

NYSAA NEWSLETTER



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Exploratory Archaeological Excavations at Fort Plain

*By Wayne Lenig
Van Epps-Hartley Chapter*

Last summer exploratory archaeological excavations were initiated on the defensive outworks at the site of Revolutionary War Fort Plain/Rensselaer. The remnants of trenches and earthen walls on the western portion of the hilltop were first recorded by historian Benson Lossing over 150 years ago. In his words, “across the neck, or isthmus, a breast work was thrown up. ... The mounds which were raised on the south side of the block-house were yet quite prominent when I visited the locality [in 1838].” Despite more than a century of plowing and agricultural use the undulations are still evident, but in recent years some folks have suggested the features are natural, caused by the forces of soil deposition and erosion. Our work was designed to investigate that possibility by examining the stratigraphy or layers of earth underlying the mounds and troughs.

On June 6th, a private contractor opened four backhoe trenches under the archaeologist’s direction. Trench # 1 was 14 meters (46 feet) long, running perpendicular to the edge of a bowl-like depression which we hypothesized might be a defensive earthwork. Trench # 2 was 10 meters (33 feet) long in an area that revealed a rectangular shadow in several aerial photographs. Trenches three and four showed little archaeological potential and were backfilled. Hand excavation and recording was accomplished on June 7th, June 8th, June 14th and 15th by



Jim Denison and
Jon Vidulich re-
cording profiles in
Trench #1

Fort Plain continued:

volunteers from the Van Epps-Hartley, Auringer-Seelye and Chenango Chapters of the New York State Archaeological Association, the Archaeology Department of The Iroquois Indian Museum, and Schenectady County Community College's Community Archaeology Program (CAP). The vertical walls of Trench # 1 and Trench # 2 were scraped and soil strata carefully measured and recorded.

In Trench # 1, 30 – 33 centimeters (about one foot) of plow-torn topsoil overlaid fine dark gray clay gravel at the top of the slope. The clay gravel represents the naturally deposited soil left here tens of thousands of years ago, when the last glaciers retreated. That naturally deposited layer is abruptly truncated near the top of the slope by successive layers of mottled yellow and brown sand and gravel which slope gently toward the base of the depression. In other words, the naturally deposited soil was clearly dug out to create the bowl-like depression. After the earthwork was abandoned, mounds of earth which had originally formed a barrier around the edge of the bowl were pushed down the slope to grade the land for agricultural use. Other layers of fill washed down the edges of the hole due to plowing and erosion, causing multiple layers or strata to be deposited (see sketch of cross-section).

Trench # 2 was positioned near the base of the bowl-like depression. Nearly two feet of topsoil and overburden had washed down the slope overlying the 18th-Century surface, but a clearly defined buried A soil horizon was discernible. About midway across the trench,

a soil anomaly or feature, two meters (6½ feet) wide and one meter (3¼ feet) deep was dug into the 18th century surface. A two-meter square unit was opened perpendicular to Trench # 2 to further define the shape or outline of the feature. A sherd of redware with most of the clear lead glaze missing, two sherds of pearlware (including one from a green shell-edge plate), brick fragments, small pieces of limestone and lime mortar were dispersed throughout the fill of the feature. Further excavation will reveal the size and shape, but the current theory is that it represents a wall-trench dug to support footings of a small building. The trench was probably robbed of all large useful foundation stones when the building was demolished. The presence of pearlware ceramics establishes a TPQ or earliest possible date for the abandonment of this feature in the 1790s. That date is consistent with the historically documented date this site was abandoned by the United States Army.

In summary, limited exploratory archaeological excavations during the summer of 2014 have confirmed the presence of large-scale earthworks built at the site of Fort Plain/Rensselaer towards the end of the American Revolution, ca. 1781-1784. At least one wooden structure associated with these outworks stood until the 1790s, when it was apparently demolished and most of the building materials were salvaged.

