# Archaeological Excavations at the Lucky Last Site 9MG218

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LAMAR Institute Publication 184
LAMAR Institute
Savannah, Georgia
2013

## Introduction

This little report of a single cluster of three features at archaeological site 9MG218 has been delayed for 35 years. Williams dug this little site in 1979 with volunteers, but it was never written up for many reasons. We have chosen its name to be Lucky Last since it was a lucky discovery of the last archaeological site to be excavated in Lake Oconee. Finally, with the help of University of Georgia archaeology student Lauren Smith, this can be completed. The excavation was a very limited operation, confined to an approximately 4 meter diameter area accidentally exposed in a field by a bulldozer working the Lake Oconee Basin. The data from here all date to the Late Mississippian Bell phase, named for the Joe Bell site (9MG28) site with major excavation located just 200 meters to the north of this site (Williams 1983). It could be argued that 9MG218 is just an outlying part of site 9MG28 itself. Williams wrote the first section of this report, presented below back about 1983. We have updated this a bit, and added the subsequent sections. Lauren was instrumental in creating the graphics for the report.

## Site Discovery

In early April of 1979 Mark Williams and Marshall Williams were walking over a cleared area in Morgan County, Georgia that was to soon become part of Lake Oconee in the Georgia Piedmont. In the course of the walk, an area was located near the western bank of the Oconee River, some 365 meters south of its junction with the Apalachee River that had recently been disturbed by bulldozer operations (Figure 1). A concentration of clam shells and Indian potsherds was found in this disturbed area about 50 meters east of the Oconee River. This location was at the crest of a small ridge which overlooked the river and was approximately 10

meters above the average stream level. Suspecting that a single feature had been disturbed by the bulldozer, they used shovels in the area in an attempt to define the suspected feature.

As expected, a feature was defined at a depth of about 20 centimeters under the surface of the field at the base of the plow zone. The form of the feature was that of a large black circular pit 2.13 meters in diameter, with a smaller 1.71 meter by 1.31 meter ellipse joined on the former feature's southwestern side.

**Excavation**

Lake Oconee was already rapidly rising when the feature was located. No funds were available for the testing of the feature or the site, but with volunteer labor from the University of Georgia Department of Anthropology, the feature itself was excavated on weekends during April into early May of 1979. During the final two weekends of work on the site, it could only be reached by boat, as the ridge became an island before it was finally drowned beneath the rising lake waters. Those people involved in the work included Mark Williams, Marshall Williams, Gary Shapiro, Beth Scott, Jean James, Mark Thomas, and Duane Graham. The actual work dates were April 7, 14, 21, 29, and May 6. The entire contents of the feature were excavated during this time. Samples of the soil were water screened in the nearby edge of the rising waters of Lake Oconee for recovery of plant and animal remains. There was no time to explore the site beyond the feature further. The site was in thick fescue grass except for the area disturbed by the bulldozer at the time of flooding. Thus the surface distribution size for the site could not be estimated. We doubt if it was very large, however. The site was designated as separate from the

Joe Bell site (Williams 1983) some 200 meters to the north since there were very few artifacts in between the two areas.

Because the maximum time available for examination of the feature before it would be drowned was unknown initially, a simple excavation plan was implemented. The feature was cleared only for about a foot beyond its actual boundaries. The edges of the feature were clearly seen as the black of the feature met the sterile red clay of the soil at the site. A plan drawing of the feature was made (Figure 2). In Figure 2, Feature C was located in the bottom, under Feature A. The large circle on the north was designated Feature A, while the smaller ellipse on the south was labeled Feature B. The two were joined as seen on the drawing. It was not clear which was intrusive into the other. A small area extended to the southwest of Feature B, but this was not as clear as the rest of the conjoined features.

The initial excavations in the feature consisted of the removal of the northern half of Feature A. This was removed primarily by troweling. Time did not permit excavation of this part of the pit by natural levels. Most of the soil from this part of the feature was not initially screened. Profile A was drawn as a result of this first cut through the feature (Figure 3). The walls of the feature were remarkably straight on both edges of the pit. The maximum depth in the center was 45 centimeters, while the depth on both edges was 30 centimeters. The bottom was red clay, thought at first to represent the sterile red clay soil of the hilltop. The fill consisted of alternating layers of dark ash, light ash, and midden. A midden layer in the center of the northwestern part of the profile contained numerous clam shells of the genus *Elliptio*. Potsherds and animal bones were found in all layers. There seems little doubt that the midden represents the filling over time of a depression with the remains from fires and other general house garbage.

