

NORTHWESTERN ILLINOIS AT THE CROSSROADS OF COMMERCE & MANUFACTURING TWO MILLENNIA AGO

Most of us here in the Midwest consider the history of our local region to have started about 200 years ago with the arrival of early settlers; few give much thought to earlier civilizations that inhabited our river valleys for the last 10,000 years. The Hopewell mounds in Sterling's Sinnissippi Park and those at the Albany Mounds State Historic Site are a testament to an earlier, highly developed society which inhabited this area more than 2000 years ago and left us with more than 7,700 known sites of their activities throughout Illinois. Centered in south-central Ohio, the Hopewell civilization built elaborate earth works and thousands of burial mounds throughout the river valleys of the Midwest. They established trading routes for copper and silver from northern Michigan, sea shells from Florida, to chert and obsidian as far north and west as the Athabasca region of Canada. Here in northwestern Illinois, they established several large settlements and found a preferred pipe stone deposit which they mined. Recent data shows that 80% of stone pipes found in one of south-eastern Ohio's most prominent Hopewell mounds were made from local Sterling-area pipe stone; manufactured goods from villages throughout this region were distributed over long distances throughout the Hopewell trading sphere, making northwestern Illinois an important center for manufacturing and commerce 2000 years ago.

This presentation will trace the development of a thriving ancient civilization in northwestern Illinois, review the significance of local area mound sites and the development of local pipe stone mining, utilization and trading.

Wolf Koch and his wife **Linnea** have been studying accounts of Adena and Hopewell archeological research and have traveled to many mound builder sites in Ohio and Illinois. Dr. Koch, a Sterling resident, is a consultant to the oil and petrochemical industry and has been a professor of chemical engineering. Linnea Koch, a graphic designer and photographer, produced three interpretive panels for Sterling's Sinnissippi Park in 2008, describing the history of the Hopewell civilization, the significance of the local mounds and settlements, local mining, manufacturing and trading of pipe stone products. In 2009, the Koch's completed a booklet on the Hopewell civilization in the Rock River Valley for use as a resource in teaching local history. They have presented the Hopewell story many times to local civic groups and historic societies. Together, they have also just completed a presentation on the Kaskaskia-Cahokia Trail, Illinois' First Road.