

NEWSLETTER

Representing Nassau & Suffolk Counties

Vol. 22      No. 3  
Fall          1996  
ISSN          1079-2198

PRESERVATION ACTION FOR FORT CORCHAUG

Fort Corchaug, a Native American Contact-period fort located on the West bank of Downs Creek in the North Fork village of Cutchogue has been the subject of archaeological interest since the 1950s. Ralph Solecki, then a graduate student at Columbia University, wrote his master's thesis based on his limited excavations at the site. The artifacts from the site were placed in the Smithsonian Institution, American Museum of Natural History, and Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. An overview of this research was published by the Archaeological Society of Connecticut Bulletin No. 24:3-40, 1950.

Carlyle Smith, for his doctoral dissertation on *The Archaeology of Coastal New York*, used the data from Fort Corchaug to develop his proposed Shantok aspect or focus (*American Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Papers Vol. 43, Part 2, New York, NY, 1950*).

Ralph Solecki, now professor emeritus at Columbia University, first tested the "well" or Baxter site, a short distance south of the fort in 1938 when he was working on his master's thesis, and he and Carlyle Smith excavated part of it in 1947. Bert Salwen, a graduate student of Dr. Solecki's at Columbia, in 1960 excavated 2 five meter squares at the Baxter site (named after the owner, William J. Baxter). It was probably a living area, although no post molds indicating a shelter were found.

The subsistence data from this sample was an important part of Salwen's doctoral dissertation on *Sea Levels and Archaeology in the Long Island Sound Area* (later published in *American Antiquity*, Vol. 28:1, 46-55, 1962; reprinted in SCAA's Vol. V, *The Second Coastal Archaeology Reader*, James Truex, ed., 1982:35-43).

New York State Archaeologist William A. Ritchie further excavated the Baxter site in 1961, and found a Woodland period occupation level as well as an earlier Orient period one. His analysis of the shellfish debris of the two periods questioned Salwen's

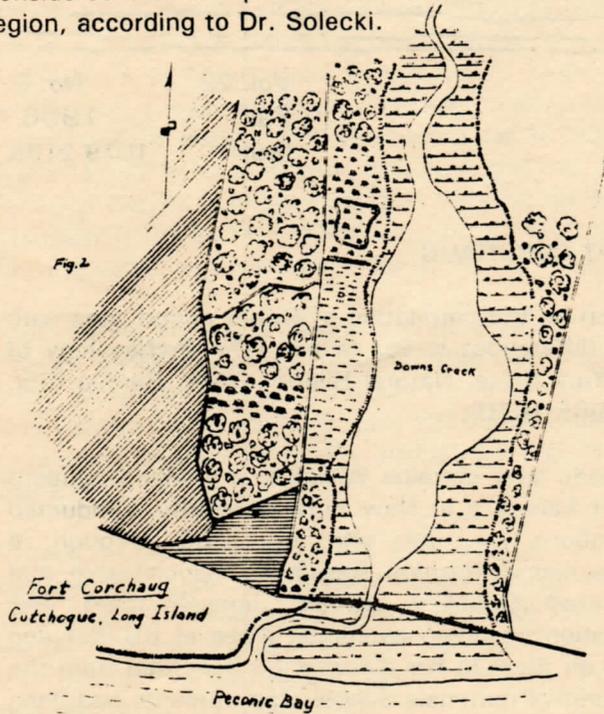
position on the correlation of Orient period sites with major differences in sea levels. (*The Archaeology of New York State*, Natural History Press, Garden City, NY, 1965:167ff).

A decade later Lorraine Williams, a graduate student of Bert Salwen's at New York University, conducted excavations at the site in 1968 through a Smithsonian Institution Research Associateship and reanalyzed Solecki's artifacts housed there. Her excavation of seven additional areas at the fort and report on three in her dissertation benefited from the comparative materials Salwen and students had been excavating at Fort Shantok, Connecticut (*Ft. Shantok and Ft. Corchaug: A Comparative Study of Seventeenth Century Culture Contact in the Long Island Sound Area*, New York University, University Microfilms, 1973).

Lynn Ceci, later a professor at Queens College, marshaled agronomical, documentary, and archaeological evidence to support her doctoral thesis contention that European contact and trade contributed to the shift of Coastal natives from mobility to sedentism. The archaeological data of Solecki and Williams from Fort Corchaug was an important part of her evidence (*The Effect of European Contact and Trade on the Settlement Pattern of Indians in Coastal New York, 1524-1665: the Archaeological and Documentary Evidence*, City University of New York, University Microfilms, 1977).