Most of the sherd fragments were small, with only a few fragments of as much as one quarter of a vessel. The work of excavating the northern half of the feature was completed on April 7.

On April 14 samples of the removed soil from the northern half of Feature A were water screened through window screen on the site using buckets of water from the fast-approaching lake. Five bucket loads of the midden were processed in this manner. The southern half of Feature B was excavated next. The resulting profile is shown in Figure 4. This profile was only 30 centimeters deep in the center. The edges were not as vertically aligned as were those in Profile 1. The new profile consisted of four curving layers. From top to bottom these were: (1) light ash, (2) bright red clay, (3) brown-black midden, and (4) mottled red clay with charcoal. The presence of the red clay in two of the layers was different from the first profile.

On the same day the western part of the remaining southern half of Feature A was excavated (Figure 2). This resulted in the production of Profile C on the remaining quarter of that feature (Figure 5). This profile was 45 centimeters deep at the deepest part. The short section of the profile had almost a straight bottom. The layers of red clay that were seen in Profile B in adjoining Feature B extended into this profile and intermixed with the various ash layers seen originally on Profile A.

On April 21 the northern half of Feature B was excavated. By that point it was thought that the excavations were completed. The bottoms of both features were cleaned, but there was one more surprise. As we were cleaning the bottom, there was much ash that continued below the level of the red clay floor in the area between Features A and B. This was a deeper rounder area in the floor of Feature A filled with ash and was defined as Feature C (Figure 2). The northwestern quadrant of Feature C was excavated on that day, after the new feature had been

defined. In truth, Feature C was simply a more deeply excavated area of Feature A, but it likely was filled with ashes from an in-place fire. On the final day of excavation, May 6, the other three quadrants of Feature C were excavated just hours ahead of the rising waters of Lake Oconee that soon filled the feature and drowned it forever.

**Discussion**

The features excavated at the Luck Last site were all actually part of a single pit, likely excavated for the removal of red clay. This was probably used as daub on some nearby house or structure. As has been learned over the years, it is normal for such daub processing holes to become filled with trash of all sorts as rapidly as possible after their initial creation. This would include ash from fires, broken pottery, animal bones, and all of the sorts of items recovered from the features at 9MG218. The presence of the sterile red clay layers in the fill of the feature is unusual. Potentially, people may have had fires in the pit and covered them with red clay to put them out, but this is uncertain. It makes no sense to put red clay right back into a hole from which they had just removed it. This begs the question of how long the feature was open. We would be surprised if it were more than a few months.

