



SUFFOLK COUNTY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

*P. O. Drawer AR, Stony Brook, NY 11790*

# NEWSLETTER

REPRESENTING NASSAU AND SUFFOLK COUNTIES

Volume 15, Number 2  
Spring 1989

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE CONTAMINATION - GARDEN VARIETY

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One of the many problems in urban archaeology is that of landfill, and its effect on the local landscape, or urban geomorphology. It goes on everywhere around us, and in New York City, we need not go far. Both east and west sides of Manhattan and a big stretch on the east River in Brooklyn are built on landfill. Even Governor's Island (formerly Nut Island) in New York Harbor was built up with the tonnage extracted from the IRT construction around World War I. In another category are the great man-made mounds or garbage dumps, in polite society called "sanitary landfills"(!), which abound on southern Staten Island and in other handy marshy places like the Pelham Bay Park area. Never mind the methane gas and the noxious effluents from these heaps. There is still a third variety of landfill, more gentle and subtle, of the garden type sometimes called "beautification" and "landscaping." It is the third variety which I have never seen discussed in my reading of local New York archaeology. This was brought home to me years ago when I was still in high school in the mid-1930s. Using my Bolton, Parker and Skinner guides, I often took the subway and street car (at a fraction of today's fare) to check the sites mentioned by these gentlemen. One of my trips took me to Canarsie, the end of a long BMT ride, where I recall taking a street car to where there had been the amusement park area. A large Indian site was reportedly situated in the area of the Paerdegat Canal, which was no lie (Parker

1922, Part 2, p. 582; Bolton, 1922, p.149-150). This was the "Canarsee Planting Ground." There were many open lots in this area at the time, the soil was loose and sandy, and everything showed up quite plainly on the surface. The ground was whitened with both oyster and clam shells, telltale signs of Indian occupation. Indeed, the local streets were not paved and the sidewalks were just hard packed lanes paralleling the nascent streets. There were even some shell pockets tightly packed right in the middle of the sidewalk areas. Small bits of quartz flakes and an occasional potsherd were enough to tell me that I was not wasting my time. An occasional fallow garden (the truck garden type, where the owners seemed to specialize mainly in tomatoes for some reason) afforded more upturned earth for surface hunting. The finds were not many, but the rewards in potsherds and chipped stone specimens were enough to keep the search going. According to my notes, my surveys, some half dozen trips over a space of six years, took me from Flatlands Avenue to Ralph Avenue down to the docks, Canarsie Avenue, Avenues K, L, M to Avenue T. There was a site at E 107th Street and Flatlands Avenue.

On Seaview Avenue, I chanced across a vest pocket-sized park which was undergoing construction. There were a number of men plying the earth in small groups. They frequently took time off to stand and gossip around a scrap wood fire burning

in an iron drum for warmth ( it was February). This was during the Depression era, and these men were dressed in street clothes, street shoes and shabby blue overcoats looking lost in this environment. There were pinched faces, none of the men looked happy, and some not quite sure how to work with their tools. They were spreading a thick, black dirt over the park area. A spread of oyster and clam shell fragments told the story. I was afraid to work over the freshly laid earth especially after the men had just laboriously raked it over several times, levelling it. I noted that the rakings were picked up in a wheel barrow and carted outside the park to an empty lot and dumped. This proved to be a treasure trove of finds, including quartz and chert flakes and bits of pottery. While I was poring through the little heaps of discards, a truck pulled into the park and unloaded yet another dump load of the rich black earth. The men, directed by an overseer, attacked this heap with shovels and wheel barrows, scattering the earth around in designated areas. I finally got the courage to ask the supervisor where the dump loads of earth came from. He said that they came from somewhere on Long Island (Brooklynites do not consider themselves Long Islanders as everyone knows), from Great Neck. The realization of this fact did not come to me until later - who would ever guess that a little park sitting in the midst of an important Canarsie archaeological site would be contaminated with a veneer of foreign soil containing non-local Indian artifacts. Worse, this covering with this putative Great Neck earth lay over native Canarsie soil, giving a stratigraphy in cultural material that was misleading.

