

# Maine Archaeology

The Newsletter of The Maine Archaeological Society

2000 Excavations at N'tolonapemk, Meddybemps, Washington County, Maine.

From left to right: Dr. Arthur Spiess, Michael Brigham, Robert Bartone, Connie Darby and Dawn Fitch

Winter 2021

I hope everyone's doing alright out there. In this issue we have an update from Tim Spahr on the conservation of the dugout canoe identified off of Cape Porpoise (Summer 2019) and Tom McLaughlin on the process of donating the late Helen Leadbeater's collection of Wabanaki cultural materials to the Maine State Museum. We also remember our dear friend and fellow archaeologist Michael Brigham and offer heartfelt thanks to Nancy Asch Sidell who has stepped down from her post as the MAS board secretary after fifteen years. Thank you, Nancy!

And, while we continue social distancing and sticking close to home this winter, here are a couple of links to some great online events that might be of interest:

The Abbe Museum held their annual Indian Market digitally due to COVID-19. The event is fully archived at the link below – beautiful artwork and engaging discussions with the artists. Take the time to see this. The Abbe also announced the hire of Chris Newell as Executive Director & Senior Partner to Wabanaki Nations. He is the first Wabanaki Nation member to lead the museum and a recognized innovator in decolonizing museum practices.

<https://www.abbemuseum.org/digitalamim>

Also, the Maine Historical Society has several recently archived lectures and upcoming virtual events that might interest folks, including *An Apple History of Maine* with John Bunker, a discussion with Dr. Kate McMahon on *Freedom's Woods: The African American Community of Peterborough in Warren, Maine*, and a great discussion with James Eric Francis, Sr., Director of Cultural and Historic Preservation for the Penobscot Nation about *Pandemics in Wabanaki Communities*.

<https://www.mainehistory.org/onlineprograms/>

## Remembering Michael S. Brigham (August 23, 1950 – September 3, 2020)

Michael Brigham passed away in September and will be greatly missed throughout the Maine archaeology community. Ellie Cowie gave a tribute to Mike's legacy at the MAS meeting and you can read more about his extensive contributions in the fall bulletin article by Dick Doyle and Arthur Spiess. The photo above was taken in 2000 at the site of N'tolonapemk, "Our Ancestor's Place" in Meddybemps, Washington County, Maine. The excavation was a joint collaboration between the Passamaquoddy and the University of Maine Farmington (UMF) as part of mitigation of the Eastern Surplus Company Super Fund site. Mike led the fieldwork and authored the report on this remarkable place along with Ellie Cowie and Bob Bartone (both previously at UMF) with the input of Donald Soctomah (Passamaquoddy THPO). The site yielded evidence of being occupied from the early Archaic through the time of European contact. Mike is pictured on the far left between Arthur Spiess (MHPC) and Bob Bartone (now of NEARC). We want to pause again to remember Mike and all the great work he did over the last forty plus years to further Maine archaeology, particularly around his hometown of Milo in western Maine where he identified and ultimately conserved, the Brigham and Sharrow sites, representing some of the best known stratified Archaic sequences in New England. We love you Mike. Rest in peace, friend.



The Maine Archaeological Society

Promoting Archaeological Awareness through Education and Publication, and encouraging Conservation

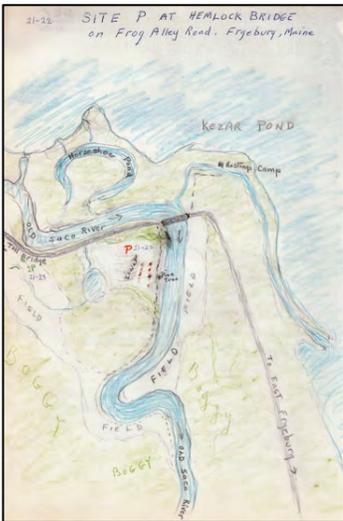
## Delivering for Helen

Tom McLaughlin - December 1, 2020

*Note from Dr. Arthur Spiess. This column is reproduced with permission from Tom McLaughlin with minor editing. A former history teacher, Tom is a columnist in Lovell, Maine, whose work is published in Maine and New Hampshire newspapers and on numerous web sites. Email: [tomthemick@gmail.com](mailto:tomthemick@gmail.com). He is a Maine Archaeological Society member. Tom is to be commended for his work getting this important collection into Maine State Museum care.*



