Late Prehistoric Period
900 A.D.- 1750 A.D.

Fort Ancient Culture

Society
Social differences in Fort Ancient society were few, and were based on age, gender, and personal achievement. Women were responsible for farming, gathering wild plants, and managing the home. Men cleared the fields, hunted, and handled trade and disputes. Leaders led by consensus. They settled village arguments, organized planting, scheduled religious ceremonies, and worked out alliances with neighboring villages.

Settlement
Fort Ancient peoples were hunter-gatherer-farmers. They lived in villages. Early examples were small scatters of houses. But by A.D. 1200, villages were larger with between 90 and 180 inhabitants. They arranged rectangular houses in a circle around a central plaza. Storage pits and outdoor working areas were located near each house. The plaza was the center of trading and ceremonial life. Villages became larger after A.D. 1400, and circular villages became uncommon. These larger villages housed 250-500 people.

Technology
Fort Ancient peoples hunted with the bow and with arrows tipped with small triangular-shaped stone points made from chert (flint). The shape of these points changed over time. Other chert tools included scrapers, knives, and drills. Potters made vessels from locally available clay tempered with crushed limestone and freshwater mussel shells. They made jars, some of which had handles. As time passed, they used shell for temper exclusively and added bowls, pans, and colanders to their vessel inventory. Adults used animal shaped carved smoking pipes and everyone wore ornaments of bone and shell.

Trade
They traded locally, but also were involved in long-distance exchange of marine shell. by the late A.D. 1500s/ early 1600s, objects made from European copper and brass began to filter into Kentucky’s Fort Ancient villages. These items arrived via the same trading networks.

Health
Fort Ancient men stood roughly 5’6”; women, about three inches less. The backs of their heads retained the flatness left from cradleboards. Their lives, on average, were not as long as ours: 45 was considered “old”. Many children did not live to see their 5th year, dying of nutritional deficiency or illness during weaning. Everyone suffered from iron deficiency, and many also endured chronic infections, tuberculosis, and arthritis. Cavities, gum disease, and tooth loss were common. Relative to their hunter-gatherer ancestors, their health was generally poorer.