

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

MAR 15 1993

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Deasonville Archaeological Site

other names/site number 22Yz527

## 2. Location

## 3. Classification

## Ownership of Property

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

## Category of Property

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

## Number of Resources within Property

| Contributing | Noncontributing |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1            | 1 buildings     |
|              | 1 sites         |
|              | 1 structures    |
|              | 0 objects       |
| 1            | 2 Total         |

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously  
listed in the National Register 0

## 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. ☐ See continuation sheet.

*Kenneth H. P. Paul*  
Signature of certifying official Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
Mississippi Department of Archives and History

*March 9, 1993*  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: village site

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: single dwelling

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

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Deasonville archaeological site (22-Yz-527) consists of a multicomponent occupation area covering approximately 3 acres.

The site is currently covered by a mature pecan grove and grass lawn.

The site was excavated in 1929-1930 as a joint project of the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Collins 1932). The fieldwork was directed by Henry B. Collins, Jr. of the BAE, with assistance from MDAH staff members Moreau B. C. Chambers and James A. Ford. At the time of the excavation, the site was in cultivation as a cotton field and the then-young saplings of pecan had been planted a few years earlier (Collins 1932:2).

The site is characterized by a midden deposit containing abundant ceramics, lithics, animal bone, and mussel shell.

According to the 1932 site report, habitation debris generally did not extend beneath the plowzone; however, once the plowzone had been stripped off by Collins' excavation crew, a profusion of intact postmolds were revealed embedded in the subsoil. Concentrations of midden, described as "rich black earth containing potsherds, animal bones, and other refuse," reached depths of 2 1/2 feet in places. These deep deposits were found to be contained in wall-trench features dug into the subsoil (Collins 1932:2).

In March 1992, the site was revisited by Keith Baca and David Morgan of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to determine the subsurface integrity and spatial extent of the site as compared with the 1932 description. As the ground surface is currently concealed by grass, the presence of dark, organic-stained midden soil was detected through the use of a small-diameter core rod.

☒ See continuation sheet

## 8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☒ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Archaeology-prehistoric

Science

Period of Significance

A.D. 400-600

A.D. 1200-1600

1929-1930

Significant Dates

N/A

N/A

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Baytown (Deasonville phase)

Mississippian

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Deasonville archaeological site possesses significance under National Register criterion D, in that it has yielded, and retains the potential to yield, information important to knowledge of the prehistory of Mississippi; and criterion A, in that the 1929-30 archaeological investigation carried out at this site contributed significantly to the establishment of American archaeology as a scientific discipline during the early 20th century.

The Deasonville site is the type site for the Deasonville phase of the Baytown culture. Based in large part on ceramic materials obtained through excavation at this site in 1929-1930, Ford (1936) defined his "Deasonville complex." The Deasonville classificatory unit has since been revised and refined (cf. Greengo 1964:13-14; Phillips 1970:11, 546-550; Williams and Brain 1983:364-366, 403-404), and it remains a useful culture-historical/chronological concept in the study of the archaeology

As it is now designated, the Deasonville phase comprises the initial half of the Baytown period. Baytown represents a regional variant of the Late Woodland societies which occupied what is now Mississippi between A.D. 400 and 800.

It has been acknowledged that Henry B. Collins' Deasonville site investigation initiated the modern era of archaeology in the Lower Mississippi Valley (Blitz 1988:6; Brain 1989:5). The work at Deasonville, a village site, represented a marked departure from most previous archaeological excavations in the Southeast, which had usually been characterized by burial mound-oriented searches for exhibit-quality grave goods (Stoltman 1973:135). In his introduction to the Deasonville report, Collins emphasized that comprehensive interpretation of southeastern prehistory would require the recovery of data from all kinds of sites, not merely the conspicuous mounds (Collins 1932:1). Hence, a village site was chosen for excavation based on its potential to provide information, not exhibit-grade

☒ See continuation sheet

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

☒ See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☒ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository:

Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property                     

UTM References

A                       
Zone Easting Northing

C                     

B                       
Zone Easting Northing

D                     

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

☒ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

☒ See continuation sheet

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Keith A. Baca and Geoffrey R. Lehmann, archaeologists

organization Mississippi Department of Archives and History date March 9, 1993

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Approximately 50 core samples were taken from a series of transects [redacted] In general, midden depth was found not to exceed 15 cm in most places tested; however, corings did reveal midden extending to as much as 50 cm deep in a few spots. This generally shallow midden with scattered deep deposits, probably indicative of intact sub-plowzone features, matches the description of the site conditions given in the 1932 report. The deepest accumulations of midden detected during the 1992 site visit were concentrated [redacted]

[redacted] The exact location of the 1929-30 excavation is unknown, as the excavation limits were not tied in to any permanent datum point. However, the general location description given in the 1932 report indicates that the excavated area lies within the boundaries delineated above.

The aforementioned house and tennis court were both constructed in the 1960s or early 1970s. These structures intrude somewhat into the northern boundaries of the midden deposit. The grade levelling and other foundation preparation work done prior to their construction destroyed or at least truncated any underlying archaeological deposits.

[redacted] For the purposes of this nomination, the house and tennis court constitute noncontributing resources within the site boundaries.

The excavation of the Deasonville site in 1929-1930 uncovered the remains of three large circular structures described in the report as "house rings." Each consisted of a series of concentric, midden-filled wall trenches in which individual postmolds were visible. The largest of the three structures was approximately 60 ft. in diameter. The other two measured 45 ft. and 38 ft. in diameter, respectively. The significance of the concentric arrangement of the wall trenches is uncertain; Collins suggested that they may indicate expansion, rebuilding, or repair of the structures. Other possibilities offered were that the inner trenches represent supports for internal rows of benches which may have lined the walls of the structures, or were reinforcing roof supports (Collins 1932:8-11). Within the interior of two of the circular wall-trench patterns were found a series of individually set postmolds, many of which were arranged in rectangular patterns. These may indicate the remains of interior partitions or perhaps roof supports. Alternately, it was stated that the inner

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rectangular post patterns may not have comprised part of the circular structures, but may instead represent separate, rectangular structures built before or after the circular ones (Collins 1932:8).

Based on its large size, Collins suggested in his report that the largest structure (House Ring No. 1) might represent a communal "council house," citing as an analogy ethnohistorical descriptions of large council houses of similar size and layout in use among the 18th century Cherokee and Creek tribes (Collins 1932:10-12). The two smaller structures were interpreted as ordinary dwellings.

It is unfortunately not possible to definitely associate the excavated structures with any of the several occupations now recognized at the site, since (except for a diagnostically ambiguous pot from a house trench) no specific intrasite provenience was recorded for the various artifact types recovered. The wall trench construction technique is most commonly associated with Mississippian period occupations; however, Mississippian houses were characteristically rectangular, not circular. The circular house plan, on the other hand, was the standard construction practice of the earlier Woodland period, but the posts were generally set in individually dug holes, not trenches. It is this anomalous combination of techniques associated with two separate culture-historical traditions which makes a temporal assignment for the excavated structures uncertain.

The only other recorded occurrence of a circular wall trench structure in Mississippi is one reported for the Boyd site, in adjacent Madison County (Bohannon 1965); however, the Boyd structure (which, like those at Deasonville, is of uncertain cultural affiliation) was not composed of concentric trenches. As such, the concentric configuration of the Deasonville structures remains unique in the archaeological literature of Mississippi.

Several features described as fire pits were found within the house rings. In addition, one human burial, consisting of the flexed skeleton of a child, was found in the outer trench of the largest circular structure. No associated artifacts were reported.

Quantities of well-preserved food remains were recovered from the midden fill contained in the wall trenches and post holes. Mammal bones, predominantly those of deer, were the most abundant. The second most plentiful faunal material consisted of freshwater mussel shells. A number of unbroken box turtle carapaces were found, as were a few

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turkey and fish bones. Floral remains consisted of pieces of charred corncoobs.

