe or skinner, found on Barrett farm, Graton Twp.
.56
.59 Ceremonial Axe? Found near Ada by A? Plum, left to Coffinbury.
.60 Totem, found in Courtland
.61 Combination axe, found in Walker by James White |

**Series I. Michigan finds, attributed to Prehistoric Hopewell/Adena
cultures, 1873-1898, n.d.**

Subseries D. Other Michigan Counties.

		Ottawa County	
2	11	--Spoonville Mounds, 1876-1877, 1880, 1883,	n.d.
		.63	
		.64	
		.65	
		.66	
		.67	
		.68	
		.69	
		.70	
		.71	
3	3	--Tallmadge	
		Both housed in oversized	
		.72	
		.74 Oversized	
2	12	--Ferrysburg Mounds, 1877, 1880, n.d.	
		.75	
		.76	
		.77	
3	4	.78 Oversized	
2	12	.79	
2	13	Allegan County artifacts; 1883, n.d.	
		.80	
		.81	
1	4	Barry County	
		.91 Oversized, folded	
		Calhoun County	
2	15	--- Battle Creek, 1885	
		.135	

Series I. Michigan finds, attributed to Prehistoric Hopewell/Adena cultures, 1873-1898, n.d.

Subseries D. Other Michigan Counties.

- 2 16 Chippewa County
---Stone Mound, [Mackinaw? Island & Marquette] 1896-1897.
.138 James Travis association
.139
.140
Attributed:
.136
.137
- 2 15 Clinton County
.95
- 2 17 Genesee County, 1882.
.142 Gaines, Mr. Terry
- 2 14 Gratiot County artifacts; 1882, 1888-90, n.d.
.82
.83
.84
.85
- 1 5 .87 Oversized
.88
.89 Oversized
.90 Overzied
.108
See also .252 Michigan Miscellaneous Geological McNaughton find.
See also .86 in Ionia Co.
- 2 18 Ionia County; 1885, 1886, 1889, n.d.
.86
- 3 5 .92 Oversized. Fisk Creek.
- 2 18 .93
.94
.96
.97

**Series I. Michigan finds, attributed to Prehistoric Hopewell/Adena
cultures, 1873-1898, n.d.**

Subseries D. Other Michigan Counties.

		Montcalm County
2	19	.99
		.100
		.101
		.102
		.103
1	6	.104 Oversized
		Newaygo County, 1882.
2	15	.143 Found by Dr. McNabb, Fremont Twp., Another item on same sheet include reference to article in Grand Rapids Egale Aug. 2, 1882.
		Oakland County, 1882.
2	17	---Waterford
		.141 presented by Mr. Terry, Gaines Station, Genesee Co.
		.144 bought of Mr. Terry, Gaines Station.

Series II. Non-Michigan Archaeological artifacts, including other cultures, as well as possible non-Michigan Prehistoric HOPEWELL/ADENA cultures, and including items copied from publications or other museum.

Subseries A. Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and others

- 1 7 ---near Muscatim? On the Mississippi, between Iowa & Illinois
- .106 Oversized
- .134 Oversized. Various, including "Out of a Spoonbill cat fish taken in the Mississippi River"
- 4 1 ---Gladwell Mound, Franklin Co., Ind.
- .145
- See also Smithsonian Report 1882
- From Warren K. Moorehead's Work, No.1, including Mich./Arizona/Iowa images
- .146
- Shelby, Ohio
- .147
- Medina, Ohio find
- .149
- .183 Ohio, Coffinbury/Le Metayer de Guichainville
- .184 Ohio

See also .148 Coffinbury Norton Mound item, with a second image associated Le Metayer ...

- .341 Pennsylvania/Ohio Arrows
- .345 Columbus, Pa.
- .347 Columbus, Pa.

Attributed?

These items found in this folder 2/2000

- .150 Fragment
- .151

Series II. Non-Michigan Archaeological artifacts, including other cultures, as well as possible non-Michigan Prehistoric HOPEWELL/ADENA cultures, and including items copied from publications or other museum.

- 4 2 **Subseries B. Miscellaneous Archaeology**
--Mr. Van Alstine purchases
.105
.114
--Jim Travis stationery
.110
--Norfolk Downs, Mass. + clipping
342
--William Cullen Bryant ref. + Charles C. Abbott ref.
.348
--...from Mounds in the North ... [probably Michigan]
.308
--Other
- 1 8 .116 Oversized, Arrows of Mr. Pritchards
.115
.113
.111
.112
.109 Oversized, axx was given by Mr. Wetherly to Mr. Pruser? The
Jeweler, sold to Chicago gentleman
.107 Oversized. Radius of various vessels

Series II. Non-Michigan Archaeological artifacts, including other cultures, as well as possible non-Michigan Prehistoric HOPEWELL/ADENA cultures, and including items copied from publications or other museum.

- 3 6 **Subseries C. Report to the Peabody Museum, 1893.**
All housed in oversized folder
.117 + William Cullen Bryant reference
.118 Sheet 1
.119 Sheet 2, with reference to Tinkam Collection
.120 manuscript

Series II. Non-Michigan Archaeological artifacts, including other cultures, as well as possible non-Michigan Prehistoric HOPEWELL/ADENA cultures, and including items copied from publications or other museum.