Last week I took a load off my truck and off my mind. I delivered the late Helen Leadbeater's Wabanaki artifacts and collection of journals to the Maine State Museum. The boxes I had packed last summer filled my Toyota Tacoma. They comprised the result of thirty years of collecting and documenting pre-contact Native American cultural materials from the upper Saco River Valley. I was afraid my truck wasn't big enough. I was also afraid all that stone weighed so much I might break a spring, but I made it.



she found and where.

Though my tenure here in western Maine overlapped Helen's, we never met. My sister-in-law collected with her in North Fryeburg's fields after they were plowed and harrowed in springtime. My brother viewed the collection after being granted access by Helen's son, Arizona Zipper, who inherited her property across from Fryeburg Academy. When I wrote about Helen's collection in this column, AZ, as Arizona Zipper likes to be called, knocked on my door and invited me to see it as well.

That was ten years ago when I was still teaching US History in Fryeburg. Virtually every archaeologist in the northeast had made the pilgrimage to Helen's house, and one of them, Mike Gramly, asked me to inventory the collection for him. So, when I retired that became my first project. AZ gave me access again and I spent three weeks that first winter of

retirement photographing her artifacts the way Gramly had asked me to.

A local woman named Diana Bell heard about what I was doing and offered her assistance. While I photographed the artifacts box by box (Helen used hundreds of nylon stocking boxes to store them in), Diana scanned Helen's notebooks and journals, which were also extensive. Thus, I learned much about early human settlement of Fryeburg, Lovell, and Conway, New Hampshire.

Helen had published one scholarly article on pottery in The Maine Archaeological Society Bulletin in 1978. A former student of mine named Bill Rombola had surveyed Helen's collection during his archaeological study at the University of Southern Maine and published another article about in the Bulletin in 1998. In it, Rombola reported that some of Helen's artifacts were as much as 8000-9000 years old and were made from lithic (stone) material from New York, Vermont, Maine, Quebec and even northern Labrador (Ramah Chert).



AZ had little interest in his mother's passion, but he respected her work and wished to preserve it for study. His house is huge, difficult to heat and maintain, so for years he's been considering a sale and a move to a smaller home. At one point, I was working with Dan Lee, former headmaster at Fryeburg Academy, to mediate a purchase of the home and turn part of it into a museum for Helen's collection. AZ couldn't pull the trigger on that, so I began trying to convince him to let the Maine State Museum have the collection.

Last spring, he agreed under one condition: that photographs of Helen's artifacts and digital copies of her journals be made available online as well as at the museum. I hurried to get his signature on a Museum gift agreement to