Fort Plain continued:

The project director would like to formally thank all the participants listed here in alphabetical order: Tom Anderson, Louise Basa, Norm Bollen, Tom Bollen, Dan Bradt, Jim Denison, Bob Fusco, Charlene Lenig, Helen Martin, Skip Rielly, Christina Rieth, Orion Shea, Jon Vidulich and Sarah Vidulich. Special thanks also to Dr. Jonathan Lothrop, Ralph Rataul and the New York State Museum for the loan of shovels, screens and excavation tools.



At top right: Skip Rielly, Dan Bradt, Jim Denison and Orion Shea scraping south wall of Trench #2;.

At below left: Chunks of limestone at top of feature in Trench #2



NATIVE AMERICAN BAGS and POUCHES: SOME NOTES ON PUZZLE POUCHES and THEIR MAKERS

By Marshall Becker
University of Pennsylvania

Every culture employs bags and pouches of various types for use as containers. Bandolier pouches, with their long straps that pass over the shoulder, may be one of the better known categories of native-made containers. Their use and distribution among the Five Nations Iroquois merits a specific study. Since the peoples of central New York occupied the heart of the Core Area of wampum diplomacy, various bags and pouches for holding wampum are mentioned from time to time in the documentary record. Note also should be made of the glass-bead ornamented straps used for some Northeastern native pouches. These often are mistaken for wampum bands, which employ only shell "beads" (cf. Lainey 2008). Only true wampum, fashioned from marine shells, was used to make diplomatic bands (Becker 2010, also 2007).

The bags specifically used to hold diplomatic wampum belts and strings were the subject of a recent study (Becker 2013; see also Drooker and Hamell 2004, Becker 2011). Diplomatic wampum has never been associated with slit pouches, which were commonly used in eastern North America. Slit pouches, a category well represented in museum collections, are reviewed by Christian Feest (2006). His study of this category of container also includes an excellent bibliography. Most slit pouches can be folded over a belt and therefore are roughly similar in form to puzzle pouches.

Drawstring pouches are perhaps as common in museum collections (Kasprzycki 1997). Various types of containers for tobacco and/or pipes are known, and several arrow quivers may be described as pouches. A Susquehannock "pouch" (arrow case?) dating from ca. 1650 CE and now at Skokloster Castle in Sweden (misidentified as Lenape in origin, see Becker 1990, 2012b), may fall in this category. Bullet pouches are variations on pouches used for carrying objects. The most ornate examples of every type survive as museum pieces, but the majority of

pouches may have been minimally ornamented, or may have had no decorations at all.

Since pouches were ubiquitous among native peoples, and most were unornamented, they are infrequently mentioned in the ethnographic or historical records. Thomas Birch (1756-1757: 418-421) recorded a gift, consisting of three Indian purses, that had been made to the Royal Society by John Winthrop in 1669. Two of these three purses, collectively identified as item number 20 in the Royal Society records, were received by the Society in Box 1 of the extensive Winthrop gift. Both were said to be ornamented with porcupine quills. The third may have had no ornamentation. Feest (1983: 135-137) describes a skin pouch, almost certainly from the area of present Virginia, decorated with four files of disk-shaped shell beads, the form identified as "roanoke." He describes this pouch as a "symmetrically folded belt-pouch ... sometimes referred to as a 'slit-pouch'." This type of pouch is elongate.

A small numbers of bags or containers are represented among the miniature artifacts that were made to accompany dolls fashioned for sale by Native American. Most are rectangular in shape, but specific details would be less easily identified. A miniature representation of a slit pouch might be recognizable for that specific form, but I know of no such example. The inventory of such dolls and miniature examples of related material culture is vast. I suspect that bags for storing or transporting wampum would be very unlikely subjects for the kinds of items that accompany dolls, which include guns, canoe paddles, etc. (Becker 1992). A basic inventory would provide a good beginning for the study of artifact categories, and possible representations of items of interest here.

