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November, 2002

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Eastern New Jersey: The Notebook of Charles F.
Woolley, 1878-1881

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“Observations on the Aboriginal Remains in Eastern New Jersey:” The Notebook of Charles F. Woolley, 1878 - 1881

By Megan E. Springate

Presented at the Eastern States Archaeological Federation Conference, Mt. Laurel, NJ, November 7-10, 2002.

** Specific details regarding site locations have been removed from this publicly available version.

Slide 1: Book

Good morning. My name is Megan Springate, and I am the Assistant Curator and Archaeologist at the Monmouth County Historical Association, a private non-profit museum with over 100 years of history collecting and preserving the history of Monmouth County, New Jersey. While working in our library and archives a while back, researching something completely unrelated, I came across a small notebook in our collections, entitled “Observations on the Aboriginal Remains in Eastern New Jersey, Book 2, 1878 - 1881” by Charles F. Woolley. Inside the notebook were copious and detailed observations made by Mr. Woolley who scoured sand fields and creeks throughout Monmouth and Middlesex Counties, as well as other locations, collecting native artifacts.

During my subsequent research, I was unable to find out very much about Mr. Charles Woolley, such as when he was born and when he died, etc. What I was able to discover about the man came from the diary itself. Mr. Woolley mentions early in this notebook

that he moved his collection from Freehold to Eatontown, NJ in March of 1879. While it is unclear whether just the collection was moved, or if Mr. Woolley changed residences, we do know from newspaper clippings in the notebook that he was first a teacher and then principal of the Eatontown Public School. Woolley was a contemporary of Charles Abbott, but there is only passing mention in the notebook of Mr. Abbott as another collector in New Jersey, despite the fact that Woolley wrote of rather extensive contact with other collectors in the area, exchanging artifacts and visiting sites with people such as Louis Ruf of Freehold and Jacob Corlies. I was unable to determine if there was any friction between Woolley and Abbott from the references I had available; however, both of them donated collections of New Jersey material to the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University on the same day in 1879. Abbott's rather more extensive donation is listed immediately after Woolley's in the museum's accession book.

Woolley's donation to the Peabody consisted of 148 stone implements. In a letter to Mr. Putnam at the Peabody dated July 15, 1878 Woolley wrote:

Dear Sir,

I ship by express today 150 arrow points etc. found in Monmouth and Middlesex Counties of this state. The stone of which they are made never occurs in situ here. Of 3000 implements collected by me about 3/5 are made from this material. They were all found in sand fields upon the surface of the ground. I think the stone is the

same kind of rock as the Palisades in the NE part of our state. Yours respectfully,
Chas. F. Woolley.

Upon contacting the Peabody museum, I was pleased to discover that these objects were still in their collections, and I received permission to photograph them for study, for which I am very grateful.

Mr. Woolley's notebook contains much information, including various notes on general artifact types, transcriptions of various published articles, clippings, lists of locations to be visited, a diagram of his display cabinet and a list of the books and publications in his personal library. Of primary interest for this presentation, however, are the entries Woolley made after visiting sites. Each site or locale was given a number, and these range from 1 to 99. In some cases, these are individual sites; in other cases, these are small regions that contain multiple sites. Most of these 99 locales are in Monmouth and Middlesex Counties; Burlington County, Ocean County, Mercer, Camden and Gloucester Counties in New Jersey are also represented, as are other states, including Pennsylvania, Missouri, New York, Florida, California, Illinois, Virginia, and Utah, and countries, including France and Mexico. Mr. Woolley himself did not visit all of these more exotic locations; there are instances where he purchased or traded for items from other regions, and these still received a location number in his notebook. The vast majority of the sites listed are prehistoric, with a few historic sites he visited and collected from, including Monmouth Battlefield and Civil War sites in Virginia.

At the end of each year, Woolley would summarize his site visits, giving the book and page number for his initial visit notes, which contain the most precise site location information. Unfortunately, since we only have book 2, and the location or fate of his first notebook is unknown, it is not possible to precisely locate many of the sites he visited prior to 1878. He did, however, in his annual summary, give the town name in which most of these sites are located, and so we have some idea of their distribution. His location information was often so detailed that using period maps, such as the Beers' 1873 and Wolverton 1889 maps of Monmouth County and the Everts and Stewart map of Middlesex County from 1876, it is possible to identify site locations, and then locate them on modern maps. I was able to get to some of these sites to photograph, and was pleasantly surprised to find that not all of them had been built over, and that even after 120 years or so since Mr. Woolley visited them, the sites still held promise for data recovery. This, of course, also means that these sites remain threatened by increasing development.