Ralph Solecki, returning to the topic, examines Ceci's opinion that the 'forts' of Southern New England and Long Island were 'trading stations,' and finds the archaeological evidence does not support that use for all of them. Fort Corchaug is a significant part of that evidence, being both a refuge and a trading station. ("Indian Forts of the Mid-17th Century in the Southern New England-New York Coastal Area," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*, Vols. 22-23, 1992-93:64-78).

Meanwhile, Mrs. Myra Case of the Cutchogue-New Suffolk Historical Society secured National Register status for 25 acres of the 105 acre site. Along the way the site was sporadically 'pot-hunted' by (presumably) a few local people, but it is still considered the best preserved Native fort site in the region, according to Dr. Solecki.



In 1974 the Suffolk County Legislature sought to purchase the fort site from Mr. Baxter to preserve it as a county park. This action was opposed by the Southold Town government as a local government issue. In 1989 the County and Town, using open space funds, jointly agreed to purchase the site to preserve it from development. The tract was appraised for \$3 million, but unfortunately a contract for that amount was not signed by the County's real estate entity. Subsequently, property values dropped and the County could or would not pay an amount larger than the new lower assessment. Mr. Baxter would not agree to this, and filed plans to develop the tract, to include a vineyard, horse farm, 42 house sites, and a small area set aside around the fort.

After complaints by local concerned citizens and groups, Mr. Baxter went to the Peconic Land Trust, a not-for-profit conservation group, for help in working out a plan that would satisfy both town requirements for development of the acreage and his obligations as executor of his father's estate. The plan formulated by the Land Trust proposes 37 acres for Town acquisition (for which Southold Town had pledged up to \$1 million in the earlier town-county agreement) and a residential development of 16 lots, ranging in size from 2 to 18 acres. Unfortunately, these house lots occupy the major part of the area designated a National Historic Place, and the boundary of one is about 30 feet from the perimeter of the fort.

In addition, the archaeological survey of the parcel conducted by Greenhouse Associates as part of the Environmental Impact Statement shows very few symbols representing cultural finds in what is known by neighbors and earlier archaeologists to be an extensive habitation zone. The Baxter site remains do not appear from the map to have been pinpointed, nor another shell midden site at the head of Downs Creek reported by Ken Homan, a Cutchogue resident familiar with the site.

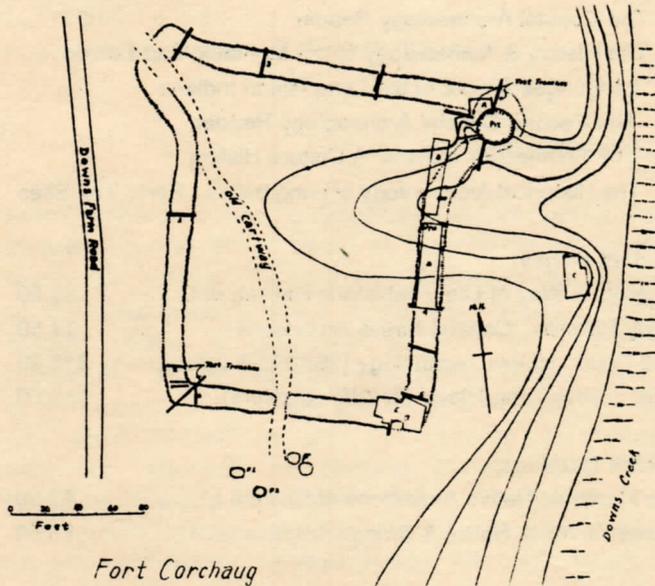
The Land Trust, which is experienced in attracting people to invest in Conservation Easements, is leading an effort to resolve the many issues involved in the sale of this property. Until now these easements have been generally secured for ecological or esthetic purposes. Fort Corchaug is the first to be considered not only for the ecological importance of its woods and wetlands but for its cultural significance. The Town government must still vote on purchase of the 37 acres proposed as a park which would preserve the site and contain an interpretive area and walking trails. A replica of the fort could also be built which would be a magnet for regional school groups and for visitors to the east end. Additional archaeological research--very little of the fort site has been excavated to date--could tell us much more about the imperfectly-known Contact Period lifeways on Long Island.

