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Name(s): Mary L. Kwas and Robert C. Mainfort, Jr.  
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## ANTIQUARIANS' PERSPECTIVES ON PINSON MOUNDS REVISITED: A RESPONSE TO MCNUTT

Mary L. Kwas and Robert C. Mainfort Jr.

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*McNutt (2005) misrepresents our treatment of various historical accounts of the Pinson Mounds site. We take issue with McNutt's uncritical use of these same accounts. We also comment on some specific issues raised by McNutt regarding the "Inner Citadel" and the "Eastern Citadel."*

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### The Historical Accounts

In what he characterizes as an "exploratory paper," McNutt (2005) proposes rather novel interpretations of Pinson Mounds and other Middle Woodland sites in the mid-South. Two major thrusts of his paper are to reassess various historical accounts of Pinson Mounds and to report heretofore unrecognized (or, at least, unreported in print) astronomical alignments at this and other sites (McNutt 2005:142). We restrict our comments here specifically to Pinson Mounds and especially to matters regarding historical accounts of the site. McNutt's proposed astronomical alignments will be addressed in a subsequent paper.

McNutt's (2005) article begins with a misleading review of Kwas's (1996) article, "Antiquarians' Perspectives on Pinson Mounds," and Mainfort's (1996) appendix to the article, "Summary of Investigations of Mounds and Embankments Identified at the Pinson Mounds Site by William Myer." Our reasons for writing the article were to (1) cite all known references to Pinson Mounds in early publications and provide brief biographical information on the authors; (2) publish early archival references to Pinson Mounds, such as the primary documents by William E. Myer and civil engineer E. G. Buck; (3) untangle and correct garbled information in later published sources; and (4) compare early descriptions of the mounds and embankments with archaeological observations made during the mid-1970s and 1980s (e.g., Mainfort 1980, 1986, 1988). The purpose of the 1996 article was not to denigrate the reports of early observers, nor to dismiss all historical accounts of the embankments, but to read McNutt (2005:143, 146), one would think otherwise. Despite acknowledging that Kwas's "citations are complete, accurate, and germane to the subject at hand" (McNutt 2005:142), it is unfortunate that McNutt

did not extend the same professional courtesy when citing our material.

If anything, Kwas's interpretation of the accounts from early sources may have been handled with too light a touch, largely allowing the citations to speak for themselves rather than providing a historiographic critique. For example, her first paragraph discussing earthen embankments at Pinson Mounds appears only after presenting and citing four early accounts. She then states:

*The existence of walls or "circumvallations" mentioned in this and earlier accounts is also worth noting. As stated earlier, the remnant of a circular embankment is confirmed in the Eastern Citadel section of the site, but no other embankments are visible or have been verified. A map published by W. E. Myer (1922) shows extensive earthworks surrounding the site. Based on these early accounts, there may have been additional embankments surrounding Sauls Mound, but the remaining ones shown on Myer's map were probably natural landforms or agricultural field boundaries (Kwas 1996:89).*

Although earlier researchers questioned the existence of some embankments portrayed by Myer (Kwas 1997:60; Morse and Polhemus 1963), Mainfort did not completely rule out their existence. In his appendix to the article, Mainfort (1996) briefly discussed each of Myer's (1922) 34 mounds and three embankments based on testing by professional archaeologists from the 1960s to the 1980s. He discussed the embankments as follows:

*Eastern Citadel. For approximately 141° of its diameter, the wall of this enclosure forms a virtually perfect circle with a diameter of 181.4 m (Mainfort 1986, 1988; Thunen 1990). Most of the southwest section of the embankment was destroyed between 1917 (when it was mapped by E. G. Buck) and 1937 (the date of the earliest known aerial photograph of the site). Several openings ("gateways") in the enclosure wall were recorded by Buck (Myer 1922) and are visible today; some of these may represent prehistoric features, while others probably are of modern origin.*

*Inner Citadel. No evidence of this enclosure is visible today; a natural rise that meanders roughly northward from Mound 17 probably represents a section of putative embankment. Testing at the Mound 11 and 13 localities, both of which were "connected" to this system of embankments, argues against the existence of such a prehistoric earthwork, but Broster's testing of Mound 24 raises the possibility of some prehistoric construction. [Note that Mound 24 was located near, but not attached to the "Inner Citadel."]*

*Other embankments. Even Myer's (1922) map notes the speculative nature of some sections of embankments, as well as alleged "palisades." The possibility of additional embankments at Pinson Mounds should not be dismissed out of hand, however. For example, limited testing of a small rise about*

*200 m southwest of Ozier Mound disclosed evidence of prehistoric construction at a locality that roughly equates with a section of embankment illustrated by Myer; an unknown portion of this probable earthwork has been destroyed by state nursery operations (Mainfort 1996:119).*

How any of the above statements can be construed to suggest that we rejected the possibility of additional embankments that are no longer visible, or that we capriciously discounted the reports of early observers, is unfathomable.