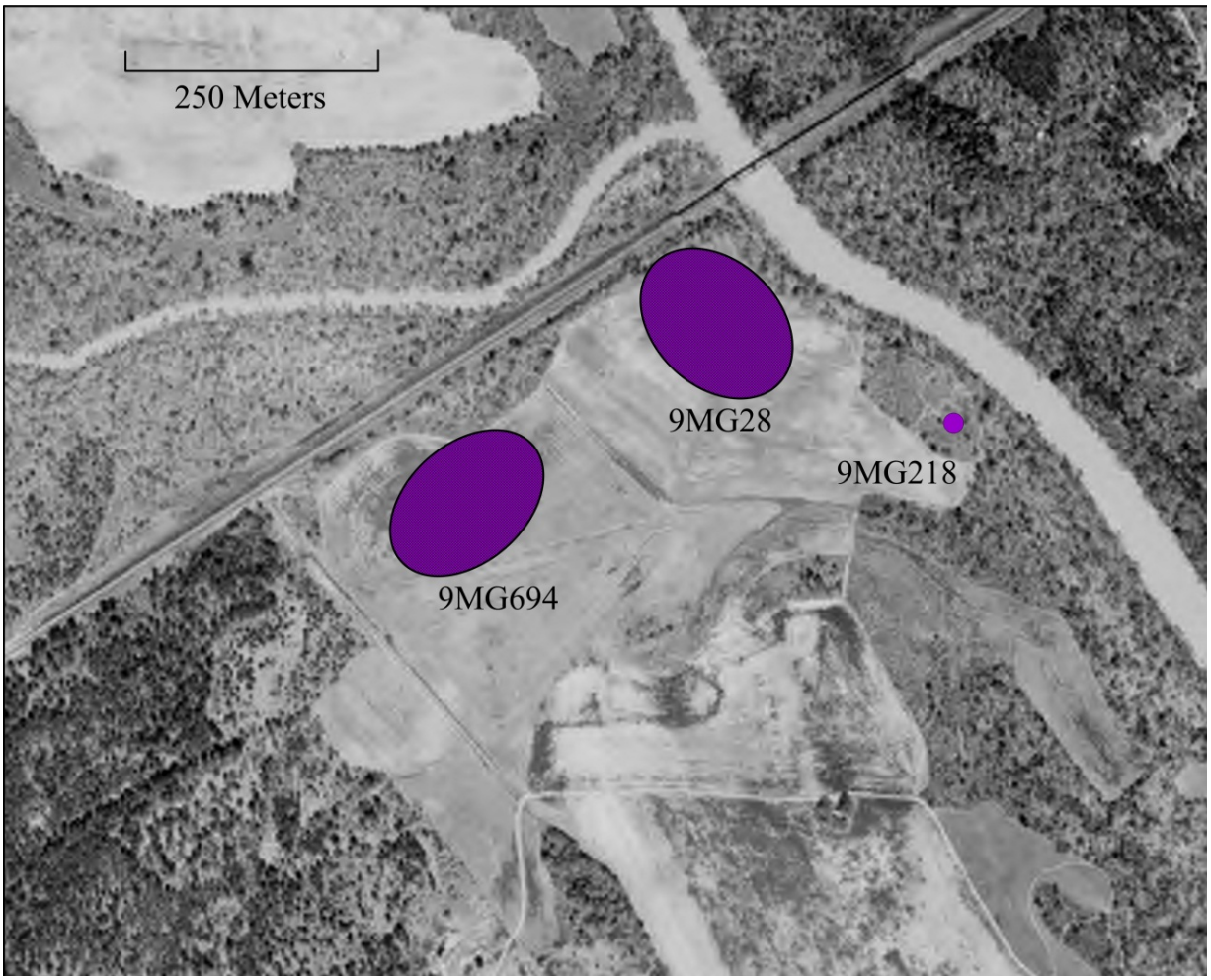

Figure 1. Site Location Map.