The Southold Town Planning Department and Town Council will be considering Mr. Baxter's current proposal when it is submitted in the near future. As an example of a similar situation, Southampton Town and the County purchased for preservation the site of a Shinnecock Fort after it was located by archaeologists in 1989.

It is clear from the information related above that Fort Corchaug is a most unique cultural resource and has figured in much of the culture history scholarship of the region, as well as being of national import. Data from the minor amount of excavation at the site to date has been crucial to regional cultural interpretation (Smith, Solecki), has figured in the national sea levels and cultural development debate (Salwen and Ritchie), has shown the directed acculturation of the Corchaug native people as compared to the Mohegan (Williams), was data postulated to support wampum production (instead of maize cultivation) as the basis for sedentism of the Coastal New York natives of the Contact Period (Ceci), and was an example of a defensive structure as well as a trading station (Solecki).

In recognition of the importance of the Contact period 'fort' or 'trading house' sites on Long Island, S.C.A.A. is preparing the 8th volume in our series, **Native Forts on Long Island**. Fort Corchaug is the

centerpiece of the book, with two chapters, by Solecki and Williams, devoted to it. Other chapters will be on Fort Massapeag (Solecki, et.al.), Fort Shinnecock (Miller), and Fort Montauk (Tooker, Johannemann, King). Let us hope that the combined efforts of Southold Town, the Peconic Land Trust, Mr. Baxter, and local citizens' groups will help preserve what eminent archaeologists deem a national treasure.



**NEW YORK STATE ARCHAEOLOGY WEEK -  
OCTOBER 6 - 13  
OCTOBER 6 - S.C.A.A.'s NATIVE TECHNOLOGY  
WORKSHOP - 1 - 4 pm  
HOYT FARM PARK, NEW HIGHWAY, COMMACK**

#### **Successful Summer Student Archaeology Field Schools**

Nassau BOCES Gifted & Talented Program students and Suffolk BOCES Summer Enrichment Program participants attended a Summer Archaeological Field School at both Blydenburgh and Hoyt Farm Parks for the third year. Students experience both Native and Colonial crafts at the sites as well as archaeology.

The students participate in all phases of archaeology--testing, excavation, mapping, drawing profiles, cataloging, mending artifacts, etc. This year a geophysical technique, resistivity testing, was added to the activities. Dr. Bruce Bevan of Geosight, Inc. consulted with museum staff and observed the students at work. Resistivity passes an electric current between two electrodes placed in the soil at measured intervals; the readings on the voltmeters, which indicate the resistance of roots, rocks, objects, etc., can be charted and later mapped. The contours resulting from the mapping indicate anomalies under the soil. These anomalies can indicate what may be buried there.

At Blydenburgh County Park we are trying to find a buried path that once led to the waterside. Resistivity is a non-invasive technique that takes the place of much test pitting, in that it may indicate the most likely spot to examine further.

These students, with guidance, are carrying out a scientific investigative technique that is not generally being used by the professional archaeologists of the region.

#### **Research from SCAA Montauk Volume Presented at Ethnohistory Conference**

Drs. John Strong of Southampton College, Gaynell Stone of SCAA and SUNY-Stony Brook, and Robert Venables of Cornell University are presenting a symposium, "The Montaukett of Eastern Long Island: Survival, Exodus, and Re-recognition" at the November 7-10 American Society for Ethnohistory conference in Portland, Oregon.

Dr. Janie Rees-Miller, formerly of Long Island and now professor of English at Marietta College, Ohio, is the author of "English and Eastern Algonquian: A Case Study in Language Death," in the up-coming issue of the journal *Linguistics*. Dr. Miller used much of the information in SCAA's Vol. IV, *Language & Lore of the Long Island Indians*, in her paper.

**The History & Archaeology of the Montauk**, SCAA's Vol. III, 2nd ed., was recently reviewed in Vol. 30 of *Historical Archaeology*, pp. 117,118. It was found to be an encyclopedic volume and an exceptional job of drawing together disparate sources on the Montauk, as well as revealing the rich archaeological heritage of the area. Richard Veit felt that the historic photographs and visual materials were a high point, and most interesting were the diaries of Occom and Horton, Strong's delineation of the loss of the land, and Rabito-Wyppensenwah's organization of documentary records. He also found the archaeological reports to be useful to regional archaeologists.