The Canarsie incident opened my eyes to the operations of Long Island developers. Since top soil is a valuable commodity (it sells for \$10 a cubic yard (unscreened) at the garden shops by the truck load in northern New Jersey today), and is not to be wasted, the first thing the land developer does after the property is cleared of brush, trees, etc., is to have the bulldozer scoop the topsoil off. It is taken down about a foot in depth, or just down to the sterile soil line or about plow zone level. In scooping up this earth, the bulldozer may lay bare

shell pockets, hearths, etc. on Indian sites. Such was the condition of the Graham Court site in College Point, Queens, where a number of shell pits, including a burial pit was uncovered (Solecki, ms.). According to my College Point colleague, Matt Schreiner, the top soil from Graham Court was trucked out to the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing which was being built at the time under Robert Moses. He also had the valuable peat moss, 88 acres of it, carted away from Juniper Swamp in Middle Village to the fair grounds (Hutter et al, 1976, pp. 138-9). Reportedly the value of the peat moss was over a million dollars. Of incidental note, my Maspeth hometown colleague, Stanley Wisniewski and I have surface collected the Juniper Swamps area for projectile points with some success. One can imagine the mixture of sites represented in the top soil covering the old fair grounds today.

The single instrument most responsible for rapid top soil removal, of course, is the blade or scoop equipped bulldozer. I have observed the technique of the bulldozers. Using the limitations of this vehicle, the earth is heaped into rectangular mounds which could be ca. 50 feet long by 20 feet wide and 8 feet high, the number and size of the mounds of course depending on the area of the ground to be stripped. This stripped earth policy accounted for the many barren stretches of ground found in suburban lots. The mounds are spotted around the acreage, and may stay for several weeks. Then as suddenly as they appeared, they disappear. And with them goes the cultural heritage of the area, even the grass roots. True, the subsurface soil remains exposed, at least for a while, but one cannot say that it is the same. Who ever heard of a farmer crumbling raw clay in his hand and saying that this was his land? Returning to the mounds of top soil, while they are still in place, they are good sources for artifacts, especially after hard rains have washed the heaps down. Needless to say, there is no doubt that they are out of context.

In the wake of the huge parkway construction and sewer projects around the City before and after WW II, I have observed a number of areas which have been cleared

## HUMANITIES GRANT TO SCAA

S.C.A.A. has received a mini-grant from the New York Council for the Humanities to carry out the scripting and visual-artifactual integration of the mural series being painted by David Siklos, Shinnecock. The murals have been funded by Suffolk County Office of Cultural Affairs, individual donors and SCAA, and will be the only interpretation of local Native American life easily available to Mid- and Western Suffolk residents.

The six large murals depict the Paleo to Historic periods of prehistoric Native life on Long Island, and will be installed in the main floor of the large barn at Hoyt Farm Park, Commack. The barn is being "recycled" into the Culture History Center for SCAA's educational arm, the Long Island Culture History Lab & Museum.

The Museum's outdoor full-day programs are completely booked by schools from Springs to Great Neck for fair weather days from September to December and from April through June. Renovation of the barn into the Culture History Center will allow the Native Life & Archaeology program to continue through the Winter, especially with half-day programs for Primary students.

## TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE

The Museum's in-school Technology Workshops have been piloted with the Cold Spring Harbor and Elwood School Districts, to great enthusiasm from students and teachers. The Workshop lasts from one to one-and-a-half hours, and introduces students to the concepts of human invention and technology as reflected in the use of simple machines from the Stone Age to today. Students get hands-on experience with Native, Colonial and 19th century tools in a variety of wood-working tasks. Teachers receive extensive packets of Pre-visit and Post-visit exercises and activities.

## COLONIAL LIFE AND TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

The Long Island Culture History Lab & Museum's new Colonial Life and

Technology program is available at Hoyt Farm Park, Commack. This program interprets the 18th and 19th century life of the Wicks family at the Wicks Homestead, now Hoyt Farm Park.

Students serve as researchers in historical archaeology excavation, seeking evidence of the Wicks family; act as craftsmen in blacksmithing, cider-making, etc., as the Wicks family did; and carry out mapping and surveying activities as did Thomas Wicks, an original settler of and a surveyor for the Town of Huntington.