There are too many sites listed in the notebook to present them all to you here, so I have selected a few to give you a sense of the type of information that is available. I am also working on an article which will present information on all of Woolley's 99 locations.

Slide: Middlesex County Sites

I will start in Middlesex County, since it contains the first site that Woolley visited, site #1 in Old Bridge. I will also discuss location #34, which actually represents several sites in and around Spotswood, New Jersey.

Slide: Artifacts from Site #1, Old Bridge

Just quickly, I would like to point out the small white numbers pasted on the artifacts.

These appear to correspond with Woolley's site numbers in the notebook, permitting the re-attribution of these sites to their sources (prior to this research, the only information the Peabody had about these objects was that they were from Monmouth and Middlesex Counties).

Woolley listed the Old Bridge site as a village site; unfortunately, because this was the first site he documented, detailed information on its exact location are in the missing first volume. The second notebook, however, details Woolley's fifth and sixth visits to this site in 1879 and 1880, both times in the month of June. In these two visits, he recovered over 60 specimens, including a core, 1 unfinished implement, 7 arrowheads, 1 perforator, 5 knives, 2 scrapers – one of which shows much battering on the edge, 1 fragment of a grinding stone with marks as if it had been made with ends, 1 clay pipe or pottery tube, and 2 knives belonging to the cache described on page 24 catalog 1. Unfortunately, Woolley rarely gave more detailed descriptions of the objects he recovered than those you just heard.

Slide: Site 34, Spotswood, Artifacts slide 1

Site 34 is a village site or sites located in and around Spotswood, Middlesex County, New Jersey. The notebook documents his 10th, 11th, and 12th visits to this area in 1879 and 1880. The initial location is not described here; but when he returned to it in 1879, he recovered a large quantity of objects, including a cache of 13 implements consisting of a hammer or smoothing stone surrounded by 12 perfect arrowhead shaped implements, 5 of basalt, 5 of black flint and 2 of dark quartz. He also recovered a brass and copper ring and thimble; fragments of marked pottery; 96 arrowheads, one of which is unique, made of quartz and when inverted is shaped like a heart. He also recovered 3 spear heads, one long and very slender, one very sharp of chipped pink jasper; 4 perforators one of which he described as a needle if ever there was one of stone; 4 chipped celts, one chisel-shaped, 2 cores, 6 scrapers, and 3 knives, as well as other items.

Several other sites in this area are described, including one near the confluence of the Manalapan and Matchaponix Rivers (no objects from this site are listed). He also visited a location opposite the Mills, where although he found a very fine chisel with a widening edge, a great portion of the field of more than 50 acres showed no signs.

Slide: Site 34, Artifacts Slide 2

Woolley also visited another field in this region, located between Texas and Spotswood,

Middlesex County. Among the 333 implements he collected in a single visit to this site were: 130 arrowheads, 1 finely serrated; 7 perforators; 4 spearheads; 9 scrapers (6 in a cache); 37 knives; 4 chipped celts; 1 digging implement; and a fragmentary soapstone vessel. Shortly after this visit, Woolley returned to this area from June 26 to July 2, 1880 and recovered very few items. In a rare discussion of the sites, he wrote:

Over all fields and an additional one at Texas, exploring them systematically except the one near the dairy and the one at the spring. I think [they] ... are exhausted. I have never heard of hammerstones or polished celts being found.

Slide: Monmouth County Sites

We now move on to sites in Monmouth County. This slide shows most of the Monmouth County site locations mapped out on Wolverton's 1889 map.

Slide: Site 20, Map

This is Site 20, a village site located in Macedonia. Visited in July and August of 1879, Woolley described this area.

Slide: Site 20: Site Photo

This photo was taken of the area; this is a photo of the east side of the brook; the west side is more of the same brush. Woolley noted that this spot had not been searched before, and so is included here as being of some note. Artifacts recovered include fine

pottery fragments both plain and ornamented, the latter chiefly of very true geometric lines; 8 arrowheads, 1 perforator, 1 knife, 1 spearhead, 1 fine polished chisel or celt, and many shells covering more ground than he suspected.