We must take exception with McNutt's uses of the early historical sources. Reading and assessing historical accounts is not straightforward; it requires skepticism and thoughtful interpretation of the accounts and their contexts. A written or published account does not constitute unimpeachable proof or even probable truth. Neither does, necessarily, a "large number of references" (McNutt 2005:146). A classic example is provided by the various documents pertaining to the infamous Civil War battle at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, which have been used to support the case for both a massacre of Union troops and a glorious Confederate victory (Cimprich 2005; Cimprich and Mainfort 1989). By not providing a stronger critique in her original article, Kwas (1996) left readers without the benefit of our understanding of the context of the early sources.

Several authors, including McNutt (2005:145–146), give too much credence to the secondhand account of Col. Pickard Jones that he rode six miles on the embankments around Pinson Mounds. Jones did not make that observation as a military man, nor even as an adult. By his own account, he told J. G. Cisco that he had ridden the embankments *when he was a boy* (Kwas 1996:96), which would likely have put his age somewhere between 6 and 13 years.

Cisco first reported Jones's statement in a publication circa 1895 (Kwas 1996:95), but Jones probably told Cisco about Pinson Mounds around the time Cisco first visited the site in 1877 (Kwas 1996:110). William Myer, crediting Cisco, later reported that the ride had occurred in the year 1840 (Kwas 1996:110). So minimally, there were 37 years separating the memories of a boy from the reporting and 55 years separating the memories from publication. A child could not be expected to accurately estimate the height or length of earthworks, or to be able to distinguish between man-made or natural landforms. Nor could anyone expect a minimally 35-year-old memory to constitute an unimpeachable account of an event. Thus, aside from its interest as a historical anecdote, Colonel Jones's account is virtually worthless.

Regarding the survey (i.e., with a transit—not an archaeological survey) of mounds and embankments that local civil engineer E. G. Buck conducted for William Myer, McNutt (2005:144) states, "We must

presuppose that E. G. Buck saw *some* thing." Of course he did; Buck saw the same mounds and embankments we can see today. But we *can't* presuppose that Buck actually saw everything Myer wanted him to see. Buck was hired by Myer to map the mounds and embankments of the Pinson Mounds site (Buck to Myer, letter, 8 September 1917; National Anthropological Archives [NAA] Ms. 2150-A) and anything Myer pointed out, Buck could measure and place on a map. Buck was not hired to determine which rises were man-made and which natural, and that distinction would have been irrelevant to him. Perhaps the most telling statement regarding what Buck actually saw came two years after he had finished his mapping work. Myer wrote for clarification, asking him to "calculate roughly the cubic yards in the ancient walls around the old town at Pinson. These walls extended about 4 miles, counting the inner and outer wall" (Kwas 1996:101). Buck replied: "For the wall around the Pinson Group: I am unable to give you anything but an estimate based on an assumed size of wall—Taking this as 4 feet high—with top 4 feet wide and a base of 18 feet—which is the approximate average of the wall around #29, the yardage for the four miles is 34420" (Kwas 1996:101).

This strongly suggests that Buck had not seen the extensive embankments Myer thought were there, so he could not measure the height and width. The only way Buck could provide the volumetric estimate Myer wanted was to extrapolate from the measurements he had taken on the only embankments he could see, which were those around Mound 29—the "Eastern Citadel." Buck clearly visited the site in the company of Myer on at least one occasion (Buck to Myer, letter, 8[?] September 1917; NAA Ms. 2150-A), and it is likely that he did so at other times.

