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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Thelma Mound Archaeological Site

other names/site number 22Cs501

2. Location

street & number [REDACTED] not for publication

city or town Houston vicinity

state Mississippi code MS county Chickasaw code 017 zip code 38851

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Kenneth H. P. Paul

SEPT. 13, 1994

Signature of certifying official/Title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Mississippi Department of Archives and History Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Janet E. Sorenson

11-3-94

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
1		sites
1		structures
		objects
2		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Government/Religion: ceremonial mound

Domestic: habitation site

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture/Subsistence: agricultural field (pecan orchard)

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other N/A

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Archaeology: Prehistoric

Archaeology: Historic-Aboriginal

Ethnic Heritage: Native American

Period of Significance

A.D. 800-1100

late 18th - early 19th centuries

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Transitional Late Woodland/Early

Mississippian

Choctaw

Architect/Builder

N/A

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

National Park Service-Natchez Trace
Parkway Headquarters, Tupelo,
Mississippi

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
National Park Service
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Chickasaw County, Mississippi

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mound mark an associated habitation area. The mound and the habitation area together comprise the National Register property.

The Thelma Mound is an oblong, rectangular platform earthwork with a prominent ramp extending off its north side (see accompanying topographic map). The mound has been damaged, though not severely, by agriculture-related earth moving activity on the northwest corner and on the south side. In addition, two pits dug by vandals scar the mound's northwest summit corner and southwest flank (see topographic map). The mound has approximate basal dimensions of 20 meters E-W x 12 meters N-S, and is about 2 meters high. The mound is covered with trees of various sizes, including southern red oak, sweetgum, dogwood, and black cherry. The surrounding area is a mature pecan grove.

The first archaeological fieldwork at the Thelma site was conducted in 1935 by Moreau B. Chambers, then field archaeologist of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Naming the site after the nearby rural community of Thelma, Chambers noted the presence of five oblong mounds, recorded their measurements, and prepared a sketch map (Chambers 1935). A collection of surface artifacts was made, consisting mainly of undecorated grog/clay-tempered ceramic sherds. The site was subsequently visited and surface collections made in 1942 and 1948 by National Park Service field parties during the preliminary route survey of the Natchez Trace Parkway. Additional site reconnaissances conducted in 1970 and 1973 are described by McGahey (1971:14) and Johnson and Atkinson (1987:63), respectively.

To date, the only excavation to have been carried out at the site consisted of limited testing of the mound conducted in 1984 by James R. Atkinson of the Natchez Trace Parkway, National Park Service, and Jay K. Johnson of the University of Mississippi (Atkinson 1984; Johnson and Atkinson 1987). A 1x1-meter test unit was placed on the east end of the platform summit and was excavated to a depth of 116 cm. From this level, excavation was continued with a post hole digger until a buried, pre-mound topsoil horizon was encountered at 169 cm beneath the mound summit (Johnson and Atkinson 1987:63). The excavation profile exhibited horizontal and vertical variation in soil color and texture suggestive of fill loading. However, no continuous stratigraphic zones were visible, indicating that the mound apparently had been built in a relatively continuous construction episode, not in stages (Johnson and Atkinson 1987:66). The excavation revealed no structural features or remains (e.g., postmolds, wall trenches, clay daub, charred thatch) which are frequently encountered in platform mound contexts. Given the restricted extent of the test unit, however, the possibility that such remains may be present in unexcavated portions of the mound cannot be ruled out.

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Artifacts recovered by the excavation consisted of 35 ceramic sherds, all secondary inclusions in mound fill. The majority (28) were grog/clay-tempered plain, with a few specimens of grog/clay-tempered cordmarked, sand-tempered plain and incised, and shell-tempered plain. Johnson and Atkinson (1987) note that the predominance of undecorated grog/clay-tempered ceramics at Thelma is quite atypical for the region, in which most Late Woodland (Miller III phase) assemblages are characterized by predominantly grog-tempered cordmarked materials. The nearest comparable archaeological complex is the West Jefferson phase, the terminal Late Woodland occupation of the Black Warrior drainage of west-central Alabama (Jenkins and Nielsen 1974; Welch 1990:210, 215). West Jefferson sites have yielded a series of radiocarbon dates indicating a time range for the phase of ca. A.D. 850 to 1100 (Jenkins and Nielsen 1974:155-158; Welch 1990:210, 215). Accordingly, this complex has been used by Johnson and Atkinson (1987) for cross-dating purposes. On the basis of diagnostic ceramics recovered from the mound and the surrounding occupation area, Johnson and Atkinson (1987) and Atkinson (1986b) estimate that the remaining mound and the prehistoric component in the off-mound area date to a transitional Late Woodland-Mississippian time frame (ca. A.D. 800-1100). A charcoal sample excavated from the Thelma Mound yielded a radiocarbon date of A.D. 680 ± 130, which would suggest an earlier period for the mound's construction. However, this date has been discounted due to the ambiguous context of the sample, and the preponderance of ceramic evidence from the site, which indicates a later date (Johnson and Atkinson 1987:69).

