

Maine Archaeology

The Newsletter of The Maine Archaeological Society



Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Donald Soctomah and University of Maine students Dylan Smith and Liam Daniels at Indian Township Museum (UMaine Anthropology File Photo)

Hope everyone's having a great winter! This issue has some wonderful articles from Bonnie Newsom, John Mosher, and Arthur Spiess. Bonnie heads up the University of Maine field school on Machias Bay, John led MHPC's excavations at Province Fort and Arthur has a new odd artifact to share. **Details are still being worked out, but it looks like the Spring 2020 meeting will be on April 26 at University of New England in Biddeford.** Also, the online store is up and running thanks to the work of Anthony Viola! Check it out and buy something! Recent and out-of-print, hard to find TMAS publications <http://www.mainearchsociety.org/store/> It's Maine's Bicentennial, 1820-2020. Keep up with events through the Bicentennial website. Thanks for reading!

University of Maine Students Return to Machias Bay

Bonnie Newsom, University of Maine at Orono

After a five-year hiatus, the University of Maine Northeast Archaeology Program returned to the Machias Bay area to conduct the 7th season of coastal archaeology field work in the Downeast region. Over the course of a 4-week field school in June, students were immersed in experiential learning that combined archaeological fieldwork with cross-cultural community engagement. The field school took place at the Holmes Point West site - one of Maine's most fragile shell midden sites currently threatened by severe erosion. The site spans roughly 3,000 years of Maine's pre-and post-contact history. Recent ceramic analyses at the site suggest that potters added balsam fir needles to ceramic pastes as temper. This finding was the topic of a recent paper published by Bonnie Newsom and former UMaine student Matthew James in the *Archaeology of Eastern North America*.

Past excavations at the Holmes Point West site produced Native American, French, and English material culture. Dog remains from previous excavations are the subject of Abby Mann's Master's thesis, and one of the goals of the field research was to collect additional faunal material to support her research.

This year the UMaine students' efforts added to the existing collections. Glass and copper beads, a bone knife handle, and drilled metal are among the artifacts recovered. Notable pre-contact material recovered in 2019, includes a small group of large scrapers, complete and broken projectile points, Middle Ceramic period pottery, and numerous faunal remains. Processing of these materials is currently underway and analysis and interpretation of materials is planned as part of the Anthropology Department's spring semester course on archaeological lab methods.



Shoreline Erosion Near the UMaine Field School (UMaine Anthropology File Photo)

The Maine Archaeological Society

Promoting Archaeological Awareness through Education and Publication, and encouraging Conservation

Archaeological sites in the Machias Bay region are important cultural spaces to the Passamaquoddy people. Since initiated by the late Dr. Brian Robinson, this field school has been conducted in cooperation with the Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Office. Continuing with this partnership, Dr. Bonnie Newsom directed the field school using an “Indigenous archaeologies” approach—one in which she and the students worked with and for the Passamaquoddy people in their heritage preservation efforts.

A new component to the field school this year was Passamaquoddy language revitalization support. The field school students worked with Passamaquoddy speaker Dwayne Tomah to create three language videos designed to support community language learning. The videos integrate Passamaquoddy language with archaeology-related themes and are designed for young Passamaquoddy language learners.



Field school students with Dr. Arthur Anderson of UNE learning and practicing flintknapping techniques (Courtesy of L. Pollard)

The field school students’ community engagement activities also included a visit to the Indian Township museum hosted by Donald Soctomah, Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Several community groups visited the field school as well, including students from the Cobscook Experiential Program and the Indian Township School. Guest speakers Natalie Dana-Lolar of the Passamaquoddy Tribe and Dr. Gabe Hrynick of the University of New Brunswick enriched the student’s learning with evening lectures at the University of Maine at Machias.

Experimental archaeology was another feature of the field school. To understand the technologies of past peoples living at the site, students participated in evening sessions where they learned the basics of Indigenous stone tool and ceramic manufacture through hands-on lessons. Dr. Arthur Anderson shared his expertise in stone tool manufacture and Dr. Bonnie Newsom led ceramic manufacturing lessons. These activities gave students a new appreciation for the knowledge and skills of Indigenous families living at the Holmes Point West site.