Myer's comments at the end of Warren K. Moorehead's note regarding an inspection of Pinson Mounds (Kwas 1996:102; W. K. Moorehead, undated notes; NAA Ms. 2150-A) make it clear that the outer "breastworks" (so labeled on his map of the site) were not plainly visible as early as 1877: "In 1877 Cisco saw the remains of breastworks or walls in Ozier's fields, is not certain about seeing them in Watlington's fields." The Ozier in question is S. M. Ozier, who on December 3, 1880, purchased a 334 92/160-acre tract (Madison County Courthouse [MCC], Jackson, Tennessee, 1880: Deed Book [DB] 38:367; Mrs. S. E. Hart to S. M. Ozier) that encompassed Mound 5 (Ozier Mound), with the tract extending about 167 m west of the mound (topographic map accompanying Porter Dunlap to J. O. Hazard, letter, 8 July 1947, copy on file, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Nashville). S. M. Watlington owned a large tract bounded on the east side by the Ozier tract (MCC 1947: DB 148:400; M. T. Lawrence, et ux. to

State of Tennessee). Note that Cisco apparently said nothing to Myer about the presence of "breastworks" or "walls" within the Sauls tract, which encompassed the Inner Citadel and had been owned by the family since 1866 (MCC 1866: DB 26:476; Patrick Sauls from Robert A. Connally).

Further evidence that Cisco did not observe the Inner Citadel appears in his own early published description of Pinson Mounds: "The mounds are connected, or rather surrounded, by a line of earthworks or embankments about two miles long" (Cisco 1879). This is unlikely to be a reference to the Inner Citadel, which is only about a mile long. It is worth mentioning that J. G. Cisco did not visit Pinson Mounds in the company of William Myer and had no direct role in on-site identification of the features Myer chose to identify as mounds and embankments. Cisco was an antiquarian who spent a fair amount of time at Pinson Mounds and obtained collections from there, as well as other archaeological sites in Madison County, Tennessee (Kwas 1996). Had Cisco observed an embankment surrounding Sauls Mound in the 1870s and 1880s, it is virtually certain that he would have reported the existence in print (Cisco 1879, 1902) or to William Myer. He did neither. Further, it seems unlikely that such a feature would have gone unnoticed by Cisco yet be observed by Myer over three decades later. Indeed, the annotations on Myer's map (Kwas 1996:106; Myer 1922; McNutt [2005:144] presents a modified version of the map) makes clear that Myer, himself, saw little, if any, evidence of the Inner Citadel embankment.

### The Inner Citadel Mounds

In attempting to bolster his case for the existence of the Inner Citadel, McNutt (2005:145) states that "only one (Mound 13)" of the mounds shown as connected to the embankment "has been tested and disproved as a real or potential mound." This is not correct. Mound 11, located north of Mound 9, was recorded as a rectangular earthwork measuring approximately 170 by 180 feet at the base and 3.5 feet tall (Buck to Myer, letter, 7 September 1917; NAA Ms. 2150-A). As recorded, it is the largest of the mounds shown as connected to the Inner Citadel embankment. The Mound 11 locality was examined rather extensively in 1978 after being damaged by heavy equipment, at which time a number of Middle Woodland features were found (Mainfort 1996; Toplovich 1980). Although over 40 cm of soil were removed from the surface of this rise, no evidence of basketloading was observed by any of the archaeologists (including Mainfort) who inspected the area.

The status of Mound 17 as a constructed earthwork is unresolved, though McNutt (2005:151) seems willing to accept it as a prehistoric mound. Buck (Buck to Myer, letter, 7 September 1917, NAA Ms. 2150-A) recorded the dimensions of Mound 17 as 120 by 160 ft, with a height of 3.5 ft. In 1974, John Broster (Broster, Adair, and Mainfort 1980:37) profiled a substantial disturbance in the "center of the mound" and observed evidence of basketloading; there is no photographic record of the profile. Broster estimated the dimensions of Mound 17 as "40 feet in length and one meter above present ground surface." In the 1980s Mainfort (1996:117) cut several profiles in disturbed portions of the landform (i.e., the same general area profiled by Broster) and saw no evidence of artificial construction (also lacking a photographic record)—only sand. As longtime local resident John Sauls informed Mainfort in 1980, the center of the "mound" was removed for use as sandy fill (cf. Mainfort 1996:117). While we interpret the locality designated Mound 17—at least a substantial portion of it—as a sandy knoll, additional testing may be necessary to conclusively resolve the issue.

McNutt (2005:145) cites Mounds 9, 10, and 12—all located within the Inner Citadel and not connected to the embankment—as evidence that supports the existence of the Inner Citadel and the problematic mounds (two of which, as noted above, clearly are not constructed earthworks) connected by the embankment. This is specious. The fact that William Myer correctly identified the 72-ft-tall Sauls Mound as a prehistoric earthwork has no bearing on the existence of the Inner Citadel. We will add that, to our knowledge, McNutt (2005:151) is the only researcher to take seriously Mainfort's (1986:26) whimsical statement regarding Mound 10 and a "ritual specialist." This comment is one of several in a sequence of "insider jokes" exchanged over the years between Mainfort and James B. Griffin that originated with a passage in Griffin's (1979:266–279) contribution to the 1978 Chillicothe conference.

