

# Maine Archaeology

The Newsletter of The Maine Archaeological Society



Stone Well, Portland, Maine

Winter 2023

Happy Winter! We have a couple of articles for you including the return of the well-loved “Odd Artifact” along with some news and photos from the Fall meeting, the MAS booth at MOFGA’s Common Ground Fair, and the 2022 Field School at Katahdin Iron Works.



Fall 2023 Field School Volunteers at Katahdin Iron Works Company Store

We are hoping to have the **2023 Spring meeting in person again this year at the University of New England in Biddeford**. This should be a great meeting! So far, the lineup includes a presentation by Independent Archaeological Consulting (IAC) on their excavations at the Preble Site in York. See last summer’s newsletter for more info. IAC just returned from the Society for Historical Archaeology annual gathering in Lisbon, Portugal and this should be an excellent talk! Definitely worth making the drive down south.

We are planning to run the third annual field school at the Katahdin Iron Works Company Store this fall. Last year’s field school was a huge success thanks to an excellent group of wonderful volunteers! Please join us and reach out if you would like more information. Aside from the KI field school, we are exploring a second excavation opportunity on the coast and possibly a laboratory day later this year to help process and catalog the Company Store artifacts. More information will be available as things develop!

## The Odd Artifact with Dr. Arthur Spiess

While recently preparing a collection from the late 1980s for storage, Maine Historic Preservation Commission staff rebagged and examined material excavated in 1987, including an incised pebble that is the subject of this essay. We began archaeological testing for a new bridge across the Kennebec River between Waterville and Winslow in 1987. Eventually that project resulted in large excavations at sites 53.36, the Big Pit site (Spiess 1999), and site 53.38 with a Susquehanna tradition component (Spiess and Hedden 2000). The early stages of our fieldwork were broader in area than these two sites, and materials were recorded by transect (a line of 1 x 1 m deep testpits) and testpit number and depth. Later we figured out that some of our testpits along Area G7 transect 2 were near site 53.20, tested by the late Ted Bradstreet in 1982, while the north end of the transect was designated site 53.37 (Spiess et al. 1990).



These two sites are perched on the high terrace of the Kennebec near the railroad tracks, associated with a wetland (former river meander?), and deep, wet alluvial (flood) soils (see Figure 2, pp 15-18 in Spiess 1999). There is scattered pre-European stone debitage (mostly quartz, Kineo rhyolite and some coarse metasediment) and scattered historic 18<sup>th</sup>- 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century material (brick, creamware,

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4/64" pipe stem, unburned bone) in plowzones and A horizon forest soils buried by recent floods on these sites. Getting the collection sorted out, we were surprised to remember calcined bone from a buried A horizon relatively deep (to 40 cm) in G13T2tp2. Two pieces from the hoof are definitely identifiable as sheep, so burned bone from 18th/19th century fireplaces was part of the historic trash discard.

The incised pebble came from G13T2tp7, at a depth of 10 cm. There was no definite pre-European flaked stone (or other material) from that testpit, although a few pieces were in nearby testpits. The pebble is a channer or river-worn flat pebble much thinner than it is wide/long, made of phyllite or similar relatively soft material. It is between the size of a quarter and a half-dollar coin and just slightly thicker. It was not transported up onto this terrace with the fine flood silts unless brought up in a piece of floating ice. One side of the pebble is featureless. The other is marked by two sets of parallel or sub-parallel grooves that cross at an angle. The grooves do not continue onto or around the naturally eroded/rounded sides of the pebble. Our photos here show the pebble at two angles relative to the light to highlight the grooves differently. Depth of incision varies from less than a millimeter to just more than a millimeter, as does width. Some of the grooves seem to maintain a constant width and depth across the pebble, with a square profile cross section. And others vary. The stone is soft enough that it could have been scratched by a piece of much harder stone, or by an iron or steel object. But making the grooves would have taken considerable force and a steady hand, if they are handmade.

It seems most likely that the pebble goes with the 18th/19th century historic material, not the much less common pre-European stone flakes we found in the area. And the grooves or scratches would have been much easier to produce with an iron or steel object, whether deliberately or by incidental contact, than with stone. This is an odd artifact that does not fit with my expectations. Comments are welcome.

Spiess, Arthur and others  
1990 Waterville-Winslow Bridge Location Phase II Archaeological Testing. Maine Historic Preservation Commission file report 2565.

Spiess, Arthur  
1999 Deep Testing on the Kennebec: The Waterville-Winslow Bridge. The Maine Archaeological Society Bulletin 39:1:13-40.

Spiess, Arthur and Mark Hedden  
2000 Susquehanna Tradition Activity Areas at the Waterville-Winslow Bridge. Maine Archaeological Society Bulletin. 40:1:23-54

## Construction Monitoring in Downtown Portland

by Sarah Loftus

During the summer and fall of 2021 Northeast Archaeology Research Center (NEARC) monitored the construction of a community housing project in the East End of Portland at the intersection of Franklin and Middle Streets. This section of the East End was part of the lower India Street neighborhood (King Street until 1837) and after the Revolutionary War was



Portland's commercial center throughout the early part of the nineteenth century. People living in the neighborhood, which is bordered on the north by the historic Eastern Cemetery, were initially engaged in shipbuilding industries as well as lumber and fishing and were heavily involved in the West Indies trade (Larry and Daniello 2012). Homes and storefronts characterized the neighborhood throughout the mid-nineteenth century (Larry and Daniello 2012). The Abyssinian Church is a couple of blocks from the Project at 73 Newbury Street and many of Portland's Black residents lived in this general area working as mariners. The church is Maine's oldest Black church building and was an important part of the Underground Railroad during the abolitionist movement (Maine Memory network 2021, Minter 2021).