The University of Maine’s Northeast Archaeology program is on an exciting trajectory in archaeological research, teaching, and service. We are scheduled to offer

a similar field experience during the summer of 2021. UMaine student participation in this field school is supported in part by the University’s Maine Academic Prominence Initiative (MAPI). Donations and sponsorships to help support students and sustain UMaine’s Northeast Archaeology program are welcomed. If interested in supporting our archaeology program, please contact Dr. Bonnie Newsom at bonnie.newsom@maine.edu or the University of Maine Foundation at (207) 581-5100.



Possible bone knife or utensil handle, drilled metal fragment and large scrapers recovered in June 2019 from the Holmes Point West Site (UMaine Anthropology File Photo)

Mitigation Archaeology of the Province Fort, Windham, Maine
John Mosher, MHPC

On the eve of King William’s War, in early Spring 1744 the townspeople of New Marblehead, now Windham, erected a blockhouse and palisade known as the Province. Province Fort was one of six constructed on the Eastern Frontier of Maine with funding from the Massachusetts General Court. It was designed to serve as a defensive refuge for the English settlers who had begun establishing farmsteads in 1737 within a contested borderlands occupied by the Presumpscot band of Wabanaki whose homelands encompassed the Presumpscot River watershed and Sebago Lake.



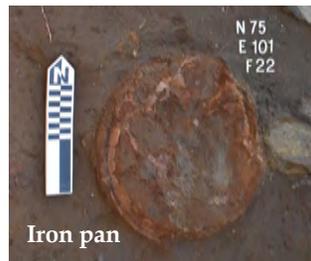
Eric Lahti, and Rachel Newbert of MHPC and volunteers Kathy Bridge and Judy Lindsay...and Dal Burgess’ feet excavating the proposed glacis

New Marblehead was given fair warning it was an unwelcomed presence. In March 1736 construction of a meeting house located near the site of the future fort was cut short by the arrival of heavily armed Wabanaki. Three years later a delegation of Presumpscot Wabanaki, led by Polin, met with Governor Jonathan Belcher in Boston to voice their opposition to the new English settlement of New Marblehead, as well as those at Buxton and Gorham.

Moreover, Polin complained that Thomas Westbrook's dam at Presumpscot Falls was barring the passage of alewives and salmon on which they relied. As these and other issues were not resolved to the satisfaction of the Wabanaki, war broke out in August 1745 and English frontier settlements throughout Maine were targeted. Once fighting ceased with the fall of Quebec in 1759, the palisade around Province Fort was likely removed and its buildings repurposed for ecclesiastical and town business. In 1765 Reverend Peter Thatcher Smith erected the large house that is now occupied by Elaine Dickinson and began making modifications to the landscape around the fort. In 1782, Abraham Anderson acquired the fort at public auction and dismantled the buildings, probably around 1790.



Tin glazed Earthenware



Iron pan

From the first of August to the end of September 2019, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission conducted Phase IIIB mitigation archaeology at the site of the Province Fort (ME 483-001) on River Road in Windham. This work follows upon Phase II testing in 2015 and Phase IIIA mitigation in 2016 of the Fort remains situated on either side of River Road on the property of Elaine Dickinson and her late husband, the Rev. Donald Dickinson. Phase IIIA investigations in 2016 identified numerous features including the central chimney of the fort-era block house, a second chimney or bake oven for a later building, possible trench sections of the east and south palisades, a probable boardwalk adjacent to the south palisade, as well as foundations and pit features associated with later buildings and activities on the north side of River Road.

Phase IIIB mitigation entailed subsurface testing beneath the River Road fill in a section of road measuring about 50 linear meters. Contractors Shaw Brothers, Inc. of Gorham installed jersey barriers, temporary traffic lights, and removed the asphalt and underlying road bed, first in the south lane, then the north. The success of the project is in great measure due to the help of many volunteers who were willing to dig and sift when it was 90 degrees, humid, and sunny or 40 degrees, windy, and raining.



