

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic ELY MOUND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (44LE12)

and/or common ELY MOUND (Preferred) (VHLC 52-18)

2. Location

street & number [redacted] not for publication

city, town [redacted] vicinity of

state Virginia code 51 county Lee code 23

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. S.C. Hobbs

street & number N/A

city, town Rose Hill vicinity of state Virginia 24281

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Lee County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Jonesville state Virginia 24263

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

title Site Survey Form 44LE12

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date July 1963 federal state county local

depository for survey records P.O. Box 368

city, town Yorktown state Virginia 23690

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Ely Mound Archaeological Site [REDACTED] It dates to the Late Woodland/Mississippian Period (ca. AD 800 to AD 1750). Approximately one-sixth of the mound was excavated in the 1870s by the late Lucien Carr, Assistant Curator of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University. Since then, no further excavation has occurred. Recent inspections of the site by archaeologists from the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission's Research Center for Archaeology indicate that the mound and associated occupation areas are in excellent state of preservation.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The Ely Mound (44LE12) stands on a gentle slope [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. The mound is presently covered with clover. A modern barn has been constructed to the north of the mound.

In the early 1870s the mound was tested by Lucien Carr, Assistant Curator of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, who named it after its owner, Robert Ely. Carr, in a report written in 1877, described the mound, which had been in cultivation for many years, as a "truncated oval...about three hundred feet in circumference at the base, and nineteen feet in height, as measured in the excavation or shaft, sunk through the centre. On the top there was a level space, oval in shape, the diameters being respectively about fifteen and forty feet. At a distance of eight to ten feet from the brow of the mound, on the slope, there were found, buried in the earth, the decaying stumps of a series of cedar posts which I was informed by Mr. Ely at one time completely encircled it" (Carr, 1877:75). From the posts Carr surmised "that the summit of the mound had at one time been occupied by some sort of a building-possibly a rotunda or council chamber" (Carr, 1877:76).

According to Carr's report, his testing of the Ely Mound consisted of sinking a shaft, 6' x 4', from the center to the circumference. Two graves were encountered during the first day of excavation. Grave number one, ten feet deep in the central shaft, contained the remains of two children. Associated with the children were a black bear canine tooth, two quarts of shell beads of various sizes and shapes, two shell ear pins, and a shell gorget with a weeping eye motif. Grave number two, six feet deep in the side trench, held the remains of an adult woman and contained shell beads.

While Carr's excavation was in progress, Professor Lucius H. Cheney, a student in the Harvard Summer School of Geology, and Mr. Charles B. Johnson, of Gibson's Station, Virginia, who were excavating these human remains, were inundated by falling earth from the collapsing soil profiles, which descended when a discovery caused spectators to rush suddenly to the edge of the excavation. Although the men were rescued, Mr. Johnson was severely bruised and Professor Cheney was dead, for apparently the weight of the cave-in had broken his back or neck.

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates AD 800 - AD 1750 Builder/Architect N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Ely Mound Archaeological Site, 44LE12, in Lee County, which dates to the Late Woodland/Mississippian Period (ca. AD 800 to AD 1750) represents the only example of a clearly identified substructure or town house mound in Virginia. As such, the mound and associated occupation areas have great potential for archaeological research on the development of increasingly complex societies in southwestern Virginia during the Late Woodland/Mississippian Period and the interactions of those societies with the more complex societal groups in the adjacent states of North Carolina and Tennessee. Moreover, human remains present at the site provide direct data for studies in human osteology. The Ely Mound is also significant in the history of archaeology, for based upon his excavations in the 1870s, Lucien Carr emphatically rejected the so-called "lost race" hypothesis for mound builders in eastern North America, a popular theory among 19th-century American archaeologists.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Ely Mound is the only positively identified substructure or town house mound in Virginia despite the documented occurrence of numerous mounds of this type in the adjacent states of Tennessee and North Carolina. Site inventory files at the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission's Research Center for Archaeology note the existence of only one other possible example, although it is smaller in size and has never been verified through archaeological testing. The Ely Mound, which dates to the Late Woodland/Mississippian Period, is probably attributable to people either closely related to or in direct contact with the ancestors of the Cherokees. Being in an excellent state of preservation and as the only archaeologically identified example in Virginia of the secular/sacred utilization of a town house center, the Ely Mound and associated occupation areas have exceptional archaeological significance.

The acreage nominated is particularly significant for archaeological investigations documenting the spread of Mississippian chieftain cultures up the Powell, Clinch, and Holston rivers and their interface with the typically less complex societies in southwestern Virginia. Such studies are especially critical to understanding the development of the increasingly complex socio-cultural institutions in southwestern Virginia which culminated during the Late Woodland/Mississippian Period. Further, the structural and spatial plan of the Ely Mound and surrounding occupational features provide invaluable comparative data relating to the Cherokee town house centers investigated in Tennessee and North Carolina. Human remains at the site also offer direct data for studies on human demography, nutrition, heredity, and cultural/pathological alterations.

