

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOUTH SHORE CHAPTER

Curtiss Hoffman

The South Shore Chapter of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society was chartered in April of 1952. Its center of activities has traditionally been the area around the Blue Hills, an area well known from ethnohistorical accounts and surface remains to be rich in Indian sites. Some previous archaeological work had been done in the Blue Hills by the Harvard Excavators Club, which investigated the Blue Hill River Workshop Site during the 1940's (Rowe 1941). The massive quantities of felsite chipping debris and artifacts from this site were a further incentive to begin a Chapter in this area.

Most of the early work of the Chapter centered in the Cochato Drainage, a tributary of the Monatiquot forming the boundary between Randolph and Braintree. Early chapter members included William Ayers, Guy Mellgren, Edward Runge, Bernard Cochrane, Wesley Cote and Robert Martin. Working together or separately, these members recorded a dozen densely occupied sites on bluffs overlooking the Cochato, some of which have since been bulldozed for housing developments or industrial plants. Their work established a baseline for what has come to be referred to as the "Cochato Complex" (Carty 1983), one of the strongest Middle Archaic manifestations anywhere in Massachusetts. The results of their work were published in two separate articles in the Bulletin of the M.A.S. (Ayers et al. 1955; Cote 1958). Charcoal from one of Cote's sites, Mill St. in Randolph, was recently dated to 3020 ± 90 B.P. (Beta-16516); it is associated with small quartz triangles (Hoffman 1986).

In 1962, the Chapter shifted its operations from the Monatiquot to the Neponset drainage. With a few exceptions, the Chapter's work has remained centered there ever since. At about this time, the Chapter established a relationship with the Blue Hills Trailside Museum of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which granted display and meeting space to the Chapter. Under the direction of Robert Martin, the Chapter undertook the first phase of its extended excavations at the Ponkapoag site, on the shores of Ponkapoag Pond. Excavations at Ponkapoag were possible year-round, because of the cover of pine needles; Bob Martin has slides of winter digging at the site. Ponkapoag is remarkable for its large collection (183) of ulus, in all stages of manufacture; the site has components from Early Archaic bifurcate through Contact; a Pine Tree Shilling was recovered, probably associated with the praying Indian village in the vicinity. Excavation continued full time at Ponkapoag until 1966, and then part-time through 1974. One radiocarbon date of 4960 ± 75 B.P. (UGA-012) was recovered by Joseph Marshall and sons from a dense felsite workshop. Martin reported the Chapter's findings in the Bulletin in 1977 (Martin 1977).

In 1966, Bernie Cochrane and Bob Martin recovered over 200 tools from the surface of a truck garden at the base of what was later to be called Green Hill. They were soon joined by Dana Seaverns, Guy Mellgren, Richard Parker and Al Lowry. The site was considered endangered since the Department of Public Works planned to construct an extension of Interstate-95 through the area. Work alternated between this site and Ponkapoag from 1966 to 1970, the Green Hill site being worked during the summer, when the site is exposed to cooling breezes up the Neponset, and abandoned during the fall and winter for the same reason.

Starting in 1968, Dick Parker began excavation at the Brook Meadow site in Canton, along with Al Lowry and Ross McCurdy. This project was undertaken as a salvage operation, and replaced Green Hill as the Chapter dig during 1970 and 1971 for this reason. Parker reported his findings at Brook Meadow, a multi-component Archaic site, in the Bulletin in 1974 (Parker 1974). Work continued at Ponkapoag during this period in the colder months of the year.

With the destruction of the Brook Meadow site in 1972, the Chapter returned to Green Hill during the summers, under the direction of Ross McCurdy, Dick Parker, Kenneth Menzies and Al Lowry. It was during this period that Al designed the familiar symbol for the M.A.S. that adorns the Bulletin, auto decals and the popular South Shore Chapter T-shirts. A new grid was laid out on the apron of the site and large-scale area excavation was undertaken. This operation was accelerated from 1973 to 1975 with the introduction of field school students from Boston College working under Dr. John Rosser and adult education students from Cambridge Center, Boston Center and Newton YMCA working under Dr. Curtiss Hoffman. Numerous features were excavated and samples saved for flotation and radiocarbon dating; samples from two adjacent pits of 7950 ± 95 B.P. (UGA-580) and 7875 ± 230 B.P. (UGA-500) were at the time the oldest Archaic dates in Massachusetts. A third date of 4390 ± 70 B.P. (UGA-1236) established the Late Archaic component at the site. The Green Hill site is remarkable in its large number of felsite bifaces (knives) and argillite gouges, illustrating several different stages of manufacture. Is it possible that individual sites like Green Hill and Ponkapoag were stations for specialists in certain tool types, who traded with each other and well beyond the region?

In order to clear up the backlog of laboratory analysis of the site, excavation ceased at Green Hill from 1976-78. The results of this study were published in a series of papers edited by Rosser in the Bulletin (Rosser 1980a, 1980b). During this period, the Chapter remained active, taking part in an intensive survey along the Blue Hills River under the direction of Dr. Barbara Luedtke (1978) in advance of a sewer project. Also during this period, the Chapter participated with the Friends of the Blue Hills in preparing a National Register District Nomination for the Blue Hills. This successfully protects the Green Hill site as well as several known felsite quarries in the Blue Hills; unfortunately, the Ponkapoag site was not included in the final accepted nomination because it was not possible to establish site boundaries.

The Chapter returned to Green Hill in the summer of 1978 under a revised excavation plan, with Dr. Curtiss Hoffman as field director and Dr. Charles Nelson as research director. Instead of open area excavations, a series of perpendicular transects was established to test the limits of the site. Actually, the last season of Rosser's excavation in 1975 had investigated one such transect in the lower meadow. From 1978 until 1984, excavation concentrated on a transect from the top of the hill to the edge of the floodplain, and another along the crest of the hill. The hillcrest proved to be extremely productive, and two radiocarbon dates of 3965 ± 155 B.P. (GX-10250) and 4460 ± 80 B.P. (Beta-15193) were recovered from features in this area (Nelson and Hoffman 1983). Excavation ceased again after the 1984 season so as to evaluate the results and prepare another report, which we hope to have completed soon.

Besides formal excavation projects, the Chapter has continued its involvement in surveys; in 1980 several chapter members participated in a survey in the Dover-Medfield area under Dr. Curtiss Hoffman (1980), and in the spring of 1986 in a survey at a Late Woodland site in Holbrook, again under Dr. Hoffman (1986). A small lithic scatter of Blue Hills felsite from this site was radiocarbon dated by associated charcoal to 400 ± 150 B.P. (Beta-16517) (Hoffman 1986). The Chapter was actively involved in the litigation against the Codex Corporation at Prowse Farm, until that company agreed to a survey. We also