#### **MEETINGS**

**The Eastern States Archaeological Federation** meeting will be October 24-27 at the Radisson Hotel, Huntington, W.VA. For information, WVAS-ESAF, P.O. Box 1596, Huntington, WV 25716-1596.

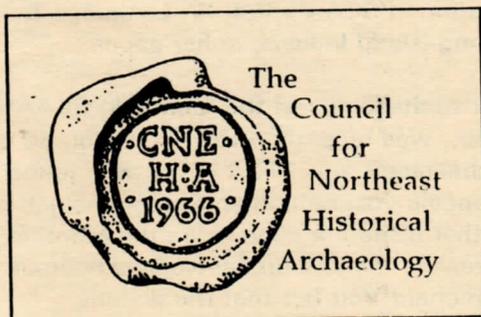
**N.Y. State Archaeology Week** programs will be held at SCAA's Hoyt Farm site on October 6th--a Native Technology Workshop; films at Garvies Point Preserve on October 6 and 12; a slide-lecture on Archaeology at Rock Hall at the Smithtown Historical

Society's Brush Barn October 6th; a slide-lecture on the New York African Burial Ground at Adelphi University October 9th; the same lecture at Dowling College, Oakdale, on October 7th.

**The Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums 1996**  
Annual Meeting will be held on Long Island November 10-13, sponsored by the Long Island Museum Association, of which SCAA is a member. There will be exhibits, a resource room, programs, and tours throughout the Island. For information call MAAM at 302-731-1424. "Oral History, Memory, and the Sense of Place," annual meeting of the Oral History Association will be held in Philadelphia, PA on Oct. 9-11. For information call 817-755-2764.

South Street Seaport's "Digging Around Town" Lecture Series has weekly lectures from Oct. 16th to 30th. Dr. Alan Gilbert of Fordham University will report on his excavations of Rose Hill Manor on the campus on October 23rd. For information call 212-748-8757.

**Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology**  
conference will be held October 18-20 in Albany at the Ramada Inn Albany Downtown. A major focus will be on Dutch archaeology and material culture, and there are numerous tours and workshops. For information call 518-747-2926.



**Prehistoric American Indian Ceramic Workshop** will be held Sept. 24 and a second date on Staten Island, sponsored by the N.Y. Institute of Anthropology. For information call 718-815-3460.

**N.Y. Archaeological Council** general meeting, September 28th at the Best Western Airport Inn, Syracuse, NY. For information call 518-474-5813,

**Historic Iron-making Conference**, sponsored by the North Jersey Highlands Historical Society, is October 19 and 20th at Ringwood State Park. For information call Edward Lenik at 201-492-8525.

**L.I. Council for the Social Studies** conference and materials exhibit, October 21st at the Huntington Hilton, Melville. For information write LICSS, P.O. Box 348, E. Setauket.

## PUBLICATIONS OF THE SUFFOLK COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Readings in **LI Archaeology & Ethnohistory**: All volumes are \$35. except Vol. III which is \$75. + tax and shipping. Vol.s I & VI are out of print.

- I. Early Papers in Long Island Archaeology
- II. The Coastal Archaeology Reader
- III. The History & Archaeology of the Montauk, 2nd Edition
- IV. Languages & Lore of the Long Island Indians
- V. The Second Coastal Archaeology Reader
- VI. The Shinnecock Indians: A Culture History
- VII. The Historical Archaeology of Long Island: Part I: The Sites

### Student Series:

Booklet: A Way of Life: Prehistoric Natives of LI	\$5.50
Study Pictures: Coastal Native Americans -	\$7.50
Wall Chart: Native Technology (26X39" 3 colors)	\$13.00
Map: Native Long Island (26X39" 3 colors)	\$13.00

### Exhibit Catalogs:

The Montauk: Native Americans of Eastern LI	\$3.50
Women's Work: Native & African Americans of LI	\$3.50

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Membership in SCAA includes 3 Newsletters per year and a 10% reduction in workshop and publication costs. All contributions are tax deductible.

Student (To age 18) \$10	Individual \$20
Family \$30	Sustaining \$50
Contributing \$100	Patron \$200
	Life \$400

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No: \_\_\_\_\_ Willing to Volunteer? \_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Send Check to: Suffolk County Archaeological Association, P.O. Drawer 1542 Stony Brook, NY 11790