

History of West Virginia before the Civil War

Early cultures

While we know there were people living in the area that is now West Virginia thousands of years ago, little is known about them until around 3000 years ago.

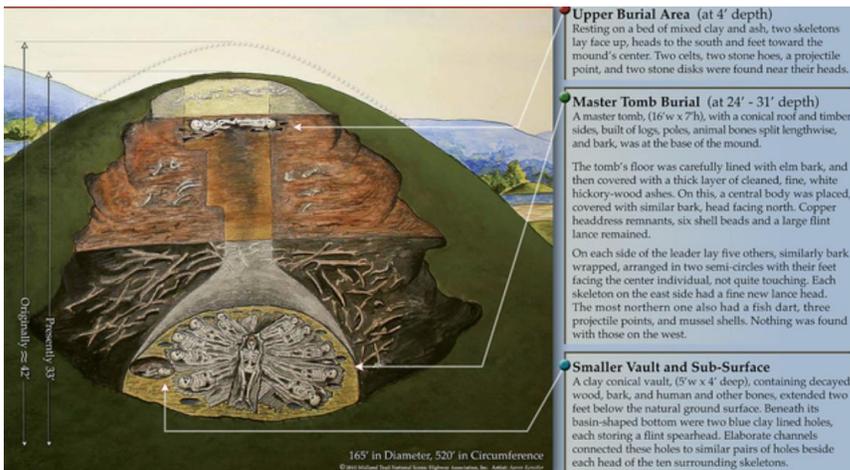
In the period between 800 B.C. and 500 A.D. (2800-1500 years ago, ending about 1000 years before the arrival of Europeans), people living in the area left behind objects that give us some information about their existence here.

These people obtained food in the following ways:

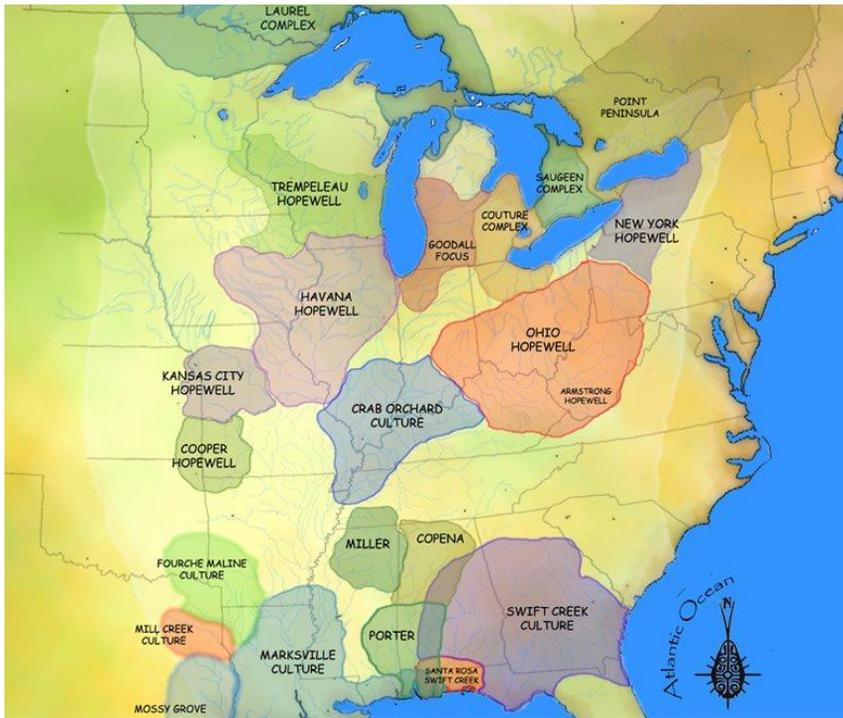
- They hunted deer, elk, black bear, woodchuck, beaver, porcupine, turkey, trumpeter swan, and ruffed grouse.
- They gathered various edible seeds, grasses, and nuts.
- They cultivated pumpkin, squash, sunflower, and other plants.



They lived along river valleys in scattered settlements of about 10 families living in 1 to 3 circular dwellings built with wooden posts from 15 to 45 feet in diameter. They moved every few years to fresh ground within the nearby area.



Some of the early people built large mounds for burial and religious purposes, some of which can still be seen today.



By 100 B.C. various such groups of people (termed Hopewell Culture) who were living between the Appalachian Mountains and the Great Plains had developed an extensive trading network.



Animal figure ceremonial pipes

Watch the [3-minute video](#) which gives you a good look at an art object from the Hopewell Culture. This was found in a burial mound in Ohio, less than 100 miles from West Virginia.

Mysterious Disappearance

Sometime around the year 500, the Hopewell trade network ended, mound building stopped, and the art forms of these people were no longer produced. War is a possible cause, as villages dating to the end of this period shifted to larger communities; they built defensive fortifications of palisade walls and ditches. Archeological research indicates that use of the bow and arrow reached the eastern woodlands around this time; before this, short spears and spear-throwers were used. But this is not the only theory, and no one knows for sure.