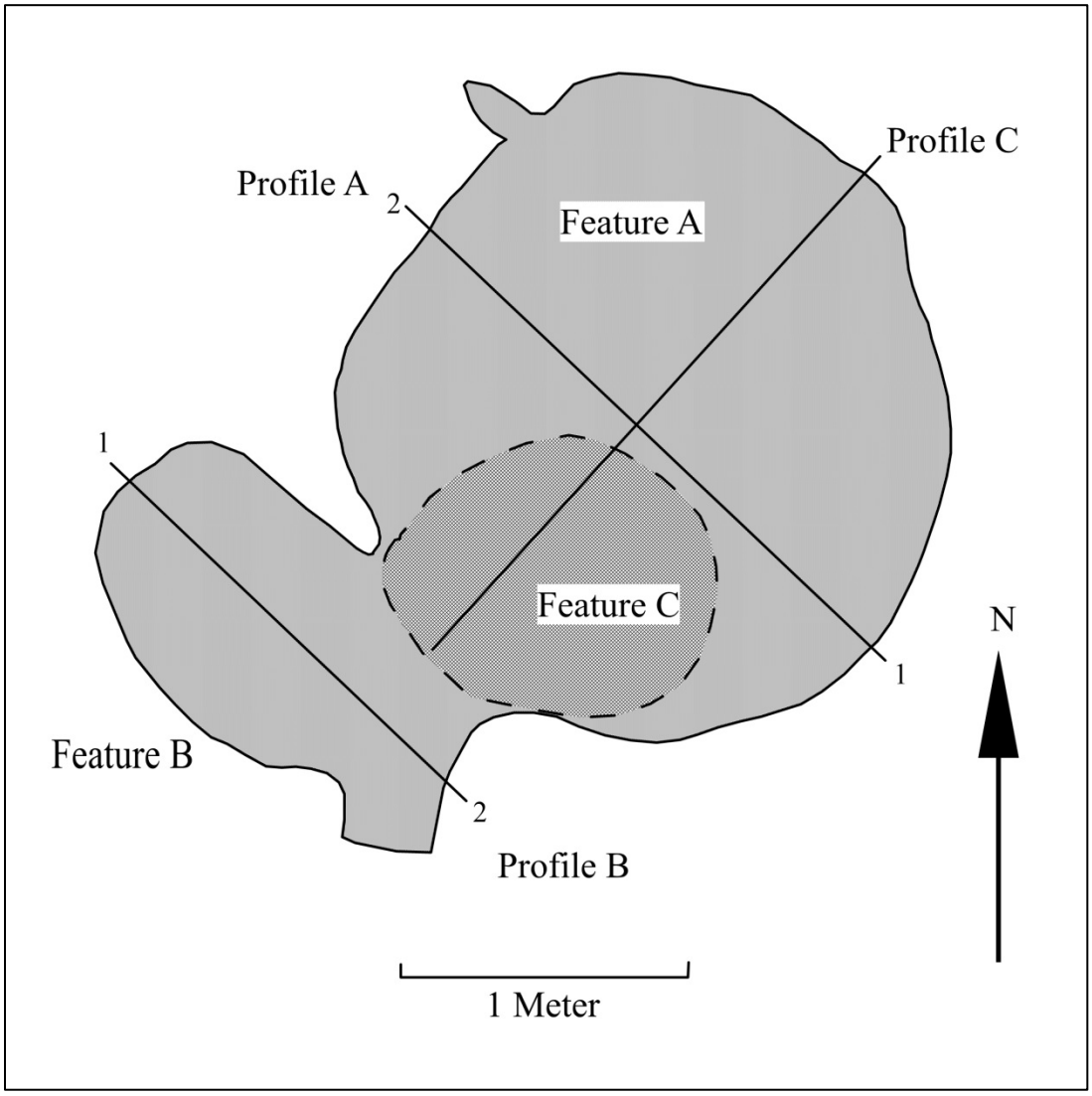


Figure 2. Features A, B, and C.

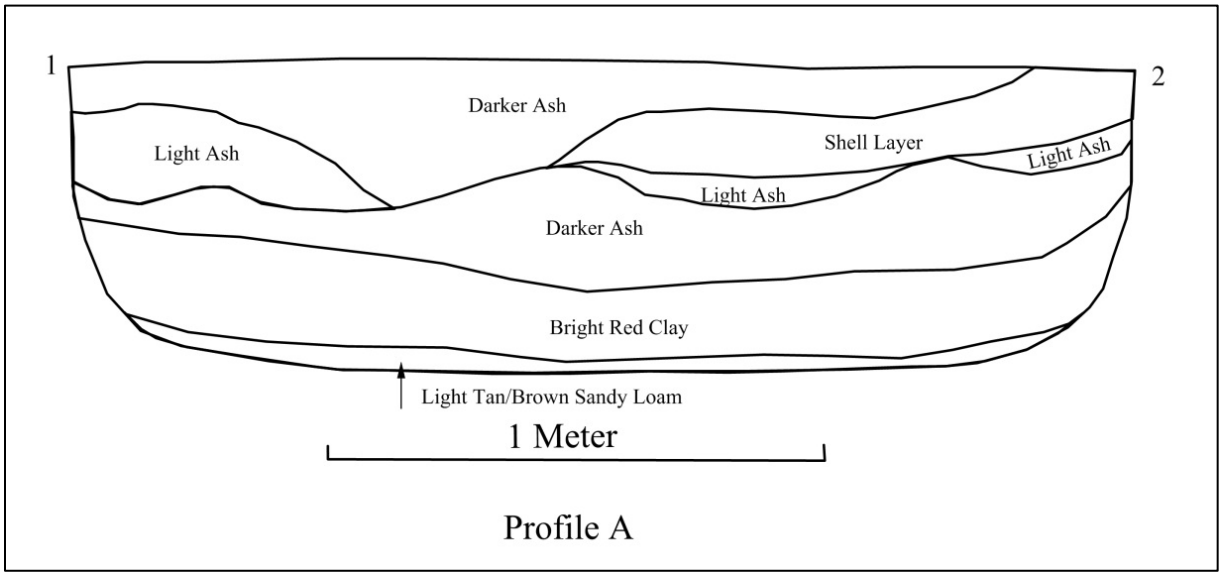


Figure 3. Profile A.