In 1866, the Great Fire swept through downtown Portland and destroyed much of the India Street neighborhood including the Project Area. Rebuilding was slow within this section of the East End and the neighborhood declined. New construction post-fire was mostly done in brick as opposed to more fire-prone wood, and this was evident during the monitoring as large quantities of brick were scattered throughout the project and several brick architectural features and foundations were recorded. Most of the new buildings that went up during this period were multi-family houses and mixed developments with storefronts and apartments above.



A new mix of first-generation Americans settled in many of the homes during this period and in rented flats including Jews fleeing oppression in Russia and Austria-Hungary. Shaarey Tphiloh synagogue was erected in 1904 less than a block east of the Project Area, and Etz Chaim, was established in 1921 on Congress Street and continues to serve Portland. The neighborhoods economy began to shift away from maritime industries during the turn-of the twentieth century, though these activities always retained a role. New small businesses opened - barber shops, bakeries, restaurants, shoe shops, groceries, and boarding houses all sprung up around Middle, Newbury and India Streets (Larry and Daniello 2012, US Census Records). Based on census records, people occupying Middle Street near or within the Project Area included Italian, Irish, Canadian, and Russian immigrant families working in various industries including as teamsters and in maritime trades as well as in hotels and as small businesses owners.



The Great Depression hit this area of Portland hard and city directories indicate that many of the buildings along Middle, Newbury, and India Streets were vacant throughout the 30s and 40s (Larry and Daniello 2012). During the era of “Urban Renewal” in the 1950s, this area was targeted for an upgrade, and many building were knocked down, especially with the expansion of Franklin Street, which began in 1967. The Project Area was impacted by this road expansion, which resulted in the buildings and former tenements in this section of the block being torn down. In place of the structures, the current parking lot was built and until recently was utilized by the city.

As a result of the archaeological monitoring, ten features were documented including a privy, cistern, and hand-dug stone well (pictured on the front), as well as several foundations and architectural features. The possible cistern (Feature 5) is a roughly circular shaped brick feature identified approximately 2 ft below the current ground surface and is approximately 5 ft deep. The base of the feature is dug into the natural marine clay and the floor was lined with wood planks. The feature was bisected, and hand excavated, and the sediments were screened through ¼ in mesh resulting in the collection of several thousand artifacts - mostly, mid-late-nineteenth century ceramics including tablewares and more utilitarian storage vessels. Fragments of bottle glass, tumblers, and some pressed glass was also collected. White clay pipestems, several marbles, buttons, and a “frozen charlotte” figurine were also identified as well as architectural materials including whole bricks and brick

fragments, broken window glass, and nails. Further archival research and artifact analysis are necessary to try to associate the artifacts and the feature with occupants, or if not possible to at least characterize the neighborhood block and possible context/origins of the household trash.



The privy (Feature 7) was identified approximately 90 cm (3 ft) below the current street level and first appeared as a ceramic sewer pipe and concrete cap that were installed after original construction. The top layers of fill beneath the concrete were mostly sterile aside from brick, but further excavation revealed dense layers of household trash approximately 70 cm (2.3 ft) below the top of the feature. This lower portion of the feature was comprised of a wood lined box measuring approximately 4 ft x 5 ft and is likely the original privy construction. The total depth of the feature was approximately 150 cm (5 ft.). The base was not lined and takes advantage of the dense, natural, marine clay. Hundreds of artifacts were collected from this feature as well as soil samples, which can be processed to gain information about diet and health. As with Feature 5 (the likely cistern), a cursory analysis of the artifacts collected from Feature 7 suggests most of the materials post-date the 1866 fire that swept through this area of Portland, but some earlier items are also present. Of note, high quantities of cut/butchered faunal bone were also collected. Based on the 1886 and 1954 Sanborn maps, Feature 7 may have been associated with a tenement that later housed a restaurant. As previously noted, initial review of census records indicates this part of the East End was largely comprised of first-generation Americans, many of whom were small business owners who often lived above their shops with their families.

As mentioned, a significant number of artifacts were collected from the features. These artifacts have the potential to yield significant information about mid- to late-nineteenth century daily life and consumption in the lower India Street neighborhood of Portland’s East End. NEARC is currently working with Nate Hamilton and his team at University of Southern Maine who graciously volunteered to get everything catalogued. A huge thanks to Nate, Morgan Day and the rest of the USM folks! \* Contact editor for references



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# 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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## Maine Archaeological Society 2021 Fall Meeting Review - Arthur Spiess

On October 9, 2022, the Maine Archaeological Society held its first in-person membership meeting in several years (since Covid-19 became a thing) at the new Education Center building at the Viles Arboretum, Augusta. In the morning Thomas Bennett and Nathan Hamilton presented on their recent archaeological survey efforts in Casco Bay, focusing on revisiting eroding shell midden sites. In the afternoon Nathaniel Kitchel and Heather Rockwell presented recent Paleindian and chert quarry research in the general Munsungun region of northern Maine. The Viles Education Center is a new post-and-beam structure with open floor plan and no central heating. The day was cool but sunny, and about 50 members attended with appropriate attire. It seemed appropriate that the first post-Covid meeting was held in a ventilated space where members could step outside and enjoy the sunshine on breaks or talk without feeling confined.



Thomas Bennett and Nathan Hamilton present Casco Bay research to the MAS members with a view of MAS members in warm attire

## The MAS Table at MOFGA's Common Ground Fair

- Cyndie Lamoreau



The Common Ground Fair returned September 2022 as an in-person event, with a record turnout - and The Maine Archeological Society was there at our booth, greeting old friends and making new, including new Society memberships. Friday was a highlighted day as many students across Maine visited our booth, participating in activities and asking questions, enthusiastic and curious.