

# NEWSLETTER

REPRESENTING NASSAU AND SUFFOLK COUNTIES

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

## THE (17TH CENTURY) HICKS HOUSE SITE BAYSIDE, QUEENS

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The Hicks House site was the first one that I had ever participated in excavating. Certainly, with the training and knowledge which I acquired in later years I would have kept better records and more comprehensive notes of my work there than I did. However, since I was at the time more interested in prehistoric remains, and as the site was the particular domain of a Floral Park, Nassau collector, Waldemar J. Pedersen, whose major activity was in unsystematically turning the earth over for artifacts, I refrained from doing much work there. In addition, a small high school allowance did not permit many long journeys from western Queens to Nassau, about a two hour one way trip to the site.

I recorded five visits to the site in my notes from April 25, 1937 to May 1, 1938. There was generally a group of us participating in the site excavations. At various times, these included Waldemar Pedersen, John Wilson, Leonidas Westervelt, Matt Schreiner, Carlyle Smith, Kenneth Orr, Wynn Smith, Bob Fieux, Edgar Pedersen, Richard Spooner, and Bob Kusy. William F. Stiles of the Museum of the American Indian and Mrs. Stiles participated once in the excavations. I have no record that Stanley Wisniewski was present at the Hicks House excavation in my notes, but it is to be assumed that he knew of it.

John Wilson thought that the site was that of the 17th century Hicks House. My original impression was that it was rather late, perhaps dated around 1850 from the looks of the good shape of the foundation, the only remaining part of the house. I had based this conclusion on cultural material discovered from my earlier investigations, including a piece of a clock frame, some pieces of iron, white clay pipe bowls and stems, and some kitchen utensils which looked late in time to me.

I made a sketch map of the site location, which was never elaborated in detail because Carlyle Smith and Wynn Smith made a survey of the house site. From my recollection, the site consisted of a cellar foundation of stone, measuring perhaps twenty feet on a side. It lay overlooking the marsh at the head of Little Neck Bay, and one could clearly see the bridge over the creek to the north and the village of Douglaston in the distance. It was situated on a prehistoric Indian village site, marked by a refuse shell heap skirting the front of the sloped bank to the north and east of the house. It was evident that the Hicks family took good advantage of a favorable location originally used by the Indians. We found quite a number of prehistoric artifacts, including chipped and ground stone specimens and aboriginal pottery attesting to a long occupation by the Indians here. The house was situated on the side of a low hill slope, facing the marsh. There was a dirt road on the east side of the house leading north from the farm to Northern Boulevard. The the north of the house on the edge of the bank facing the marsh was an aboriginal refuse heap of shells, which was bisected by the road. There was a refuse heap just to the east of the house, between the house and the road. The site of an old tidewater mill was pointed out to me situated a short distance out in the marsh from the house site. During my visits to the site there had been a a large excavation cut into the hill for sand and gravel just to the west of the house site. I recall that parts of the digging equipment were still lying there. The excavation had sliced through what appears to have been a colonial period cemetery on the hill, which had been dug through an aboriginal Indian site. We recovered a number of burials there originally interred in coffins

since the coffin nails were found in association with the skeletons. These finds are part of a separate record since they may not directly pertain to the Hicks house.

A picture of the Hicks house in the "History of Queens County, New York, 1683-1882" (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., p. 88) identifies it as 200 years old and located in Bayside, Long Island. It shows a two story salt box-type house with a shingled roof. There are five upstairs windows, a central door and four windows on the front ground floor. The oblique view shows the side with one door, one upstairs second story window, and a small attic window. There are two chimneys at either end of the house, within the house walls. There is a gable pitched roof, and the house appears to face toward the southeast. The same source (ibid., p. 89) notes that John and Stephen Hicks came from Flushing in 1642. John Hicks was one of the original patentees. There are historical records about Hicks usurping the land from the Indians.

Regarding the excavation at the site, my notes indicate that Pedersen had concentrated a lot of effort in the excavation of the eastern perimeter of the cellar, backfilling his old excavations as he went along. To my knowledge, he worked at the east side of the exterior foundations, and I excavated with him at the northeast wall of the house foundation and in the east dump outside the house foundations. In the latter operation, on a separate day, each of us turned over about 100 cubic feet of earth.

According to my records, I cataloged under the designation of Qn1 (Queens County, Site 1) 56 artifacts and two animal bones. Not included in this enumeration were a number of items found on April 25, 1937, which may have been found collectively by the party composed of John Wilson, Matt Schreiner, Waldemar Pedersen and me. These items were some pipe bowls and stems, pieces of iron, and a piece of a clock frame and other household materials mentioned above. Among the more significant artifacts found on another occasion was a fine Iroquois-type clay smoking pipe found by John Wilson beneath the foundation stones in the bottom of the cellar. This was a very surprising find, especially since it was the only prehistoric Indian specimen recovered in this excavation. I recorded that one of my excavations went down to a depth of 3.5 feet within the cellar foundations. With the exception of the pipe bowls, which I was able to date from my experience with these artifacts, no ages were given to the artifacts. However, the earthenware plates found by Pedersen were clearly not recent in age, and were probably colonial redware. They were large, heavy and reddish in color with a shiny slip. They carried wavy banded lines as though made by fingers.