**Subseries D. Arizona artifacts; 1883, 1884, 1888, 1889, 1897, n.d.
Bath or Bark,
Pulcher, Pritcher,**

All items housed in oversized folder

4	3	.121 Pulcher Collection
		.122
		.123
		.124
		.125
1	9	.126 Oversized
4	3	.127
1	9	.128 Oversized
		.129 Oversized
		.130 Oversized
		.131 Oversized
		.132 Oversized
		.133 Oversized

Series II. Non-Michigan Archaeological artifacts, including other cultures, as well as possible non-Michigan Prehistoric HOPEWELL/ADENA cultures, and including items copied from publications or other museum.

Subseries E. Smithsonian Reports

		---1865
4	4	.165
		.166
		.167
		---1882
4	5	.164
3	7	.168 Oversized
4	5	.169
		.170
		.171
		.172
		.173
		.174 Gilwell's Mound

Series II. Non-Michigan Archaeological artifacts, including other cultures, as well as possible non-Michigan Prehistoric HOPEWELL/ADENA cultures, and including items copied from publications or other museum.

		F. Coin rubbings (18th and 19th centuries), n.d.
4	6	.185-.197
		G. Egyptian symbols, n.d.
4	7	.198 .200 .201
		H. European artifacts (Britain/France)
4	8	.178 Coffinbury & Le Metayer de Guichainville?
3	8	.202 Dublin, Ireland
4	8	.203 .204 Coffinbury & Le Metayer de Guichainville? .234
		I. Grecian artifacts, n.d.
4	9	.205 .206 .207 .208 .209
		J. Normandy, Gaulish Roman, Samian, Several or all items are from an exchange of items between Coffinbury & Le Metayer de Guichainville?
4	10	.175 .176 .177 .180 .181 .182 .199

Series II. Non-Michigan Archaeological artifacts, including other cultures, as well as possible non-Michigan Prehistoric HOPEWELL/ADENA cultures, and including items copied from publications or other museum.

K. Roman, Samian and Etruscan artifacts, 1882, 1883, 1885, n.d.

3	9	.237 Oversized
4	11	.238
		.239
		.240
		.241
		.242
		.243 Coin

L. South American

3	10	.245 Cusco. Oversized
		.349 Cusco. Oversized
		.216 Oversized
4	12	.179
3	10	.244 Oversized. Brought by Lieut. Gibon & presented to Mr. Hartman of Grand Rapids
4	12	.246
4	12	.247

M. Central American

---Honduras artifacts, n.d.

3	11	.210 Oversized
		.211 Oversized
4	13	.212
		.213
		.214
		.215
		.217

N. Japanese artifacts, n.d.

4	14	.218
		.219
		.220
		.221
		.222
		.223

Series II. Non-Michigan Archaeological artifacts, including other cultures, as well as possible non-Michigan Prehistoric HOPEWELL/ADENA cultures, and including items copied from publications or other museum.

O. Livingston County, NY artifacts, including Gilmore Farm finds, and including general area topography sketches. Note: some sheets also including geological sketches.

4	15	.98
		.224
		.225
		.226
		.227
		.228
		.229
3	12	.230 [oversized]
4	15	.231
		.232
		.233
		.235
		.236
		.343 Robert Canum's Farm
		.344 Canawagus Mount
		.346 Gilmore Farm

Series III. Geological Sketches, 1889-1893, n.d.

A. Livingston County, N.Y.

3	13	---Oversized .306
4	16	---McVain's Farm/Quarry. .251 .254 .255 .256 .261 .284 .285 .288 .304
		Other McVain drawings on other sheets in the Livingston Co. section.
4	17	---Brice's Mill .283 .287 .301 .302 .303
4	18	---Various, including above .248 .250 .257 .259 .260 .290 .294 .297 .300

Series III. Geological Sketches, 1889-1893, n.d.

- | | | |
|---|----|--|
| 4 | 19 | B. Out of the late F. Holcom Col., now owned by Dr. Kirkland, Gratiot?, Grand Rapids
.282
.291
.292
.293 |
| 1 | 10 | C. Oversized Kent Co. Geological
.267
.268 |
| 4 | 20 | D. Michigan. Geological & Miscellaneous
.252
.263
.286 |
| 4 | 21 | E. Papers 1-6
.258 Paper 4
.262 Paper 3
.269 Paper 1
.281 Paper 6
.298 Paper 2
.295 Paper 5 Livingston Co., N.Y. ID |
| 4 | 22 | F. Miscellaneous & unidentified
.249
.253
.264
.265
.272
.274
.275
.278
.279
.280
.289
.299
.305 |
| 3 | 14 | .271 Oversized. Egg, Dinornis Aepiornis, New Zealand. |

Series III. Geological Sketches, 1889-1893, n.d.

G. Ohio & Pennsylvania drawings, including reference to Oxford Coal Mine in Scranton, Pa., Sacket & Wiggins Collection, James Travis [or Travers], Wonderland Museum & Biggest Show on Earth.

4 23 .266
 .270
 .273
 .276
 .277
 .296

3 15 .307 Oversized

4 24 **H. Coal illustrations.**

Note: These items have Porter's numbers

1,1,2,2,3,4,4½,4¾,5,5½,6,6½,7,8,9,10,10½,,11,11½,12,13,14,15,16,17,18
,19,20,21,21½,22,23 + 1 Published illustration of Australain Tree Fern
House

.325
.309 to .340
.356

2	18	Series IV. Building Sketches & Photographs.
		A. Grand Rapids buildings, n.d.
		.152
		.153
		.154
		.155
		.156
		.157
		.158
		.159
		.160
		.161
		.162
		.163
		B. Photographs, n.d.
2	19	Porter, Thomas W., n.d.
		.352
		.353
		.354
		.355
		Porter houses, n.d.
		.350
		.351