The remaining "mounds" located along the Inner Citadel embankment have not been located conclusively, but not for want of effort. A number of Myer's other putative mounds have, however, been investigated and proven to be natural landforms. These include, but are not limited to, Mound 1 (90 by 120 ft at the base and 6 ft tall), Mound 13 (150 ft in diameter and 3.5 ft tall; but note that on Myer's [1922] map Mound 13 is portrayed as much larger than the stated dimensions), Mound 21 (160 ft in diameter and 4 ft tall), Mound 25 (150 ft in diameter and 2.5 ft tall), Mound 27 (30 ft in diameter and 4 ft tall), and the rather large Mound 35 (100 ft in diameter and 15 ft tall), located south of the Forked Deer River (Mainfort 1996). Based on repeated surface inspection between 1979 and 1989, as well as the archaeological findings noted above, we suspect

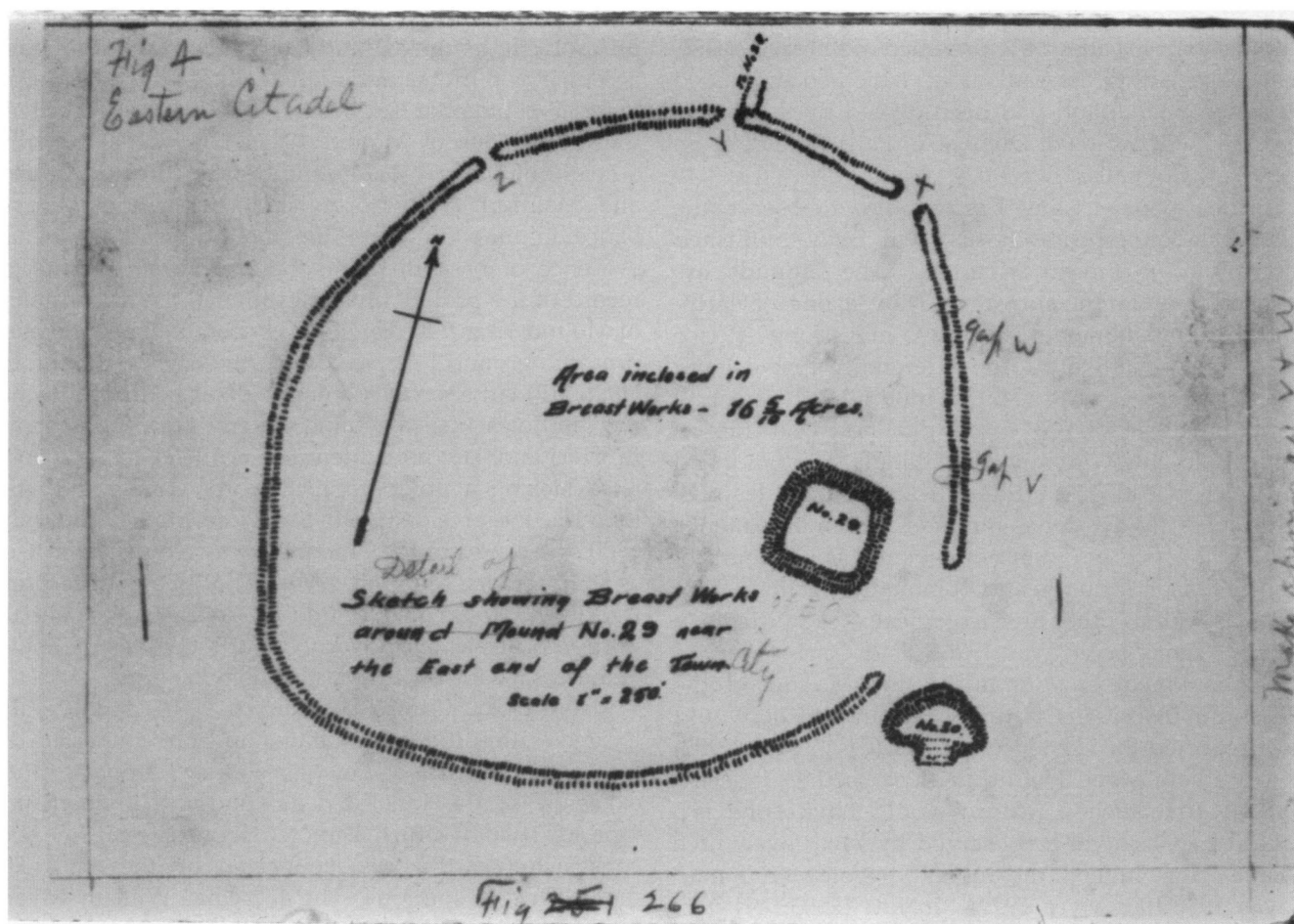


Figure 1. E. G. Buck's original drawing of the Eastern Citadel, with annotations presumably added by William Myer (NAA Ms. 2150-A).