Close-up of glacial excavation

Though early 20th-century road construction had removed all but a veneer of fort-related materials, we made some startling discoveries. At the southern edge of the south lane we identified a stone-paved downslope measuring about 20m in length and 4m in width that is interpreted as a glacis or gently sloping bank designed to expose potential attackers to fire from the abutting blockhouse. Throughout the fort period and well after its demise, the proposed glacis also served as a refuse dump. Under the north lane we identified the location of the blockhouse, based on the distribution of hand-forged nails preserved in linear rows in about 5cm of fill on bedrock ledge. Whether the nails represent the original blockhouse floor or a later remodel has not yet been determined. However, they indicate a structure of about 50 feet by 50 feet in size. Preserved beneath the north shoulder, but on top of the blockhouse remains, were at least three layers of gravelly clayey fill, the topmost of which had served as a previous road bed based on the presence of wagon wheel ruts. This road bed may represent an early iteration of River Road that dates after the demise of the fort around 1790. In addition, we identified a probable kitchen garden of the fort at the east end of the north lane, based on overlapping semi-circular and rhomboidal brown stains in the subsoil.

This winter our tasks include the processing and analysis of thousands of artifacts and feature soils to integrate these data into those generated during previous field

The Odd Artifact - Little Swan Shovel, Arthur Spiess, MHPC

What is odd about a steel shovel blade from Little Swan Island in the Kennebec River near Richmond?



In 1987 a small Maine Historic Preservation field crew was surveying Little Swan Island looking for pre-European Native American sites. Toward the north end of the Island we found a scattering of flakes and stone tool fragments on the beach and on a forest covered, sandy rise behind a swampy backwater near the beach. Testpits confirmed a pre-European site on the sandy rise, with stone tools as deep as 50 cm. During the survey we noticed "a bunch" of (quote from my fieldnotes, maybe a half dozen) deep pits scattered across the northern end of the island, some 5 meters in diameter. They were filled with leaf litter and some had trees growing in them. Sand had slumped into them but there was still a low, raised

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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Inside this Issue:

- ⇒ *University of Maine Students Return to Machias Bay*
Bonnie Newsom, PhD
- ⇒ *Mitigation Archaeology of the Provence Fort, Windham, Maine*
John Mosher, MA
- ⇒ *The Odd Artifact: Little Swan Shovel*
Arthur Spiess, PhD

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The Odd Artifact - Little Swan Shovel continued...

ring of backdirt around the rims. Most seemed to be about a meter deep, and the largest pit was about 5 by 10 m in an oval. There was no structural stone or brick, so they were not cellar holes. The seemed about 50 years old or older based on the vegetation cover. We had an inexpensive metal detector with us. There was no sign of metal in or around most of the pits, but the metal detector gave a strong (audible) signal in the very bottom of one of the larger pits. We dug, and unearthed a rusty, steel shovel blade with a broken wooden handle.

The shovel tip had seen hard use on rocky ground (before ending up at this location); it is bent over slightly and heavily worn. Whoever used it on Little Swan Island broke the wooden handle and left the shovel blade in place, to be covered by shifting sand. (They did not backfill their pits.) The shovel weighs 1 kg, and the throat (that held the wooden handle) is constructed of a welded top piece with integral cast bottom piece, and had been held together by 3 rivets. "SOLID STEEL 2" is stamped on the top of the throat piece. I have not yet been able to identify the manufacturer or dates of manufacture. (This type of shovel is still for sale as an antique gardening tool to collectors.)

Later I noticed that photographs of Warren K. Moorehead's Maine archaeology crew showed them using the same type of shovel about 1910-1915 (except I could not read any stamped letters on the metal). There is no record of Moorehead's crew working this portion of the Kennebec in his book (*Archaeology of Maine*), nor in his photo records (R. S. Peabody Museum). The location is an obvious pre-European site (with stone tool fragments), and the sand is deep enough to have been attractive for "Red Paint" graves. There is no reason to have dug as many large and deep pits in sand other than a concerted search for a Red Paint cemetery. There is no red ochre associated with the pits, and the location is clearly a habitation/workshop site, not an Archaic cemetery. Whomever dug the pits was unsuccessful. Evidently, we had done the archaeology of archaeology, but was it a Moorehead paid crew or someone else?