

# THE ARCHEOLOG

NEWS LETTER OF THE  
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O. H. PEETS, EDITOR

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OUR COVER: This pot, found by James Parsons on the Ritter site, is a very good example of what is called "herringbone". It is very unlikely, of course, that the Indians had any intention of representing the complicated boney structure of the herring with these slanting scratches on the clay. The name is a convention of scientists so they may create one of those categories they like to deal with, but could not if they had first to solve the problem of the real meaning of these patterns before making use of them. In several other examples these herringbones are in pairs as they are in this pot. They could represent cut arrow feathers, while some others with an all-over design seem to imitate a twill basket weave such as used by Indians in the South up to recent times.

The utility—indeed—the necessity of generic terms such as "herringbone" should protect them from the gibes we aim at them; but, on the other hand, they should not be used complacently as a convenient way of ignoring more probable interpretations. Some of these terms by their patent absurdity, present an argument against their use in the first place. "Smoothed-over-cord-roughened" is one such because it suggests the futility of laboriously cord-marking the surface of a pot which later was to be made smooth. Following this system we should have to describe the surface treatment of the pot on the cover as: "smoothed-over-Rappahannock-fabric-impressed". The base however shows a perfect imprint of the inside of a basket (detail in the circle at the left) and indicates that the clay was coiled inside a basket from which, after it had dried and shrunk somewhat, it was taken out and rubbed to remove the undesired basketry imprint.

The circle at the right shows the base of a pot taken from a refuse pit on the Dohring property along the east bank of Canary Creek by two school boys, Warren and Daniel Dohring, Jr.

Between the two bases is shown what may well be the smallest pottery vessel in America. It was recovered from a refuse pit on the Ritter Site by Geiger Omwake.

We have around us in this county, where Indian remains are so abundant, many collectors who would not think of calling themselves archaeologists, amateur or otherwise. They are a valuable resource but also somewhat a problem. We cannot forget that a person who

did not think of himself as an archaeologist discovered the Townsend Site and working with young Russell, now in Aviation, located the pits that we call the Russell Site. Some of these "naturals"—to give them a name with no offense intended—have collections large enough to stock several museums. What is the problem in respect to them? Not to arouse their interest or to make friends of them; this has already been done in most cases. It is to make them familiar with those regulations that we have accepted for ourselves and which make the most important difference between the archaeologist, professional or amateur, and those who do not merit this designation.

And there is another side to the problem: What are we to do with the mass of information they have stored up from years of collecting but have not put down on paper? One can easily exaggerate the importance of records in some cases. For example, there is no stratigraphy in the ordinary refuse pit, so depth measurements have little or no meaning, though they may become very important in some situations that may develop without warning and it is always good routine to record them. In the case of arrowheads turned over by the plow it is seldom worthwhile to note more than that they were found in a certain general area and to see that they are not dumped into a box in the attic with remnants of a collection Great Uncle Jerry sent back from the West when he was helping to build the Southern Pacific. These local collections by amateurs must somehow be made to yield something concrete and the following account, which we have persuaded one of our most successful collectors to write, is a first step, perhaps, toward the accumulation of a fund of information that may become very useful when we have learned to analyze it.

Ed.

### Exploring the Upper Pocomoke

*James L. Parsons*

About twelve years ago I began hunting Indian relics along the Pocomoke River between Highway Route 50 and Snow Hill, Maryland. During this time I have covered five crossings and roads within that area. On all the hills and along the small streams near the Pocomoke there are signs of Indian habitation.

Among the relics I have found in this area the types of stone seem different from those found at other sites on the Eastern Shore.



There is much rhyolite which came from the western shore, probably by trading, and I have found examples of banded slate and Flint Ridge, Ohio, jasper. Quarried brown jasper is also in evidence.

About ninety-eight percent of the arrow-points are of the stemmed and shouldered or the stemmed and notched types. Very seldom have I found triangles. The arrows are of all kinds of stone, as are the knives, scrapers, and drills which I have found and they are all beautifully made and show very fine chipping. Some of the scrapers and knives evidently were fastened into wooden handles because they are notched and stemmed like the arrowpoints.

I have found axes and celts of different types. One celt is grooved. I have found several gouges. This implement is very rare on the Eastern Shore. One of the gouges is also grooved on the half-moon side. I have found mauls and war club heads of different types of stone, several beautifully worked pieces of whose uses I have no idea. Among the implements strange to the Eastern Shore are two plummets.

There are many broken banner-stones to be found. About two years ago a friend and I were out surface hunting. My friend found half of a banner-stone. This spring I found the other half. The two pieces were a perfect match. My friend was kind enough to give me his half after I showed him how they fitted together. This banner-stone had three grooves around it. At one time it had been mended and in the mending its owner had cut the three grooves.

I have found stone balls, hammerstones, and mills of different types of stone and several kinds of stone ornaments. I also found a part of an Eskimo woman's knife made of slate. I have picked up several pieces of Indian clay pipes.

