Soil scientists and archeologists recently teamed up in Michigan to study the mode of construction of Indian mounds. This past summer Mr. Earl Prahl of the University of Michigan, Museum of Anthropology contacted me for assistance in one of his projects. He was interested in obtaining information about the soils exposed in Indian burial mounds near Newaygo and the Muskegon River in southwestern Michigan. A team of archeologists were attempting to determine the method by which the Indians constructed their burial mounds. According to Mr. Prahl, the type of burial mound, along with artifacts, provides a clue to the cultural traits of Indian groups. Each group of Indians has a specific way of constructing their burial mounds. Early evidence points to pre-Hopewell occupation of the area under study.

At first, I wasn’t quite sure what was expected of me in this study. It soon became apparent as the study developed that the archeologists wanted me to read the soil profiles and their morphology, and interpret them in terms of past history of construction of the burial mounds.

A study of a vertical cross-section of one particular mound indicated that the "V.I.P." Indians were buried in the modern day fashion in a shallow grave, after the topsoil was scalped from the area adjacent to the grave. Next, a mound of soil material was placed over the grave. This mound was capped with a thin mantle of dark colored topsoil, possibly that which was first scraped from the original surface. In some mounds the texture of the topsoil material is different than the interior fill material.