that this also is the case with Mounds 16 (125 ft in diameter and 3.5 ft tall), 22 (120 ft in diameter and 1.0 ft tall), and 23 (100 ft in diameter and 2.0 ft tall), all of which are shown on Myer's (1922) map as connected to the Inner Citadel embankment. Myer also missed some mounds, including one located about 300 m south-southeast of the Twin Mounds (Morse 1986:99; this may be the mound identified as "36" on McNutt's [2005] Figure 5).

### The Eastern Citadel

The existence of the earthen geometric enclosure that William Myer (1922) named the Eastern Citadel has never been disputed. We do, however, take serious issue with McNutt's discussion of the physical layout of the enclosure (again, leaving for another time his claims regarding astronomical alignments).

McNutt (2005:152) seemingly dismisses the importance of the radial center in the design of the geometric

enclosure and, indeed, seems to imply that the very concept of such a point was some fanciful invention of Mainfort's. The radial center of the enclosure is, of course, the radial section of the circular portion of the earthen embankment, which, if complete, would have a radius of about 181 m (as measured to the top of the embankment). This point clearly had some importance for the builders of the enclosure (cf. Thunen 1990:148 and 1998:66).

The location of the radial center and the diameter of circular arc were determined by professional engineer James Marshall (see Marshall [1987] for some discussion of his work at other Middle Woodland enclosures), who surveyed the enclosure in 1983 and produced a folio-sized topographic map that closely matches the photogrammetric map of the enclosure, which McNutt (2005:153) refers to as "Mainfort's map." The latter, with the artistic representation of the radial center, has appeared at greatly reduced scale in various publications (e.g., Mainfort 1986). Mainfort and Robert Thunen attempted to test this area in 1989, but the available

earthmoving equipment was unsuited to the task, and they halted work rather than risking damage to the area (Thunen 1990:157).

The "true" (gravitational) center mentioned by McNutt, with the location shown in his Figure 11c, is irrelevant to the design of the enclosure. That point was not used to lay out the geometric portion of the enclosure, and because the remainder of the enclosure does not represent a geometric figure, the point has no discernable importance to the builders of the enclosure. In fact, it represents a "center" only in a gross, generic sense.

Moreover, the point selected by McNutt for his astronomical backsight involving the enclosure is *neither* the radial center nor the true center. Rather it is "quite close" to the radial center and "even closer" to the true center (McNutt 2005:152). The actual distances involved are approximately 27 m and 16 m, respectively. Twenty-seven meters represents about 15 percent of the radius of the geometric portion of the enclosure. "Close," obviously, is a subjective term. Note, too, that the elevation of McNutt's backsight is approximately 10 m lower than that of the openings along the eastern portion of the enclosure.

Interestingly, neither of the two easternmost openings in the enclosure appears on Buck's original unpublished drawing of the enclosure (Figure 1), which was intended for use as Figure 266 in Myer's long monograph (Kwas 1996). Presumably it was Myer who marked these openings, which he labeled "gap V" and "gap W," with an annotation (probably to a graphic artist at the Smithsonian Institution) reading "make opening at V + W" (Figure 1). Continuing counter-clockwise, three other openings are labeled "X," "Y," and "Z." The letters that appear at various points along the embankment on Myer's published site map refer to points at which E. G. Buck measured cross-sections of the wall (see Kwas [1996:110]; contra McNutt 2005:152–153). At any rate, we suspect that the easternmost openings in the enclosure wall existed at the time Buck mapped the site; whether they are part of the original design or nineteenth-century alterations is unknown (Mainfort 1996:119). Perhaps more importantly, the conflicting information shown on Buck's map underscores the importance of carefully assessing historical documents.

### Concluding Remarks

Readers who are interested in evaluating McNutt's (2005) claims would do well to read our original article (Kwas 1996; Mainfort 1996) in order to understand the context of our statements and read the complete and accurate citations of the early sources. It is disappoint-

ing that in responding to McNutt, we have been forced to repeat so much of what we have written before.

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