



Our Old Bookcase, May 11, 2017, Mastodon Dig at Rossburg, Ohio

Photo caption: The Mastodon Molar was found at a Rossburg site in 2002. Among the dozen volunteers digging the mastodon bones were Joyce Alig, Dale Gnidovec, and Bob Converse. [Photograph by Elaine Holzapfel.]

OUR OLD BOOK CASE

By Joyce L. Alig, President, Mercer County Historical Society

In December 2002, Henry Post was plowing the field on the west side of St. Rt. 118 at Rossburg and found Mastodon bones. [The field belongs to the Rossburg Fire Department.] Post then contacted Dale Gnidovec, Curator of the Orton Geological Museum at Ohio State University.

Dale Gnidovec contacted me and other colleagues of his and asked if we would want to volunteer to dig up mastodon bones at Rossburg. Wow! Would I? That dig sounded exciting to me! About a dozen volunteers worked for three summers, 2003-2005, digging up the “big bones.” Among those dozen volunteers was Elaine Holzapfel, Editor of *“Archaeology and Artifacts of Darke County; a 12,000 year history of human occupation in West-Central Ohio.”* Another volunteer was Bob N. Converse, Author of a series of books, including *“The Archaeology of Ohio,” “Ohio Slate Types,” “Ohio Stone Tools,”*

“Ohio Flint Types,” as well as a regular contributor to the magazine, *“Ohio Archaeologist,”* published by the Archaeological Society of Ohio.

The Mastodon bones were just a few inches below the surface of the soil, so we could sit on the circumference of the site and slowly dig out each bone. I was digging around the ribs, which were several feet in length. The ribs had collapsed on top of each other, and I was trying to work around them and not step on top of them. Other volunteers worked excavating these huge bones from their resting place of thousands of years. I tried to picture in my mind, an image of these giant Mastodons walking around, right here in Mercer and Darke and Auglaize Counties. Can you visualize a Mastodon trying to walk into a garage today, and bumping his head on the overhead door? He would smash anything he stepped on. His trunk would break the vehicle’s windshield, much less dent the roof or hood.

The Rossburg Mastodon is dated about 12,000 years old, from the era of the Ice Age. These bones are being cared for by Dale Gnidovec, Curator of the Orton Geological Museum, Orton Hall, Ohio State University, 155 S. Oval Mall, Columbus, OH 43210, contact: 614-292-6896 www.geology.ohio-state.edu

This site of the Rossburg Mastodon is about five miles west from the Carter Farm site, which was excavated by the Dayton Museum of Natural History in the early 1970’s. The Carter Site is the second best Ice Age site in Ohio. The prehistoric bones found at the Carter site are located at the Dayton Museum of Natural History, now known as the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery.

The Mission of the Mercer County Historical Society is, *“To Preserve Mercer County’s History and To Educate the Public about that History.”* That Mission would also include “pre-history.” For you young readers, pre-history means *“before anyone was writing about history.”* If you readers want to see prehistoric artifacts, i.e. stone, flint, or slate tools made by man thousands of years ago, visit the 37th Annual Prehistoric Artifact Exhibit at the Mercer County Historical Museum, a block east of the Mercer County Courthouse, in Celina, on Sunday afternoon, June 25.

At the Museum, You can also see the prehistoric Elk Bones we dug up at Cranberry Prairie. If you really want to see a prehistoric dinosaur bone, I will bring my prehistoric dinosaur vertebra which dates about 150 million years ago. This vertebra is from Colorado, just south of the National Dinosaur Monument in Utah. I will look forward to seeing you June 25, the last Sunday in June.

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