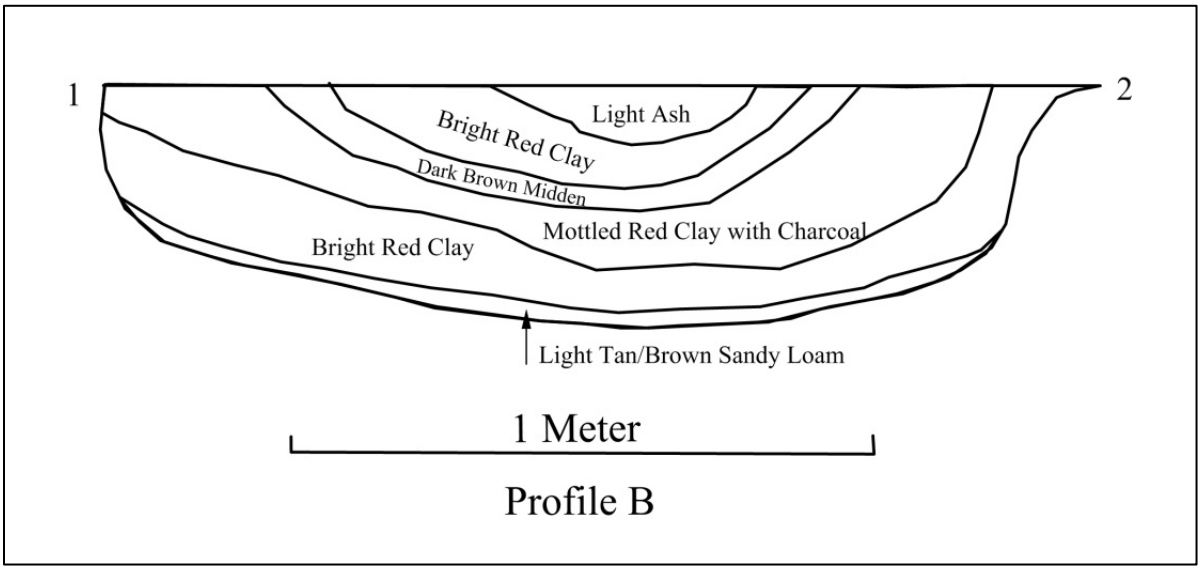


Figure 4. Profile B.

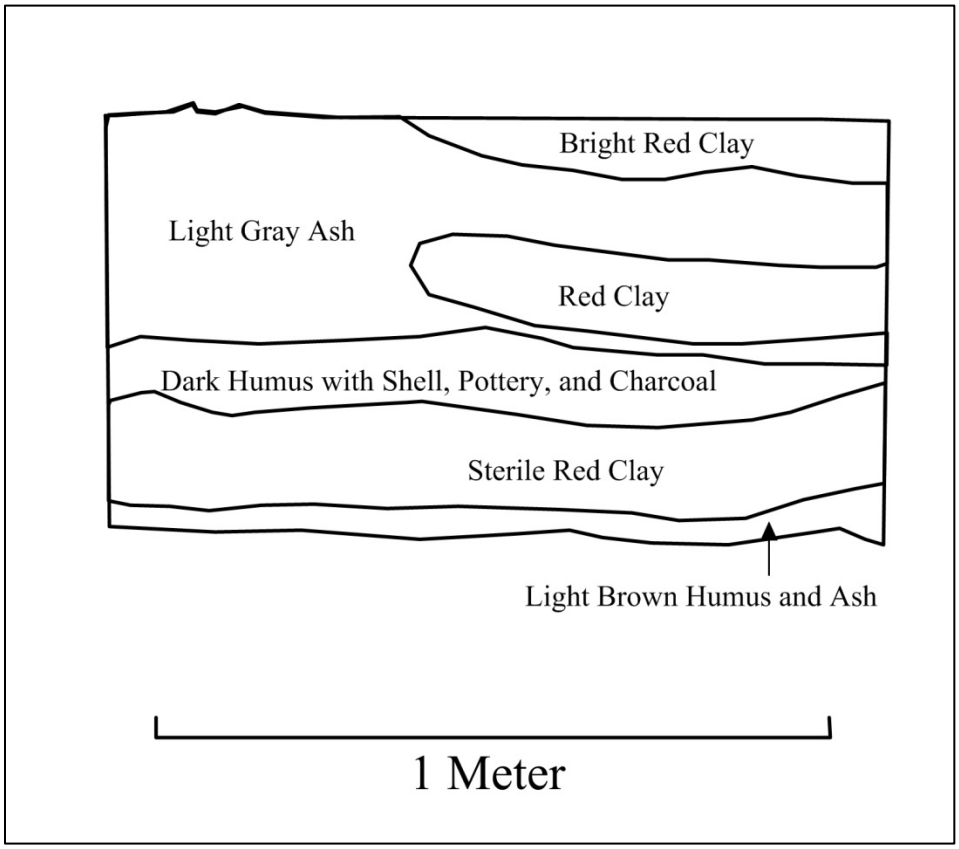


Figure 5. Profile C.

