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Caddo Indians to be topic of meeting

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

For thousands of years, the land that is now known as Arkansas has been inhabited by native peoples. For much of that time, the Ouachita River valley and much of southwest Arkansas was home to the Caddo Indians and their ancestors. Because of the significance of this pre-history to southwest Arkansas area, the Clark County Historical Association will host a special presentation featuring Caddo Indian sites along the Ouachita River, the Caddo people, and their artifacts, at noon on Tuesday, Sept. 6, at Western Sizzlin' in Arkadelphia. Mecks Etchieson, a Clark County native and retired Ouachita National Forest Heritage Program Man-

ager, will also discuss some of the results of the recent work at archeological site 3MN0298, excavated by the Arkansas Archeological Society and Arkansas Archeological Survey and hosted by the Ouachita National Forest in 2013 and 2014. Examples of Caddoan pottery and artifacts will be on display.

Archeologists are able to learn a great deal about Arkansas's first people by studying their pottery. According to the Arkansas Archeological Survey, pottery can tell us much about the "material, religious, and intellectual life of past societies and their social interactions such as settlements, trade, and conquests."

Extensive archeological remains exist in the upper Ouachita River valley: al-

most every field bordering on the river contains evidence of Indian presence in the area. Mounds and campsites all along the Ouachita River and its tributaries attracted archeologists and artifact collectors for years. Early explorations by archeologists uncovered a great deal of pre-historic cultural activity and pottery. One early study in the region was M.R. Harrington's 1920 visit during which he found sites that included mounds, cemeteries, and pottery.

Approximately 3,000 years ago, Arkansas's Indian tribes began making items such as bowls, cooking jars, and other containers from materials found in their immediate areas. For example, clay was mixed with other sub-

stances such as dried clay pellets, crushed animal bones, ground sandstone, or plants. The items were hand-shaped and baked in fires to make them hard and non-porous. With these new containers, diets changed---ground seeds, nuts, and grains as thickeners for soups and stews emerged as staples of American Indian life in Arkansas.

About 1,000 years ago, the Caddo Indians began to make distinctive pottery, which included new shapes such as plates, bottles, and even effigy vessels. Making such items became a sophisticated art form employing incision and stamping on wet clay, as well as engraving dry surfaces with tools made of stone, shell, bone or wood. The shapes and

styles of these vessels varied from one river valley to the next. Once European settlers arrived in what is now southwest Arkansas with their iron kettles, crockery, and brass pots, pottery-making declined among the Indians.

Today, excellent examples of Caddo pottery are on display at Ouachita Baptist University and Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, in exhibits developed by the Arkansas Archeological Survey. Established by the state legislature in the 1960s, the Survey's mission is to conserve and research the state's heritage and communicate this information to the public. Henderson State University's Archeological Research Station is one of eleven such stations across

the state. The HSU Station serves as a research and resource center for a nine-county region of west-central Arkansas. Archeological research by HSU Station personnel has focused on understanding ancient Caddo Indian life from sites in the Ouachita, Caddo, and Saline river valleys, and learning about how local residents used resources such as Arkansas novaculite quarried from the Ouachita Mountains.

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clark-countyhistory.org) or 230-1360 or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245-5332).