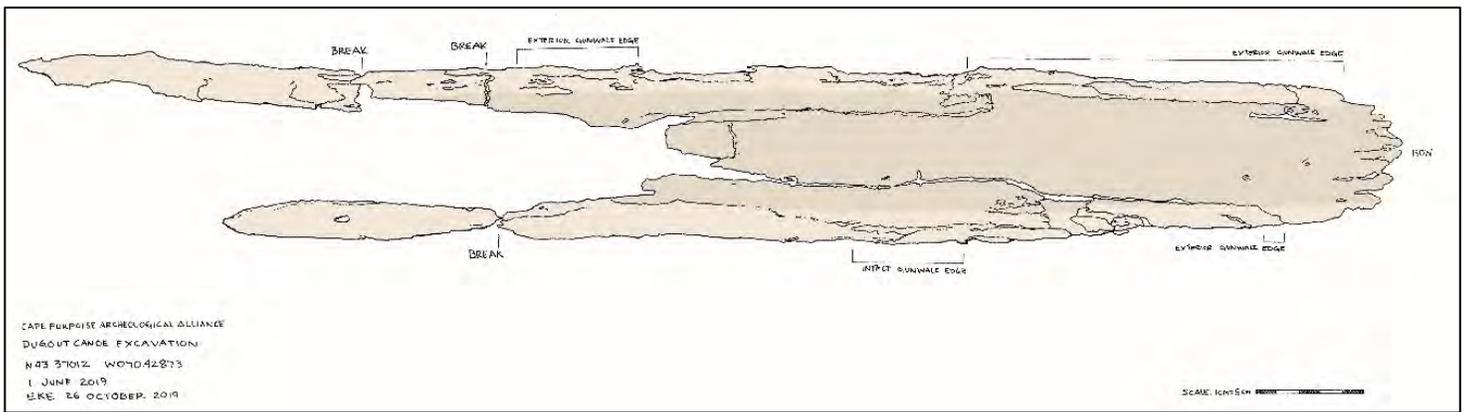


that effect and began to box up the collection. That occupied me last summer through some very hot, humid weeks, getting it all packed and moved to a friend's garage in Lovell. I also retrieved several boxes of Helen's artifacts that had been on loan to the Conway Library for exhibit.

In Augusta last week, Art and Paula helped me unload, and Paula showed me around the museum warehouse. I was thoroughly fascinated as only a history geek could be. On its moveable shelves were every historical collection about which I had been reading for decades! At one point we passed a drawer labeled "Michaud" which I knew to be a Paleoindian site in Auburn, Maine. She pulled it out and let me hold a paleo projectile point over 12 thousand years old. It was quite a thrill. I said I wished I didn't live so far away because I could spend months there, totally enthralled. She said I would be welcome anytime.

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**Thank You, Nancy Asch Sidell, Long-time MAS board Secretary**  
Richard Doyle and Arthur Spiess

Nancy Asch Sidell has resigned as Secretary, and we wish her well. Nancy was The Maine Archaeological Society's Secretary for fifteen years, beginning in 2005. A longtime member of our society she stepped into the secretary's position when asked all those years ago. Nancy's professionalism and presence on the Board is much appreciated and she will be missed as a Board member.

Nancy owns a blueberry farm in Kingsbury Plantation and Archeobotanical Consulting. As if farming wasn't enough to do she also identifies wood and seed remains from all over Eastern North America and Canada.

Back in May of 2020 Dick Doyle had an idea to get some ancient wood samples identified. A friend of his from Ontario and he had some planks that were sawn from some logs that were recovered from deeply buried sediments in Houghton, New York. The logs became exposed by erosion along the bank of the Genesee River. The group who recovered the logs had them dated and they returned a date of 1510 +/- 50 BP, Beta-52528. It turns out Nancy is familiar with the tree species that grew in that area of New York having worked on the botanical remains from there. Of the seven samples sent to her she identified them as having come from four different tree species; balsam fir 1, hemlock 3, white oak group 2, and yellow or black birch 1. Nancy declined to charge for this work as it was more of a fun project than working on burnt wood samples. Nancy, you are awesome.

Nancy has also done wood identifications on recently-recovered dugout canoes from Maine for Tim Spahr and Art Spiess. She is well-known and respected across North America and around the world, identifying charred wood, nuts, seeds (and corn), with dozens of publications (under Asch Sidell). Working on Paleoindian charred wood, the Archaic Koster site from Illinois, the introduction of corn into the Northeast, and identifying 6000-year-old squash at the Sharrow site, Maine is fortunate to have Nancy here, and we wish her continued success with live blueberries and (small) pieces of long-dead plants.