The specimens which I recovered are enumerated below:

Crockery (jug pieces, large heavy items)	18	Bone handled knife	1
Cup and plate fragments, various types	25	Iron hinge	1
Pipe stems, undated	15	Sharpening stone for knives	1
Pipe bowls*		Pewter fragments (including one spoon handle)	2
Peter Droni bowl	1	Light colored gunflint	1
18th century	1	Ladies metal buckle	1
Unidentified	1	Bones, animal	
Glass fragments	16	cattle tooth	1
Glass bottle fragments		pig jawbone	1
bottle necks (18th or 19th century)	5		
basal fragment	1		
various fragments	4		

All of these specimens were deposited with the Smithsonian Institution in the 1950's. One of Pedersen's young colleagues from his home town area, Richard Spooner, who had on occasion accompanied Pedersen on his digs, was given a few items of Pedersen's Hicks House site collection. As I remember, it represented the best part of the material from the site. To my knowledge it has never been published. Moreover, none of the data from the site has been published. I have no information about any of the other specimens which were found at the site, and presume that they have been dispersed in the possession of their various owners, although the probability of this is very slim because, as far as I know, Pedersen virtually monopolized the excavation at the house site.

I fear that the Hicks House site has been destroyed. It lay in the path of the Cross Island (Belt) parkway, just south of the clover leaf with Northern Boulevard. It is another instance of site destruction through the Robert Moses parkway system, which cut through city parks or through areas where there was least public concern just before WWII and after it. Such an incident cannot occur today, because we have the legal means to mitigate such thoughtless action against our cultural heritage.

\*Many pipe specimens in the Richard Spooner collection were illustrated in SCAA Newsletter Volume 14, No. 2, Spring 1988.

(We would like to thank Richard Spooner for his assistance in editing this article.)

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### **MONTAUK EXHIBIT TO OPEN AT GUILD HALL FEBRUARY 1991**

The New York Council for the Humanities has funded a major exhibit, **The Montauk: Natives of Eastern Long Island**, to open February 2, 1991 at Guild Hall in East Hampton and run until March 10, 1991. Thereafter it will travel to several museums on the Island and eventually to Wisconsin, where many descendants of the Montauk live. The exhibit is planned to be at the Garvies Point Museum, Nassau County Museum System, in the Fall of 1991.

This is the first time that an extensive interpretation of a Long Island Native group has been mounted on Long Island funded by a major cultural agency. Dr. Gaynell Stone, editor of S.C.A.A.'s series, **Readings in Long Island Archaeology & Ethnohistory**, is Guest Curator of the exhibit.

Much of the research underpinning this contemporary perspective on a local Native group will be drawn from the new S.C.A.A volume III, 2nd edition (greatly revised and enlarged), **The History and Archaeology of the Montauk**, which is in press.

Curriculum materials to enhance student visits to the exhibit are being funded by the SUNY-Stony Brook Center for Excellence & Innovation in Education, Dr. Eli Seifman, Director. Other aspects of the interpretation are supported by the Suffolk County Office of Cultural Affairs, the Suffolk County Archaeological Association, and individual donors.

A video film on the Montauk by the prize-winning company, Mudfog Films, is planned, which will later be available to schools and libraries. An award-winning film on the Brotherton tribe of Wisconsin, which includes many Montauk descendants, will also be shown in conjunction with the exhibit.

S.C.O.P.E. and the Teacher Centers of the Southhampton and Westhampton schools are sponsoring for In-Service credit two Saturday seminars, March 2nd and 9th, on the material culture and the history of the Montauk. They will feature leading scholars of Long Island ethnohistory as well as workshops on Native technology and Native foodways.

### **NATIVE LIFE SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN FULL SWING**

A few days in early December are available to school groups for the S.C.A.A. Native Life & Archaeology program at Hoyt Farm Park in Commack. The "please touch" Long Island Native Life Museum, an important adjunct to the program, was recently featured in an article by Claudia Stewart in the **Southampton Press** and **Hampton Chronicle**.



**CALL FOR PAPERS: Historic Preservation: The Next 25 Years, 45th National Preservation Conference, October 16-20, 1991, San Francisco, California.** Sponsors include the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Park Service, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Send abstracts by Dec. 15th to:

Vice President, Programs Services and Information, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Ave, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

**BOOKS:**

**North American Indian Burial Customs**, by Dr. H.C. Yarrow, Edited by Dr. V LaMonte Smith.

This informative and interesting book was written for the Smithsonian Institute, Bureau of Ethnology, in 1979 while Dr. Yarrow was serving as the acting Assistant Surgeon General of the United States. Base on all available primary sources and personal research by physicians in the field, the book describes and illustrates in great detail all of the mortuary customs and the ceremonies pertaining to these practices. This book will not only be valuable to anyone interested in the traditions and culture of the American Indian, it is fascinating reading!

B00/09 in paper, \$9.95. To order: Eagle's View Publishing Company, 6756 North Fork Road, Liberty, UT 84310.

**Radiocarbon Dating: An Archaeological Perspective**, by R. E. Taylor, 1987, 212 pages, \$49.95.

A solid well-written, clear description of the principles, practice and error sources in radiocarbon dating. To order: Academic Press, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, Book Marketing Dept. #00312, 1250 Sixth Ave., San Diego, CA 92101-4311.

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**ARTICLES FOR THE NEWSLETTER SHOULD BE SENT TO THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR: CAROL TRAYNOR, C/O The Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, 93 No. Country Road, Setauket, NY 11733, (516)941-9444.**  
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