It is now recognized from the excavated and surface-collected materials described and illustrated in the report that at least two and possibly three successive occupations are represented at the site. A Marksville period component (ca. A.D. 1-400) is tentatively indicated by a few Marksville Stamped sherds. An intensive Deasonville phase occupation (ca. A.D. 400-600) is denoted by the presence in the collection of large quantities of ceramic diagnostics, including the clay-tempered types Baytown Plain, var. Reed, Mulberry Creek Cordmarked, var. Edwards, and Coles Creek Incised, var. Hunt. Also indicative of the Deasonville phase occupation are several Collins Side Notched arrow points. The Deasonville diagnostics predominate in the artifact inventory of this site. Materials of the Mississippian period (A.D. 1200-1600) include various types of shell-tempered ceramics as well as Madison triangular points. The Mississippian artifacts constitute the second most plentiful materials in the site report inventory.

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materials. Willey and Sabloff (1980) have noted that the development of methodological approaches for the establishment of regional culture-historical chronologies was the predominant research emphasis of American archaeology during the years spanning 1914-1940. As such, the 1929-1930 excavation of the Deasonville site ranks among the first problem-oriented investigations to be undertaken in the Southeast during this stage in the development of the discipline. Prior to the 1920s, archaeologists working in the southeastern U.S. had by and large been preoccupied with object-oriented specimen collecting and the descriptive classification of prehistoric remains. Concerted efforts to gain control over the diachronic dimension of the regional archaeological record began with the work of Collins, whose Deasonville investigation provided key baseline data for productive subsequent research.

Collins stated in the Deasonville report that "the most important immediate problem of Southeastern archeology is to establish a basis for a chronology of prehistoric sites" (Collins 1932:17). He recognized that ceramic style groups, defined through the analysis of pottery fragments found in abundance at old habitation sites, would eventually provide a primary means by which the prehistoric period could be subdivided. Collins did determine that the Deasonville site was fully prehistoric due to the absence of ceramic styles he had previously identified at historically documented Choctaw, Natchez, and Tunica sites. However, the Deasonville site's cultural deposits were too shallow to reveal any stratigraphic succession of different artifact styles. Consequently, Collins was forced to conclude that there was not yet enough evidence to infer a chronological sequence for the materials recovered.

Although Collins was unable to derive chronological information from the Deasonville materials as had been hoped, this situation would soon change. James A. Ford, one of the participants in the fieldwork at the site, ultimately synthesized the available data from Deasonville and other key sites in Mississippi and Louisiana to construct the first prehistoric chronological framework for the region (Ford 1936). On the basis of stratigraphic excavations elsewhere and the application of new seriation techniques for the sequential arrangement of surface collections, Ford placed his several ceramic typological groups or "complexes" in chronological order. His Deasonville complex was placed in a temporal position postdating the Marksville complex and preceding the historic Tunica complex. This regional scheme, though rudimentary, provided the foundation upon which subsequent formulations for lower

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[redacted] in prehistory have been built. In addition, Ford's pioneering work had direct influence on the advancement of archaeology in other areas of the eastern United States: it has been noted that Ford's classificatory synthesis (derived in part from Deasonville site data) marked the establishment of an integrated approach that combined stratigraphic, seriation, and typological procedures "which made possible regional chronologies first in the Southeast and then in the Ohio Valley-Upper Mississippi area" (Willey and Sabloff 1980:103). Considering the important role that it has played in the delineation of regional prehistory, the Deasonville site merits inclusion in the National Register on the basis of information previously yielded.

The 1992 subsurface core testing at the Deasonville site indicated that sub-plowzone cultural deposits are extant at the site. Consequently, valuable additional information can likely be obtained through further investigation, which could be used to address current research issues pertaining to chronology, settlement patterning, and subsistence for both the Deasonville (A.D. 400-600) and Mississippian (A.D. 1200-1600) period occupations of the region. The site's potential is magnified when it is considered that no other professionally excavated site in the uplands of Mississippi has yet yielded comparable quantities of Deasonville phase materials; indeed, few sites [redacted] are currently known to have a denser Deasonville deposit than the type site itself.