**Artifacts**

Following the completion of the field work, the artifacts were analyzed at the UGA Laboratory of Archaeology in Athens. They are still curated at that facility to the present day. The analysis was primarily performed in 1982 by Mark Williams and Gary Shapiro. Table 1 presents the catalog of the 24 lots defined from the excavations at 9MG218.

The ceramic data from the site are presented here in Tables 2-4. Table 2 shows the breakdown for the 719 sherds from the feature. These weighed 9.38 kilograms, or almost 21 pounds. This is a great deal of pottery for such a feature. Plain, undecorated sherds accounted for almost 83 percent of all the pottery, while incised pottery accounted for almost 14 percent. Although it is not enumerated in the table, the vast majority of the incised pottery was of fine lines, less than 1 millimeter wide. Stamped pottery is almost completely absent, numbering only 12 sherds (1.67 percent). These numbers are very similar to those from the Joe Bell site just to the northwest (Williams 1983). It is quite obvious that the sherds from the feature reported here date to the early historic Bell phase. No historic items of European origin (beads, peach pits) were recovered from the Lucky Last site. There were seven small tobacco pipe fragments and three pottery disks in the fill of the feature.

Table 3 shows a breakdown of the 97 rim sherds from the feature. Simple, unmodified rims (typically on bowls) numbered 55 (56.7 percent), while folded rims typically on jars numbered 42 (43.3 percent). Examples of these are apparent in the photos of the defined ceramic vessels from the feature (Figure 6-26).

Table 4 shows the data on the defined ceramic vessel fragments from the features. Gary Shapiro and Williams conducted a ceramic vessel analysis on the sherds from 9MG218 about

1982. They were able to recognize parts of a minimum of 20 different vessels (Minimum Number of Vessels=MNV). These were nine excurvate rim jars, nine incurvate rim bowls, and two straight rim bowls represented in the collection. The mean mouth diameter of all the vessels was 20.3 centimeters, and the mean width of the folded rims on the jars was 20.9 millimeters. The latter is quite wide, clearly in line with the known form for Bell phase. The size of the vessels would be considered of moderate size for this time period. The number of incised lines per vessel was 5.9, but this is obviously lower than reality since many were broken. This high number is also in line with Bell phase characteristics. One vessel (Number 15) was incised and punctated, a rare but not unknown decoration mode during Bell phase. All of the reconstructed vessel fragments are shown in Figures 6-26.

| Lot Number | Location | Date |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Troweling Features A and B, 15 centimeters below surface, Northern Part ca. 15 centimeter surface depth | 4/7/1979 |
| 2 | Feature A, Northern Half | 4/7/1979 |
| 3 | Feature A, Northern Half, cleaning up | 4/14/1979 |
| 4 | Feature A, Northern Half, window-water screen sample | 4/14/1979 |
| 5 | Feature A, Southwestern Quadrant | 4/14/1979 |
| 6 | Feature B, Southern Half | 4/14/1979 |
| 7 | Feature A, Southwestern Quadrant finishing and cleaning | 4/21/1979 |
| 8 | Feature A, Southwestern Quadrant window-water screen sample | 4/21/1979 |
| 9 | Feature A, Under red clay first thought to be sterile | 4/21/1979 |
| 10 | Feature A, Northeastern Quadrant, under red clay on floor | 4/21/1979 |
| 11 | Feature A, Southeastern Quadrant, ash layer on top | 4/21/1979 |
| 12 | Feature A, Southeastern Quadrant, ash layer on top, window-water screen sample | 4/21/1979 |
| 13 | Feature A, Southeastern Quadrant, mixed ash and charcoal above the red clay | 4/21/1979 |
| 14 | Feature A, Southeastern Quadrant, black midden under red clay | 4/21/1979 |
| 15 | Feature A, Southeastern Quadrant, window- water screened sample of Lot 14 | 4/21/1979 |
| 16 | Feature A and B junction, black midden between red clay lenses | 4/21/1979 |
| 17 | Feature A and B junction, window- water screened sample of Lot 16 | 4/21/1979 |
| 18 | Feature B, Northern Half | 4/21/1979 |
| 19 | Feature A, just above Feature C in Area of Southeastern and Southwestern Quadrant Juncture. Red Clay, Shell, and Mottled Charcoal Layer | 4/29/1979 |
| 20 | Feature A, Cleaning Southwestern Wall, Surface down to Feature C | 4/29/1979 |
| 21 | Feature B, Troweling floor, light tan brown sandy loam with charcoal, ash, bone, and sherds | 4/29/1979 |
| 22 | Feature C, Northwest Quadrant, ash, tan loamy pit with shell and charcoal | 4/29/1979 |
| 23 | Feature C, Remaining three Quadrants | 5/6/1979 |
| 24 | Feature B, Thin brown midden under red clay first thought to be sterile | 4/21/1979 |