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

9. Major Bibliographical References (See Continuation Sheet #2)

- Carr, Lucien. Report on the Exploration of a Mound in Lee County, Virginia. Tenth Annual Report, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Cambridge: Harvard University, (1877).
- Holland, C.G. An Archaeological Survey of Southwestern Virginia. Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, No. 12.

10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property 14 acres

Quadrangle name Ewing KY-VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A				B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries (See Continuation Sheet #2)

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date March 1983

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3143

city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature H. Bryan Mitchell

H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date APR 19 1983

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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ELY MOUND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE, LEE COUNTY, VA (44LE12)

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 7

Page 1

7. DESCRIPTION--Archaeological Analysis

Excavations were resumed one week later. Two days of steady digging extended the central shaft and trench down to original soil. For the sake of safety, profiles were stepped up, opening a larger portion of the mound than had been originally intended, or approximately one sixth. During this work, grave number three was encountered, which held the remains of an adult male. Associated with these remains were two large projectile points; a small pile of white quartz pebbles the size of peas, believed to be the contents of a turtle shell rattle; and a large, polished, sandstone bi-concave discoidal used to play the Indian game of "chungke." Carr noted that the lower half of the mound was almost void of all evidence of human occupation, whereas the upper half contained beds of ash, burnt earth, shell beads, small gaming disks of stone or pottery, and fragments of pottery, animal bones, and charred corn and cob. In order to interpret the use and age of the mound, Carr drew heavily on historical accounts of Indian culture, directly linking the substructure mound, shell gorget, and "chungke" stone to historic period Indians, specifically the Cherokees.

In 1963 C.G. Holland conducted a survey of southwestern Virginia under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, at which time he referenced the existence of the Ely Mound. Holland was unable to locate Lucien Carr's excavated material at the Peabody Museum and mistakenly associated the mound with the Adena-Hopewell cultures of the Midwest.

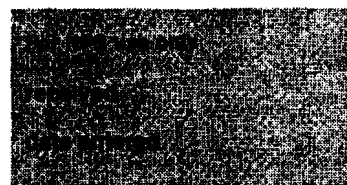
In 1979 Alan Crockett from Rose Hill, Virginia, an anthropology student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, conducted a surface survey of two small cultivated fields directly southwest and northwest of the mound, the first time those fields had been plowed in more than fifty years. In the small field to the southwest of the mound, he recorded a heavy concentration of cultural material dating from the Early Archaic through the Late Woodland/Mississippian Period. Artifact density in the small field to the northwest was considerably lighter, consisting principally of lithic flakes. Based on artifacts recovered by Carr, the mound itself dates to the Late Woodland/Mississippian Period. Crockett reported that neither the mound nor the fields to the east and south have been plowed by the present landowner, whereas the field to the west is occasionally cultivated.

Archaeologists from the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission's Research Center for Archaeology visited Ely Mound in 1982. At the top of the mound they observed a slight depression which extended northwest to its edge, probable surface evidence of Carr's excavations during the 19th century. Ely Mound has retained much of its nineteen feet height. It has an apron of soil fill that extends to the southeast, likely evidence of a ramp or series of steps ascending the southeast side of the mound. During the 1982 Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission visit, the landowner reported finding subsurface cultural features during maintenance work around the barn located immediately to the north. Based upon the Crockett survey, the principal occupation area associated with the mound likely encompasses the area directly to its south. Given minimal previous disturbances within this southerly area, there is a high probability that intact cultural features would also be present there.

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

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ELY MOUND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE, LEE COUNTY, VA (44LE12)

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 7, 8, 9, 10

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7. DESCRIPTION--Archaeological Analysis

Although the mound is well known to local people and professional archaeologists, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The present land-owner has never permitted excavations of any type in the mound or the area adjacent to it.

KE/ERT

8. SIGNIFICANCE--Historical Background

The Ely Mound Archaeological Site is also historically significant as a result of Lucien Carr's 19th-century excavation. During the 19th century there was substantial controversy regarding whether mounds in the eastern United States were built by a "lost race" of moundbuilders or whether they had been constructed by the ancestors of Native Americans. By the examination of numerous historical references, Lucien Carr, in reporting on his excavations at the Ely Mound, was one of the first individuals to definitively link the Native Americans at the time of European contact with the mound centers and the artifacts associated with them. It was not, however, until 1894 when Cyrus Thomas published his monumental Report of the Mound Explorations of the Bureau of Ethnology that the "lost race" hypothesis was finally viewed as invalid by most archaeologists.

KE/ERT

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Thomas, Cyrus. Report of the Mound Explorations of the Bureau of Ethnology. Washington: Bureau of Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, [1894].

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA--Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

thence extending approximately 700' WSW approximately 50' N of Louisville and Nashville Railroad track; thence extending approximately 800' WNW to S side of fence line, the point of origin.

Boundary Justification: The bounds have been drawn to include the mound itself and from available data, the principal portion of the associated inhabited area which encompasses fourteen acres.