Slide: Site 97: Map

The next site is Site 97, a shellheap and village site located near the railroad station. The shells extend from both sides of the ravine leading to the bay. Woolley visited this site, which is very close to the Middlesex County border, in February of 1880.

Slide: Site 97: Site

This is a photo of the site as it looks today. This was taken facing SE. Behind me is a small housing development dating from about the 1940s or 1950s. Woolley's visit to this location was extremely brief, and he recovered animal bones mixed in with the shells, fragments of pottery and 17 implements.

Slide: Site 84; Map

Site 84 is a shell heap and village site located near Red Bank. Of all the sites visited, this was the most built upon.

Slide: Site 84: Site View

This image was taken across the Navesink River. Woolley recovered relatively few

artifacts during his three visits to the site. However, one of the artifacts is quite remarkable. Along with a few fragments of pottery, Woolley recovered a carving of a human face in steatite, measuring 3cm long and 1.8cm at its greatest width. In his notebook, Woolley records that he has also heard reports of a head of soapstone similar to this one found in Holmdel , New Jersey which is five times larger and has a hole for suspension. Also recovered from this place was a fragment of a small bannerstone or baton broken at the perforations, but showing 8 very distinct tally-marks or a record, and between them were 3 smaller and less distinct incisions, looking as if they were intended as fractions of the others. This was found near the carving.

Slide: Site 28: Map

The last site I want to show you is a village site listed by Woolley only as Sugar Loaf Hill, Red Valley, Monmouth County. The only artifact he associates with this site (which he did not visit during the years encompassed by Vol. 2 of the notebook) is a core of common opal.

It turns out, however, that this site is one of the ones excavated in the 1930s and recorded in Dorothy Cross' Archaeology of New Jersey. Cross describes the Red Valley Site as one and one-half miles southeast of Red Valley. It stretches along both banks a creek on the southern side of Sugar Loaf Hill. On both sides a strip of marshland separates the inhabited area from the creek; the width of the marsh varies according to the season of the

year, with an average of 75 feet. Cross notes that the site was discovered in the early 1900s by Alanson Skinner, and reported in Skinner and Schrabish's "A Preliminary Report of the Archaeological Survey of the State of NJ." Woolley, however, had visited the site prior to 1878, and had already determined it to be a village site.

Slide: Site 28: Site View

This photo was taken looking NE along the creek from the road. The site area excavated in 1936 and 1937 is further inland on the banks of the river; however, you can see how undeveloped this area remains.

Slide: Site 28: Site View

This photo was taken facing north from the road, and shows some of the marshland described in Cross. This area remains a game preserve.

Slide: Site 28: Artifacts

Again, we have very little information from Woolley about the artifacts recovered from around Sugar Loaf Hill, save this slide of 2 pieces he donated to the Peabody, and his notation that a core of common opal was found here. The rather extensive site report in Cross, however, reveals this was a particularly rich site. Excavations of almost 40,000 square feet revealed 17 pits, 24 caches, 2,293 stone artifacts, 1,104 potsherds, as well as other miscellaneous material. Based on the material recovered, Cross concluded that the

Red Valley Site represented a village of fair size, and of more or less permanent occupation. The subsistence strategies of the inhabitants focused on hunting and fishing, with some supplementary agriculture, as evidenced by some stone hoes recovered.

Slide: Site 28: Site View

This photo of Sugar Loaf Hill was taken looking south. As you can see, we are overlooking a cultivated field of peppers, and the area looks undeveloped. Just outside of this frame, however, are indications otherwise. Immediately left of where this photo was taken is a recent housing development, and a large recreational development is present just left of the edge of the frame in the background. All of these factors suggest that the Red Valley site may be under imminent threat.

Slide: Open Book

In conclusion, this presentation has given you just a taste of the information available in Mr. Woolley's notebook. While his artifact descriptions are often lacking in detail, his descriptions of site locations are often precise enough that, using both contemporary and current maps, their locations can be accurately determined and the sites visited.

It was my expectation while working on this project that, upon visiting many of these locations, I would find the sites long since lost to development. I was pleasantly surprised to find that this was not always the case, and that some sites could still be visited by archaeologists. As I stated earlier, this also means that many of these sites are under

imminent threat of destruction as development continues unabated.

After spending so much time with Mr. Charles F. Woolley through his notebook, I believe I can honestly say that he would be delighted to know that his work had not been lost to time, and could be used to help preserve these sites, and to learn about their inhabitants.