Table 1. Site Catalog.

| Lot | Plain | Incised | Stamped | Pipe | Disk | Misc. | Totals | Weight |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 32 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 37 | 986 |
| 2 | 86 | 20 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 109 | 1287 |
| 3 | 25 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | 502 |
| 4 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 27 |
| 5 | 74 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 82 | 1463 |
| 6 | 21 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 535 |
| 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 75 |
| 8 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 8 |
| 9 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 128 |
| 10 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 15 |
| 11 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 83 |
| 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 13 | 16 | 13 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 32 | 55 |
| 14 | 143 | 26 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 172 | 2451 |
| 15 | 52 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 55 | 112 |
| 16 | 45 | 12 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 59 | 740 |
| 17 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 12 |
| 18 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 170 |
| 19 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 175 |
| 20 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 17 | 271 |
| 21 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 42 |
| 22 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 59 |
| 23 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 170 |
| 24 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 |
| Totals | 596 | 100 | 12 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 719 | 9375 |
| Percent | 82.89 | 13.91 | 1.67 | 0.97 | 0.42 | 0.14 | | |

Table 2. All Ceramics.

| Lot | Simple | Folded | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | 4 | 10 |
| 2 | 11 | 6 | 17 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 5 | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| 6 | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| 7 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 13 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 14 | 16 | 8 | 24 |
| 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| 17 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 18 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| 19 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 20 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 21 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 23 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 24 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Totals | 55 | 42 | 97 |
| Percent | 56.70 | 43.30 | 100.00 |

Table 3. Rim Sherds.

| Vessel Number | Lot Numbers | Rim Diameter (cm) | Rim Form | Folded Rim Width (mm) | Surface Treatment | Incised Elements | Vessel Shape |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1,2 | 18 | Folded Pinched | 29 | Plain | | Excurvate |
| 2 | 5,14 | 23 | Folded Pinched | ? | Plain | | Excurvate |
| 3 | 5,16 | 21 | Folded Pinched | 12 | Plain | | Excurvate |
| 4 | 14 | 22 | Folded Pinched | ? | Incised | 5 | Excurvate |
| 5 | 16 | 8 | Simple | | Incised | 13+ | Incurvate |
| 6 | 2 | 17 | Simple | | Incised | 4 | Incurvate |
| 7 | 2 | 22 | Simple | | Incised | 4+ | Straight |
| 8 | 4 | 28 | Simple | | Incised | 6+ | Incurvate |
| 9 | 6 | 24 | Simple | | Incised | 5+ | Incurvate |
| 10 | 1 | 16 | Simple | | Incised | 8 | Incurvate |
| 11 | 1 | 36 | Simple | | Incised | 5+ | Incurvate |
| 12 | 2 | 20 | Simple | | Incised | 5+ | Incurvate |
| 13 | 19 | 17 | Simple | | Incised | 5 | Incurvate |
| 14 | 2 | 12 | Simple | | Incised | 5+ | Incurvate |
| 15 | 5 | 16 | Simple | | Incised and Punctated | 6 | Straight |
| 16 | 2 | 22 | Folded Pinched | 22 | Plain | | Excurvate |
| 17 | 16 | 30 | Folded Pinched | 13 | Plain | | Excurvate |
| 18 | 6 | 26 | Folded Pinched | 22 | Plain | | Excurvate |
| 19 | 23 | 24 | Folded Pinched | 25 | Plain | | Excurvate |
| 20 | 2 | 24 | Folded Pinched | 23 | Plain | | Excurvate |
| | | 20.3 | | 20.9 | | 5.9+ | |

Table 4. Ceramic Vessel Data.


Figure 6. Vessel 1.


Figure 7. Vessel 2.

Figure 8. Vessel 3.

Figure 9. Vessel 4.

Figure 10. Vessel 5.

Figure 11. Vessel 6.

Figure 12. Vessel 7.

Figure 14. Vessel 8.

Figure 15. Vessel 9.

Figure 16. Vessel 10.


Figure 17. Vessel 11.


Figure 18. Vessel 12.

Figure 19. Vessel 13.

Figure 20. Vessel 14.

Figure 21. Vessel 15.

Figure 22. Vessel 16.

Figure 23. Vessel 17.

Figure 24. Vessel 18.

Figure 25. Vessel 19.