Bags and Pouches, continued:

Puzzle Pouches

Thwaites (1896, 42: 171-173) records the use in 1655- or 1656 of a pouch in conjunction with bringing a squirrel back to life through the use of magical herbs. This mention in the Jesuit Relations may be connected to puzzle or “trick” pouches, which form a separate and interesting category of container. I do not believe that these are related to wampum storage bags in any way, although they may have served as a variant form of small “purse.” Speck (1955: 6) illustrates two examples of puzzle pouches from the Chandler Collection. On the left is a five inch example (Cat. No. 1794” described only as “Iroquois” with the note “M. G. Chandler, Presented by Caroline Lee Pope.” On the right is a 4.5 inch long example (Cat. No. 982) listed only as “History unknown. Presented by Joseph H. Hunter.” These items would appear to be from the Great Lakes region, but they are not well documented. Both may be early twentieth century products.

Einhorn (1960), under the name “Skaroniate” (Mohawk for “Beyond the Sky”), published a brief note on puzzle pouches. Einhorn refrained from making a cultural identification for this category of material culture. Einhorn (pers. Com. 8 Jan. 2010) also recalls that “in the early 50s I acquired a very old sample and dissected it.” Einhorn believes that the pouch which he took apart probably had been in the Oldman Collection, much of which was purchased by Heye for the Museum of the American Indian. The specific origins of the piece taken apart and its present whereabouts remain unknown. Einhorn also suggests that his meticulous copies of various pouches, as well as his many fine replicas of traditional items of Iroquois material culture that he had given as gifts, were later sold by the recipients. Many of Einhorn’s pieces now are identified as ancient works of aboriginal origin.

Various “examples” of puzzle pouches are said to be Pottowatomi in origin, or from various tribes of the “Iroquois.” Several of these erstwhile ethnographic

pieces can be seen on various websites, along with detailed instructions to be used in fashioning your own. Examples with good ethnographic provenance are entirely absent. One might infer that had puzzle pouches been fashioned anywhere among the Five Nations Iroquois, Morgan or his many editors would have mentioned them (see Morgan 1851, 1922, 1962). This interesting category of pouch appears nowhere in the surviving collections that Morgan carefully assembled (see Tooker 1994).

A small puzzle pouch (15 cm long) with beading on both exterior sides now is part of the collections of the Robbins Museum of Archaeology in Middleborough, MA. Andrew Bullock identified this example as possibly made by “the Cree, the Athabaskan or the Chippewa” and he dated it to as early as 1840 (DeMello 2011: fig.). Feest’s work on Odawa materials (1984) lead me to suspect a possible origin for the Robbins Museum example among the Odawa. Bullock made a reproduction of the Robbins Museum example for the Museum. DeMello specifically reports that the original “consists of two pouches joined at their tops.” Each has a flap on the exterior, but neither flap provides access to the pouches. Both “external” sides are ornamented with beads. While ornamentation on both exteriors might suggest that this pouch would not have been worn folded over a belt, decoration on all external surfaces is common on slit pouches that were intended to be worn folded over and cinched by a leather belt. Glass-beaded straps that look roughly similar to wampum bands were used to carry various types of pouches, perhaps even these types.

In fact, all puzzle pouches may be a late nineteenth-century or later introduction to native “tradition” (see Becker and Lainey 2013). Puzzle pouches may have originated in the Great Lakes region, and only later, after 1900, taken up in Iroquoia as part of the “Indian revival” process. Puzzle pouches are not at all related to any known native tradition in the Northeast (cf. Willoughby 1935).

Bags and Pouches, continued:

Further careful study of each category of native-made containers may generate clues to specific cultural origins of specific types or styles. When linked with the ethnographic record, each of these utilitarian objects may reveal a great deal about the cultures in which they were made.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thanks are due to Prof. Arthur Einhorn and the many people who have contributed to this and related research on material culture. Special thanks are due Dr. R. Alan Mounier for reading an earlier version of this note and for several useful suggestions. Dr. Diana Loren, and Prof. Robert Du Plessis also offered helpful information. The tax rules in support of research that are sustained by the Congress of the United States of America have been critical in funding this study. My deepest thanks go to all the members of the Congress who support these laws. The ideas expressed here and any errors of interpretation or presentation are, of course, solely the responsibility of the author.