Based on the material culture inventory of the prehistoric occupation at Thelma, the site is viewed as reflecting the incipient adoption of extraregional Mississippian cultural traits (a significant minority of shell-tempered ceramics, platform mound ceremonialism) by Late Woodland populations of the area (Atkinson 1986b).

After about A.D. 1100, the Thelma site apparently was abandoned for several hundred years. The site was reoccupied during the late 18th to early 19th centuries by Choctaw Indians, as indicated by diagnostic Chickachae Combed and Chickachae Plain ceramics found near the mound (Johnson and Atkinson 1987:66). Atkinson (1986a) and Johnson and Atkinson (1987) have identified this historic period Indian occupation as the likely location of Holka, a settlement of Choctaws or mixed bloods of Choctaw/white origin recorded in an 1805 ethnohistorical account (Jennings 1947:52) and on a contemporary map (Wilkinson 1802).

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The Thelma Mound archaeological site is significant under National Register Criterion D, in that it has yielded, and remains capable of yielding, information important to understanding both the prehistory and history of Mississippi.

The composition of the artifactual assemblage recovered from the Thelma site indicates that it is one of the earliest known late prehistoric mound sites in northeast Mississippi. As such, much of the site's value lies in its ability to provide data on the beginnings of the Mississippian tradition in the region.

The predominance at the Thelma site of grog/clay-tempered plain ceramics, with a significant minority of Mississippian-style shell-tempered ware, marks the prehistoric component at the site as a terminal Late Woodland occupation beginning to receive outside Mississippian cultural influences. Thelma has been designated as the type site for the provisional Thelma phase, characterized as the phase that "represents the initial acceptance of [extraregional] Mississippian traditions by the indigenous populations of the upper Tombigbee River Valley" (Atkinson 1986:1).

The good state of preservation of the Thelma Mound indicates its potential to supply important additional data pertaining to the emergent Mississippian phenomenon in the region. First appearing in what is now the southeastern U.S. around the beginning of the first millennium A.D., earthen mounds of the rectangular, flat-topped configuration became a ubiquitous manifestation of late prehistoric societies of the Mississippian period (ca. A.D. 1000-1600). Rectangular mounds served as platforms upon which ceremonial activities were conducted, and/or were substructures for elite residences. As such, sites with platform mounds are seen to signify centers of sociopolitical and economic authority (Blitz 1993:69-70; Steponaitis 1986). Additional archaeological investigation of the mound and the associated occupation area could provide valuable data concerning the cultural context of the site and its function in the regional settlement system. Thus, the Thelma site has outstanding potential to further elucidate the timing and nature of the Late Woodland to Mississippian cultural transition in the region, a period during which a marked increase in social complexity and political centralization occurred throughout much of the Southeast (see Smith 1990).

The Thelma site is also important for its identification as one of the few historically documented locations of a late 18th to early 19th century Choctaw Indian occupation in northeast Mississippi. It was during this period that the Indian population of the region underwent fundamental changes in lifeways, adopting Euro-American settlement patterns, subsistence techniques, and other aspects of material culture (Jennings 1947:43, 48, 49). The site accordingly has considerable potential to provide archaeological evidence of Native American acculturation at a time of increasing Euro-American encroachment in the region.

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Atkinson, James R.

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1986a The Location of the 19th Century Choctaw Village of Wholkey in Chickasaw County, Mississippi. Manuscript on file, Natchez Trace Parkway Headquarters, Tupelo, Mississippi.

1986b Post-Woodland Period Archaeological Phases in the Upper Tombigbee Between Tibbee/Line Creeks and Tupelo, Mississippi. Manuscript on file, Natchez Trace Parkway Headquarters, Tupelo, Mississippi.

Blitz, John H.

1993 Ancient Chiefdoms of the Tombigbee. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.

Chambers, Moreau B.

1935 Archaeological site survey form and sketch map of "Old Thelma Group," Chickasaw County, Miss. On file, Record Group 31, Vol. 221, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson.

Jenkins, Ned J. and Jerry J. Nielsen

1974 Archaeological Salvage Investigations at the West Jefferson Steam Plant Site. Report submitted to the Alabama Power Co. Copy on file at Mound State Monument, Moundville, Alabama.

Jennings, Jesse D.

1947 Nutt's Trip to the Chickasaw Country. Journal of Mississippi History 9(1):34-61.

Johnson, Jay K., and James R. Atkinson

1987 New Data on the Thelma Mound Group in Northeast Mississippi. In The Emergent Mississippian: Proceedings of the Sixth Mid-South Archaeological Conference, R.A. Marshall, ed. Cobb Institute of Archaeology, Occasional Papers 87-01.

McGahey, Samuel O.

1971 Archaeological Survey in the Tombigbee River Drainage Area, May-June 1970. Mississippi Archaeological Survey, Preliminary Report No. 2.

Smith, Bruce D. (ed.)

1990 The Mississippian Emergence. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

Steponaitis, Vincas P.

1986 Prehistoric Archaeology in the Southeastern United States, 1970-1985. Annual Reviews of Anthropology 15:363-404.

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