Figure 26. Vessel 20.

**Faunal Material**

Table 5 presents a simple accounting of animal bones and shellfish. The shellfish were of bivalve clams (*Elliptio* sp.) and univalve gastropods (*Goniobasis* sp.). The shellfish certainly came from the limited shoals in the Oconee River just to the east. These mollusks were also common at the nearby Joe Bell site.

| Lot Number | Animal Bones | Rock Snails | Bivalves |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| 2 | 58 | 0 | 108 |
| 3 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | 39 | 3 | 10 |
| 6 | 27 | 4 | 5 |
| 7 | 14 | 1 | 53 |
| 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 0 | 1 | 14 |
| 10 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| 11 | 1 | 0 | 23 |
| 12 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 13 | 14 | 0 | 15 |
| 14 | 233 | 21 | 104 |
| 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 | 40 | 8 | 13 |
| 17 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| 18 | 6 | 4 | 1 |
| 19 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| 20 | 40 | 3 | 13 |
| 21 | 15 | 0 | 1 |
| 22 | 6 | 0 | 8 |
| 23 | 0 | 0 | 23 |
| 24 | 13 | 0 | 1 |
| Totals | 518 | 46 | 415 |

Table 5. Faunal Summary.

The animal bones from Lot 14 (the richest bone lot with 214 specimens) were examined by the late Gary Shapiro, who was a thoroughly competent zooarchaeologist as well as a great field archaeologist. His analysis of this lot is presented here in Table 6. As is typical, only a fraction of the bones were species identifiable.

The most commonly identified specimens were from white tailed deer. Certainly these formed the largest meat source in this sample, although only a single individual is represented by the sample. The sample also includes two bones from a turkey and a single bone from a rabbit. It is also noteworthy that there were a moderate number of fish bones (Suckers and Catfish) in the feature, undoubtedly caught in the Oconee River near the site. All of these food sources were also found at the Joe Bell site.

| Animal | Part | Number |
|---|---|---|
| *Odocoileus virginianus* | (White Tail Deer) | 14 |
| | Frontal With Antler | 1R |
| | Ulna | 1R |
| | Radius, Distal | 1 |
| | Scapula | 1R |
| | Thoracic Vertebrae | 3 |
| | Ribs | 6 |
| | Metacarpal, Distal | 1 |
| *Meleagris gallapavo* | (Turkey) | 2 |
| | Tarsometatarsal | 1L |
| | Tibiotarsus | 1R |
| *Sylvilagus* sp. | (Rabbit) | 1 |
| | Humerus | 1R |
| *Catostomidae* | (Suckers) | 7 |
| | Pharyngeal tooth | 1L |
| | Maxilla | 1L |
| | Metapterygoid | 1R |
| | Operculum | 2R |
| | Preoperculum | 1L |
| | Dentary | 1L |
| *Ictalurus* sp. | (Catfish) | 7 |
| | Quadrate | 1R |
| | Hyomandibular | 1R |
| | Preoperculum | 1R |
| | Metapterygoid | 1R |
| | Pectoral Spine | 1L |
| | Palatine | 1R |
| | Cleithrum | 1R |

Table 6. Identified Animal Bones.

## Lithics

There were only 4 flakes found in the Features at 9MG218. Three were local quartz and a single flake of non-heat treated Coastal Plain chert were recovered. These likely date to theArchaic occupation of the hilltop thousands of years earlier than the Bell phase occupation and were just accidental inclusions in the fill of the features.

## Summary

This brief report presents information from a single Bell phase feature excavated in 1979 at a site now destroyed under Lake Oconee. The Bell phase dates from ca. A.D. 1580-1650. There are hundreds of these sites in the Oconee Valley, the vast majority of which are small farm steads. There is inadequate data from the Lucky Last site to determine if it was also a farmstead. Given the special nature of the nearby Joe Bell site as a possible Busk ceremonial center for large feasts, it is certainly possible that Lucky Last is connected with the activities at Joe Bell. The food remains at Lucky Last were plentiful and diverse. We have not been able to examine the minimal ethnobotanical remains from the site. The pottery vessels were of a full range of forms, just as at the Joe Bell site. Perhaps the best thing about the data presented here for 9MG218 is to act as a comparison for future Bell phase collections made in the Oconee Valley as more and more about this fascinating period in Georgia's lost early history is learned.

## Reference Cited

Williams, John Mark
1983 *The Joe Bell Site. Seventeenth Century Lifeways on the Oconee River*. PhD. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Georgia.