A Puzzle Pouch as mentioned in the text. Image supplied by M. Becker



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In Memoriam: Jack Holland (1926-2014) By L.M.Anselmi and Bill Engelbrecht

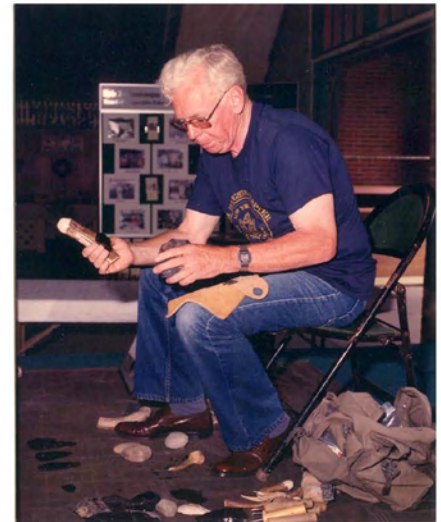


Jack Holland's lifelong interest in archaeology began as a boy collecting arrowheads along the flood plains of the West Branch of the Susquehanna River near Lockhaven, Pennsylvania.

In 1958 Dr. Marian White was conducting salvage operations at the Kleis Site in Hamburg, NY, not far from where Jack lived in West Seneca. Jack volunteered his assistance and then worked with Marian White on a number of subsequent projects, including initial investigations at the Hiscock site. When the Houghton Chapter of the NYSAA was founded in 1961 by Dr. White, Jack became one of the founding members. He was the only remaining founding member of the chapter.

Upon early retirement from his job as an industrial electrician at the Ford Stamping Plant south of Buffalo, NY in 1985, he began amassing a comparative lithic collection. The collection, originally housed at the Buffalo Museum of Science and now at the Smithsonian Institution, consists of 22,000 samples from more than 1,500 lithic types from the U.S. and Canada.

In recognition of his contributions, Jack received the Crabtree Award from the SAA in 2001 and was named a Pioneer of Science by the Hauptman-Woodward Institute of Buffalo in 2008.



The excerpt above was originally presented as part of a poster entitled, "Jack Holland: Chert Expert" in a session called "Avocational Archeology Making a Difference: Who's Done it and Who's Doing It", organized by Marcel Kornfeld and Cathy Poetschat. For the 75th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, 2010. Sponsored by the Council of Affiliated Societies. Subsequently published in proceedings entitled: AVOCATIONAL ARCHEOLOGY MAKING A DIFFERENCE Who's Done It and Who's Doing It?, edited by Kornfeld and Poetschat. Please contact L.M.Anselmi at anselmmlm@buffalostate.edu for the complete version.



Call For Papers

New York State Archaeological Association

99th Annual Meeting

May 1-3, 2015

Ramada Inn, Watertown, NY

The Finger Lakes and Thousand Islands Chapters are proud to host the 99th Annual Meeting of the New York State Archaeological Association and the annual Fall meeting of the New York Archaeological Council. NYAC will meet Friday. The NYSAA annual business meeting will be Friday evening, with paper presentations Saturday and Sunday morning. The annual banquet, awards ceremony and special guest speaker will be held Saturday evening. Our special guest speaker for Saturday evening's banquet will be Dr. Darrin Lowery, topic TBA. All events will be at the Ramada Inn, conveniently located at Exit 45 off I-81.

This is an open call for anyone interested in submitting abstracts for papers or posters on any subject of interest in the archaeology of New York and adjoining regions. Presentations should not exceed 20 minutes in length. One paper/poster per presenter- although individuals may co-author multiple papers. All presenters must register for the conference. Abstracts, authors, affiliation and AV preferences must be received by March 1, 2015 for consideration. Meeting registration must be pre-paid by April 1, 2015, or your paper will be dropped from the program. Registration information will be available online at <http://nysarchaeology.org/conference>.

Please send your title, abstract, A/V preference and contact address to:

Wendy Bacon, Wendy.J.Bacon.C78@alumni.upenn.edu

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