In all the campsites in this area at least fifty percent of the pottery is grit tempered. It is heavy, and coarse and shows cord markings on the outside. I was lucky to find a lot of pieces of one large pot after a bulldozer had pushed away a small mound of earth. Many of the rim sherds had small round holes punched about half way through them. Evidently they were all the way around the rim of the pot about an inch and a half or two inches apart. I have not seen this kind of decoration on any other pottery from the Eastern Shore.

Another strange kind of pottery was represented by a large sherd which showed that the pot had a flat base like a crock. According to the Smithsonian Institution that type of pot has been found around the Potomac River flats and in the region of the upper Susquehanna River.

I have learned of two burials found along the Pocomoke in which the Indians were buried in a standing position. The things most remembered from these burials were beads and pipes. As yet I have never seen anything that came from these burials, which someday I am hoping to.

I know of two large shell mounds in a place that at one time was surrounded by water and a swamp. These mounds interest me very much because they are located at least thirty-five miles from Pocomoke Sound, the nearest place where there are oysters. I have intentions of trying to work them this fall.

I feel that my twelve years of hunting around the upper Pocomoke River area have been well spent and I am sure that the kinds of relics I have found there are different from the kinds generally found elsewhere on the Eastern Shore.

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The suggestion as to a probable use of the pit described in the following report by Ralph Karl and William Ingram falls in very nicely with an observation by DeVries. He speaks of the Indians crowding into a pit they had preheated, coming out, beaded with perspiration, to plunge into the water of a nearby stream. It is noteworthy that Canary Creek is nearest the north bank where this pit was located.

Reference to the report on the Townsend Site shows more than a half-dozen pits to have had shell floors, so other purposes than the steam bath may have been served by such floors, though for the probable population of the Townsend Site this number of bath houses may not have been excessive.

### **A Burial Pit of the Russell Site**

The pit on the banks of Canary Creek on the Russell Site near Lewes, did not appear to be different from those already excavated, with one exception.

The usual descriptions could be applied: Circular Pit 6 feet in diameter, straight sides,



the usual amount of pottery sherds, bone implements, stone chips and flashes and a burial.

The burial was only 29 inches beneath the top soil. It was in a fully extended position. There were no grave offerings found, no ornaments, nothing in the pit which could be related to the skeleton. That in itself makes this pit similar to those already opened in this area. After the skeleton had been removed, it was noted that the pit changed in dimensions from circular to rectangular. The rectangular bottom was covered with oyster shells.

A pit excavated at the Townsend Site was floored with clam shells. At that time it was rapidly explained that these shells might have been placed at the bottom of the pit for drainage.

What drainage would be necessary in a refuse pit? As most of the pits excavated are refuse pits, some a combination of refuse, fire, and burials, why have so few pits to date been found carpeted with shells? Was it drainage or a solid flooring, or both, that the makers of these pits were after?

Indians in this area were undoubtedly subject to muscular aches and pains due to climatic conditions. Application of heat gave relief. Steam baths date back beyond the record of present man. The inhabitants of this continent, no doubt, brought this custom with them from Asia. It is reasonable to suppose that the early Delawareans were familiar with this method of obtaining relief from muscular pain.

The similarity of construction and dimensions leads us to believe that these shell-bottomed pits were used for steam baths. The depth of the pit would allow an average man standing upright to be eye level with the topsoil. The area covered by the shells at the bottom of the pit would allow a person to stretch out flat. There was, no doubt, some type of structure over the pit to retain the heat and moisture.

Whether these pits were used for relief from aches and pains, or were connected with some tribal medicine rites, we do not know. It seems significant that to date we have excavated two distinct sites and have found at least one of these pits in each community, the only difference being that the Townsend pit was lined with clam shells while the Russell Site pit had oyster shells for its floor.

There is no chance of being mistaken about

the shells being dumped in and formed on the floor by accident because the oyster shells and the clam shells were placed edge to edge, curved surface facing upward on a perfectly level floor of sand. The rectangular outline is distinct, the shells having been placed in rows, making a hard-surfaced, well-drained floor.

R. K. and W. S. I., Sr.

The following brief account by the Project Chairman shows that the Russell Site has expanded into three projects. We might even say four, were it not that Dr. Marine makes so light of the problem of finding who owned this land in 1675, the time of the Duke of York surveys. Of course, in such a matter, one does not count fatigue or sunburn, but persons who knew the D-Y land titles far better than we did, assured us that the application of these titles to given tracts when no deeds connecting them are found is not only difficult, but generally impossible, and no one seems to have accomplished it for the area of Pilottown. What makes the D-Y titles difficult is not their impermanent corner markers, but the frequent lack of boundaries on lands of known location. Some of these plots are like pottery sherds that do not connect with any others—they might go almost any place there is room for them in a restoration.

The fortunate chance that Pilottown is practically a peninsula and that the D-Y lines run clear across it make it impossible to form a block that, if laid down on the map, could not be moved more than a relatively small distance in any direction and still fit, and when placed in this position the Duke of York lines seemed to coincide with hedgerows known to be over a century old at the very least. This solution may involve an assumption, but it is one surveyors frequently make and the finding of a single deed in this whole area that goes back to anyone of the three D-Y grants would do away with this slight objection.