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## THANKS TO LOUISE BASA

Louise Basa, archaeologist for the Facilities Construction Group of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, recently conducted a most informative workshop on Cultural Resources law and State procedures for SCAA members, as well as providing us with many needed documents. Among many things, we learned that the Good Ground Water suit created case law, which now requires agencies and individuals to take a "hard-look" for cultural resources before developing a property. Another State DEC requirement under the SEQR law is that legally all archaeological work must be completed before a final Environmental Impact Statement approval can be issued. Some Town Planning agencies need to know about these procedures.

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## SCAA PUBLICATION REVIEWED

SCAA's latest publication in its **READINGS IN LONG ISLAND ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOHISTORY** series, **THE HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF LONG ISLAND, Volume VII, Part 1 - The Sites**, was favorably reviewed in the Spring 1989 issue of the new Long Island Historical Journal (Spring 1989, Vol. 1, No. 2). Linda E. Barber of the Institute for Long Island Regional Archaeology, stated the volume "does an outstanding job of accumulating, condensing, and presenting current research in historical archaeology in a comprehensive, manageable format."

**CONFERENCES, EXHIBITS**

**ASSOCIATION FOR PRESERVATION TECHNOLOGY**, Annual Conference, Sept. 4-9, 1989, Chicago, IL. Contact **Asoc. for Preservation Technology**, c/o Small Homes Council, 1 East St. Mary's Road, Champaign, IL. 61820.

**COUNCIL FOR NORTHEAST HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY**, 1989 Annual Meeting, Oct. 6-8, 1989, Headquarters Plaza Hotel, Morristown, N.J. For further information contact David Starbuck, Dept. of Science & Technology, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY. 12180.

**MATERIAL CULTURE OF GENDER/GENDER OF MATERIAL CULTURE**, Nov. 1989, Winterthur, DE. Contact Kenneth Ames or Katherine Martinez, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE. 19735.

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK, N.Y.** Exhibit: *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska*, November 26, 1989-March 25, 1990.

**HUDSON MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF MAINE, ORONO, ME.** *From Site to Sight: The History of Photography in the Service of Anthropology*, October 21, 1989-December 17, 1989. History of anthropologists' use of photography in their explorations of human culture.

**RECENT PUBLICATIONS**

**QUANTIFYING ARCHAEOLOGY**, Stephen Shennan, 1988, 364 pages, \$34.95. This book introduces archaeologists to the most important quantitative methods, from the initial description of archaeological data to techniques of multivariate analysis. **Academic Press**, 1250 Sixth Ave., San Diego, CA 92101

**STONE AGE SPEAR AND ARROW POINTS OF THE MID-CONTINENTAL AND EASTERN UNITED STATES: A Modern Survey and Reference**, Noel D. Justice, 302 pages, \$27.50. **Indiana Univ. Press**, 10th and Morton Sts., Bloomington, IN 47405.

**REMEMBRANCE OF PATRIA: DUTCH ART AND CULTURE IN COLONIAL AMERICA, 1609-1776**, Roderich H. Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka, 320 pages, \$65. (plus \$2.45 p/h). The largest and most comprehensive publication on the subject of Dutch arts and culture in colonial America. **Patria, Box 327, Kinderhook, NY 12106.**

**A FORGOTTEN PEOPLE: DISCOVERING THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN SUFFOLK COUNTY**, Grania Bolton Marcus, 1988, 152 pages, \$11.00. Through the use of primary evidence -- documents, artifacts, paintings, gravestones and buildings -- this publication traces the contributions of Long Island's black residents from the seventeenth century through 1860. **SPLIA, 93 No. Country Rd., Setauket, NY 11733**

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Articles for the newsletter should be sent to the Newsletter Editor: Carol Traynor, c/o SPLIA, 93 No. Country Rd., Setauket, N.Y. 11733.

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-----MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION-----

Membership in SCAA includes three Newsletters per year and a 20% reduction in workshop and publication costs. All contributions are tax-deductible.

STUDENT (up to age 18)	\$10	INDIVIDUAL	\$20	FAMILY	\$30
SUSTAINING	\$50	CONTRIBUTING	\$100	PATRON	\$200
				LIFE	\$400

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Please send your check and application to:  
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