

PHASE II ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS
WOODVALE-BY-THE-SEA
STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK
DEC Application No. 20-87-0218

Arnold Pickman
no date

PRELIMINARY REPORT

Field work for this project ended on May 28, 1988. The following summarizes the work carried out and the preliminary results based on field observations:

Site A

At the start of the Phase II investigations, twelve shovel tests were excavated with the objective of defining the distribution of prehistoric artifacts encountered during the Phase I testing. The tests confirmed that the prehistoric materials were concentrated in the area as determined by the Phase I tests. However, the variations in stratigraphy which were indicated by the shovel test results, as well as the continued presence of historic period materials at depths of three feet or more suggested the possibility that the higher ground immediately west of Hopping Avenue which had been defined as the site area had, in fact been filled-in during the historic period. We began the excavation of two test units (one 5 x 5 and one 4 x 4 foot square) in the area where the Phase I and Phase II shovel tests indicated the greatest concentration of prehistoric material to be located. Excavation of these units to a depth of 1 - 2 feet yielded flakes and a few pottery sherds. Some historic period materials continued to be present. At this point we used a backhoe to excavate a trench extending westward from the western edge of the higher ground which defined the site. The stratigraphy exposed by this trench suggested that substantial depths of fill had been deposited in this area. This was confirmed by the results of three additional backhoe trenches. The trenches suggested that various soil types had been deposited in the area, and that any top soil which had formerly been present in the area had been stripped off prior to filling. The backhoe trench stratigraphy suggested that the filling had probably occurred in more than one episode.

In order to confirm that no in situ prehistoric deposits remain in the area, we continued to excavate the 5 x 5 foot square. Excavation of the 4 x 4 foot unit was terminated. The test square confirmed that the deposits to a depths of approximately 7 - 8 feet consisted of fill. Most of the prehistoric lithic flakes (and a small number of ceramic sherds) derived from strata of orange/brown mottled sand in the uppermost part of the stratigraphic sequence. The concentrations of artifacts recovered from the Phase I tests apparently originated in these deposits. Some prehistoric material was also recovered from fill deposits lower in the stratigraphic column. The material underlying the landfill appears to be a pre-Holocene sand deposit.

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The landfill in this area may have been deposited during grading associated with the creation of Hopping Avenue and/or was removed from the area to the west, closer to the bluff edge, during the operation of the Brown shipyard (ca. 1870's-1930's). As noted in my letter of May 19, since the artifacts within site "A" derived from a severely disturbed context the existing deposits do not possess "integrity of location" and we do not, therefore consider this site to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. No further archaeological investigations are recommended in this area.

Site B

The area referenced as site "B" in the Phase I report is bounded on the south and west by the edge of the bluffs overlooking the Arthur Kill. The ground slopes upward to the north and east and the eastern boundary of the site is defined by the edge of this higher ground. The land to the east has been severely disturbed by recent house construction. Initially we placed two 4 x 4 foot test squares in the area of the highest concentration of flakes as noted in the Phase I shovel tests. These units confirmed that approximately 1 1/2 - 2 feet of fill overlay most of the site area. Underlying the fill was a approximately 4-10 inch thick stratum of brown sand/silty sand. A partially intact humus layer apparently overlay this stratum in one of the tests. The brown sand stratum yielded a low density of flakes with the lowest density in the northernmost unit. A few lithic tools were also recovered. Some historic period material was also recovered from this stratum. A few flakes were recovered from the orange/brown mottled transitional zone below the brown sand and from the underlying orange sand. This sand deposit, in which artifact bearing levels have been noted at other Staten Island sites, was excavated in all the test units until the underlying silts and clays were reached. The brown sand stratum appeared to slope downward from north to south, with an abrupt drop at the site of the southernmost of our test units (possibly marking the former bluff edge). A greater depth of fill (approximately four feet) overlay this stratum at the latter location. We used a backhoe to remove the overlying fill from an area immediately north of this unit. A 3 x 5 foot test unit was placed in this area, to further test the artifact bearing stratum and to provide a profile which would document its downward slope. While excavating the backhoe trench we encountered a large (ca. 5 x 7) foot concrete "basin" with a brick floor, filled with cinder and ash, adjacent immediately north of our initial test unit. The bottom of the basin was apparently within the brown sand stratum noted above. This historic period feature was probably used to burn domestic trash.

A second backhoe trench was placed in the northernmost portion of the site area. The brown sand stratum appeared to underlie the present surface in this area, with no fill present. A 2 1/2 x 2 1/2 foot test unit was placed at this location. No prehistoric artifacts were recovered. The test results suggest that this area may have been disturbed, and the excavated soil may represent a

more recent deposition than the brown sand stratum noted above.

Five additional shovel test were placed to the west and north of the test units. These tests as well as the Phase I shovel tests indicate that the prehistoric materials derive from a limited area in the vicinity of our test units. A total of 47 square feet of this deposit was sampled in three of the test units. The preliminary data suggest that the prehistoric artifacts may have originally derived from an artifact-bearing layer contained within the orange sand deposits. This material may have been incorporated within the brown sand stratum as a result of plowing, or more likely, gardening and landscaping associated with the 19th century house which formerly stood at the location of the recently built structure east of the site. Subsequent to this cultivation, a humus layer developed, which has subsequently been removed at some locations.

Conclusions pertaining to the possible National Register eligibility of this site will be made following tabulation of artifacts and further analysis. However, the preliminary results suggest that because of the low artifact density, restricted horizontal extent, and historic period disturbance, the site is probably not Register eligible.

Brown Shipyard

During the Phase II project, we conducted additional investigations and recording of the remains of the Brown shipyard (ca. 1870's-1930's). We placed backhoe trenches at the locations where the shipyard sawmill and blacksmiths shop were located as indicated on the 19th and early 20th century maps included in the Phase I report. No remains of these structures were encountered. We also used the backhoe to remove overlying fill from the area east of the exposed portion of the drydock. This testing indicated that remains of beams and posts associated with the drydock structure extend beneath the fill. We also uncovered a wooden platform which may have been the location of the winch used to remove ships from the water for repair. The winch machinery itself has been removed, however. Some additional information concerning the operation of the shipyard has been obtained from conversations with a resident of the area and some additional library research. Our field sketches will enable us to locate the remains of the drydock, shipways and pier pilings on the site map. We also plan to conduct additional photography prior to submission of the final report to provide additional documentation of the existing remains. The nature of the remains and their dilapidated condition would not appear to warrant further recording.

It should be noted that remains of the Ellis shipyard, dating to the same period as the Brown shipyard are located along the Tottenville shoreline east of Main Street. It is our understanding that a Phase I investigation of this property has recently been conducted, and a comparison of the nature and

condition of the remains of both shipyards may be of interest.

Curation

The Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences has agreed to provide curation for the collections from the Phase I and II excavations.

Submitted by:

Arnold Pickman
Principal Investigator
June 1, 1988