The first corner for the land of Alex. Molesty must be very close to the location of the DeVries monument, but this fact is probably not directly significant. It does, however, make very improbable the suggestion that a fort of old Dutch bricks stood on this point. The D-Y surveyors only used trees and posts when they had no better markers and they would not have failed to make use of a fort even in ruins.



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Rappahannock Fabric Impressed ware than were noted at the Townsend Site. Too little excavation has been completed to permit the suggestion of realistic conclusions in respect to the prevailing types of pottery. The ratio of restorable vessels to the number of pits excavated thus far is high, eight vessels having been restored from the eight pits explored. Among these is the smallest pottery vessel ever to have come to the attention of the writer. It is shown on the cover of this issue of the Archeologist and measures approximately one inch in oral diameter and about one-half inch in height. Except for its extremely small size it is otherwise not noteworthy. Miniature vessels were of common occurrence at the Townsend Site although none recovered there was so tiny.

Excavations at the Ritter Site have produced a surprisingly small number of bone implements. Only three or four awls have been recovered. This fact is in sharp variance with the pattern of the Townsend Site where numerous types of bone tools were found in comparatively large numbers. It should be noted, however, that at Townsend numerous refuse pits yielded no examples of bone implements while others were prolific. It may be that the pattern at Ritter will be both quantitatively and typologically changed as a result of further excavations.

Stone implements have been as rare at Ritter as at Townsend. At the latter approximately two dozen arrowpoints were recovered from ninety pits. At Ritter only two have been discovered. Several pitted stones have come to light but no examples of other types of stone implements. The level of development of the stone culture of the inhabitants of both sites seems to suggest that these peoples were more concerned with retrieving shell fish from the sea than in hunting wild game to obtain a principal source of food. The presence of fragmented animal bone and deer antler indicates, however, that wild game was an important feature in the aboriginal diet and the absence of chipped arrowpoints in the pits may merely indicate that not many were discarded rather than that few were made.

No burials of either human beings or of dogs have thus far been found at the Ritter Site. It will be recalled that both occurred frequently at Townsend and for that reason their absence at Ritter seems notable.

Vandegrift recovered from one pit several examples of a floral material which resembled

maize. All samples were badly charred and positive identification has not yet been obtained. No other types of vegetable remains have been noted. Charred hickory nut shells have occurred in all pits examined.

The culture pattern of the Ritter Site, as indicated by the limited excavations thus far executed, seems to indicate that the Ritter Site represents only another manifestation of that revealed by the excavations at the Townsend Site.

H. G. O.

Lewes, Delaware  
February 13, 1950

Dear Member:

You will find enclosed a bill for your dues as a member of the Sussex Archaeological Association. To receive a bill through the mail with "please remit" added, sometimes strikes a wrong note, so I have asked our treasurer, Miss Adele Chambers to enclose this report to you listing some of the activities of your Association.

The first activity I want to report, is the most interesting meeting planned for Feb. 25, 1950. This meeting will be held in Lewes Fire Hall on Savannah Road at 8:00 P.M. Mr. Leon deValanger, State Archivist, will be our guest speaker.

The Townsend Site has been completed. The pits have been filled in at a cost to the Association of \$60.00. This was ordered paid at our January meeting. Also at that meeting Mr. Geiger Omwake, Chairman of the Townsend Site Project Committee, turned in the final report of the committee. Mr. Omwake through his tireless efforts has compiled a report that is a credit to Mr. Omwake, to the project committee and to the Association. In turning in the report, Mr. Omwake stated that this is the first complete Archaeological investigation of an Indian Site ever made in Delaware. Another feature that makes this investigation unique in the annals of Archaeological investigations is the manner in which it had been carried out. Archaeological investigations are usually conducted by one or two trained Archaeologists with the aid of hired labor to do the "digging". All notes and artifacts are kept and retained by the Archaeologists. In the Townsend Site investigations, the members of the association under the direction of the pro-



ject committee did the "digging", kept the notes, and retained the artifacts.

Of interest to all the members who like to "dig" is the fact that a new project committee has been appointed with Mr. Ralph Karl as chairman. This committee is investigating a site along Canary Creek. If, after an initial investigation by the committee, the site appears to be worthy of opening as a project, then you will be notified.

Your next issue of the Archeolog will come to you under the guidance of a new editor: Mr. Orville Peets of Millsboro, Delaware. Mr. Omwake, the first editor of our publication begged to be excused this year because of the heavy building program he will head as Supt. of Lewes Special School District. We were most fortunate to have a member of Mr. Orville Peets qualifications to assume this important post.

The new officers elected at our last meeting are: Pres. K. D. Givan; Vice Pres. Ralph Karl; Sec. Miss Catherine Maull; Treas. Miss Adele Chambers; Editor of Archeolog Orville Peets and Chairman of Project Committee, Ralph Karl.

Very truly yours,

K. D. Givan, Pres.

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