Nancy's sage advice to us all is "Everything is better with blueberries" <http://perseverancefarm.com/>

**Dugout Canoe Update from the Cape Porpoise Archaeological Alliance**  
Tim Spahr

In June of 2019, Archaeologists of the Cape Porpoise Archaeological Alliance coordinated with the University of New Brunswick/University of New England Coastal Archaeological Field School and recovered, crated and transported the remains of a Precontact dugout canoe to the Clement Clark Boathouse in Kennebunkport. (Radiocarbon dating analysis performed by Beta Analytic dated the wood between 1275 and 1380 AD). Upon extraction, archaeologists observed that much of the wood was "punky" with a soft spongy texture. Suffice to say, these remains were very fragile.

Upon arrival at the boathouse, the canoe was soaked in fresh water. At first, archaeologists changed the water daily as a rotten odor persisted and an assortment of crustaceans and mollusks were still within the wood's crevasses and worm holes. Salinity tests were routinely conducted until salt levels were no longer detectable. In November of 2019,



Polyethylene glycol (PEG) was added. PEG is a water-soluble wax-like chemical that penetrates and when dried, re-adheres wood fibers. Over a six-month period, PEG was increased to the water-based solution and in late April of 2020, the canoe was removed from its hydric/PEG storage and pressure bound in cloth for a slow drying process.

While the canoe was in hydric storage, Senior Artist Susan Osgood of the University of Chicago's Epigraphic Survey in Luxor Egypt, held a workshop with CPAA archaeologists and visually documented the canoe through technical drawing. The drawings produced, not only recorded the

# The Maine Archaeological Society

The Maine Archaeological Society (TMAS), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, was founded in 1956 and currently consist of professional and avocational archaeologists, as well as individuals of the general public who are interested in furthering the objectives of the society. The organization's mission is to promote archaeological awareness through education and publication, and encourage archaeological conservation.

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## *Dugout Canoe Update from the Cape Porpoise Archaeological Alliance continued...* Tim Spahr

canoe as it was insitu but also acted as a reference throughout the conservation process.

After 8 weeks of drying, the canoe was removed and although the most volatile portions held firm and solid, delamination between growth rings occurred. This was subsequently treated by the insertion of metal pins and

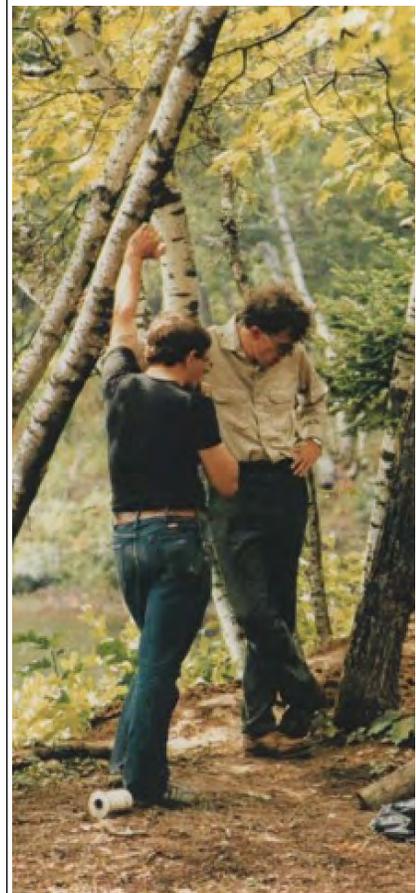


Tim Spahr, Susan Osgood and Elizabeth Kelley Erickson  
Photo by Gemma-Jayne Hudgell

then connecting the canoe to an exoskeleton which stopped warping, twisting and separation. Currently, the canoe is being housed at the Brick Store Museum in Kennebunk in preparation for an exhibition scheduled for this February through April of 2021.

To check for updates on the exhibit visit:

<http://brickstoremuseum.org>



Michael Brigham and Walter MacDougall at the Sharrow Site