Deasonville phase sites [redacted] are notable for the frequent presence of shell middens, a trait not associated with preceding or subsequent cultures in the region. Phillips (1970:549) has suggested that the Deasonville occupation of the Yazoo Basin may have been primarily seasonal, based on the exploitation of mussels and other aquatic subsistence resources found in abundance in the region's lowland riverine environment. Such foods would have been most efficiently procured during the late summer through fall dry season, [redacted] is an alluvial floodplain, highly susceptible to widespread annual inundation. Under this postulated scenario, the Deasonville phase sites located in the uplands to the east represent base settlements, occupied during the majority of the year.

Phillips' hypothesis of possible seasonal migration of Deasonville populations between [redacted] As such, the Deasonville site, located in the uplands, is ideally situated to provide comparisons with

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contemporaneous Yazoo Basin sites. The 1932 site report lists notable quantities of well-preserved subsistence remains. Although the intrasite context of these materials was not differentiated during the excavation of the multicomponent site, standard modern field techniques unknown at the time of the original excavation could be used to readily separate the materials secured by further fieldwork at the site into their respective components. Floral and faunal material recovered from identified Deasonville phase features could provide information on the kinds of subsistence resources procured in the area and the seasons in which they were taken. In this manner, analysis could be brought to bear on the question of whether differential seasonal scheduling is evident [REDACTED]. The comparison of seasonality data from upland settlements like the Deasonville site with information secured from suitable [REDACTED] lowland sites can likely provide the best approach for testing the hypothesis of a seasonal round between the two adjacent physiographic/environmental zones during Deasonville times.

Morgan (n.d.:42) has stated that finer temporal control for the Deasonville through Mississippian sequence in the region is needed. While the relative position of the Deasonville phase is fairly well established, absolute dates are scarce and the initial and terminal temporal boundaries remain vague. In addition, the Mississippian occupational sequence [REDACTED] has yet to be subdivided. The organic materials present in remaining sub-plowzone midden deposits may provide the radiocarbon dates needed to help alleviate the current dearth of chronological information for the region.

A longstanding puzzle with significant chronological implications concerns the unusual circular wall-trench structures found at the site, a sparsely documented prehistoric architectural manifestation in Mississippi. As discussed in the description section, it is uncertain whether these remains are attributable to the Deasonville or the Mississippian occupation. Even if only short segments of circular trench from additional structures remain intact at the site, recovery of artifacts and/or C-14 samples from such features could provide the data needed to address the question of the cultural affiliation of circular, wall trench houses in the region.

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1965 The Boyd Site: Madison County, Mississippi. Completion of Resource Study Proposal NATR-2, [REDACTED]. Unpublished manuscript, copy on file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson.

Brain, Jeffrey P.

1989 Winterville: Late Prehistoric Culture Contact in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Archaeological Report 23. Jackson.

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1932 Excavations at a Prehistoric Indian Village Site in Mississippi. Proceedings of the United States National Museum 79(32):1-22.

Ford, James A.

1936 Analysis of Indian Village Site Collections from Louisiana and Mississippi. Department of Conservation, Louisiana Geological Survey Anthropological Study No. 2. New Orleans.

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Phillips, Philip

1970 Archaeological Survey [REDACTED] Mississippi, 1949-1955. Papers of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Vol. 60. Cambridge.

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1980 A History of American Archaeology, 2nd ed. W. H. Freeman, San Francisco.

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1983 Excavations [REDACTED] Mississippi, 1958-1960. Papers of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Vol. 74. Cambridge.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the site are demarcated by the limits of horizontal distribution of midden debris and artifacts. Observed dark subsurface midden soil and occupational debris (small potsherds, lithic debitage, etc.)

