



OVERPECK SITE

The Overpeck Site is a multi-component site in eastern Pennsylvania (Bucks County), with components from the (possibly) Early Late Woodland, Late Woodland, and Contact period. The cemetery area seems to date to the early Contact period (circa AD 1550). The site (state site number 36BU5) was acquired by The State Museum of Pennsylvania by means of donation from Elmer Erb in 1983. The collection was the product of an excavation conducted by Elmer Erb in Bridgeton Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

The site was first excavated in 1947 by John Witthoft and Scottie MacNeish. The results of this excavation are in an unpublished manuscript at the State Museum of Pennsylvania (Manuscript #35).

The 1947 excavation produced no burials, but the 1947 report contains the following:

“Burials exposed by the 1903 and 1936 floods, judging by associated artifacts presented by Earl Heacock and Mrs. Samuel Overpeck, the land owner, pertained to zone 3. They were flexed, in shallow pits and without grave goods although stray artifacts were included in the fill (Witthoft 1947:32)”

According to Witthoft’s report, “we found no burials during our excavation.” There is also no further information about the “stray” artifacts mentioned above, nor about the burials exposed in the floods.

In 1962, members of the Forks of the Delaware Chapter of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology obtained permission from Bethlehem Steel to carry out a salvage operation on the site. After consultation with then-State Archaeologist John Witthoft, the excavation was begun and led to the discovery of a small Indian cemetery with 13 burials. Two of the burials, both children, yielded European contact materials. Excavations may have taken place up to 1966.

Later a second portion of the site, believed to be a “village,” was found. This area, 128 meters west of the cemetery, was excavated by the Delaware Chapter of the SPA, in 130 2.5 x 2.5 meter squares. Artifacts were dated to the Late Woodland. (A large shallow pit (Pit 6) containing earlier Vinette I pottery was found in this area by Witthoft during earlier excavations.) Fragments of Early to Middle Woodland Vinette pottery were also found mixed in the deepest 1962 excavation units, but it appears that the principal occupation was Late Woodland.

The “village area” excavation produced two rows of postmolds (not fully recorded), and 12 pits, hearths, and red burned earth features. During the excavation a total of 29 pits and hearths were recorded in the village area, and many others were discovered by later heavy equipment operators. Remains included “pipe bowls and pipe stem fragments, fish scales, fish bones, corn cobs, charred beans, corn kernels, grass matting, bone awls or skewers, bone needles, bird-bone beads, charred nut shell, and hematite stained pottery and pipe fragments.” Other remains included a portion of a shell tempered (Andaste) Susquehannock vessel along with a grit tempered (Proto-Susquehannock) vessel. Many pits contained a large concentration of charcoal and ash.



Southeast of the village area, and southwest of the cemetery, were a concentration of several features (Features 1, 2, and 3). It is not clear how these features were found (presumably by surface indicators), as only the 100 x 100 foot village area and the 40 x 40 foot cemetery area were systematically excavated, according to the site map.

Feature 1 was a dog burial, oriented northeast. Near the dog skull were the remains of a fire containing charred butternut and hazelnut. Preservation was poor. A small firepit was located 1.2 meters northeast of the dog burial, and was surrounded by chips of yellow jasper. Twenty-one pieces of pottery were also found, as well as a broken sandstone pestle and a pentagonal smokey quartz point.

Feature 2 was a large firepit containing pottery, bone, two whole and two broken netsinkers, teshoa blades, a jasper hammerstone, an anvil, and several pieces of rough stone. There were six whole and broken triangular projectile points, a pendant, and the base of a broken triangular point.

Feature 3 was a number of small pits and areas of compacted earth. A large pit in this area produced several netsinkers and triangular points made from black flint, smokey quartz, argillite, and jasper. A triangular point broken vertically through the center was found in the pit. Several large rimsherds of Shanks Ferry Incised were made in a concentration of charcoal. A nearly complete pottery vessel was found just to the northwest. A hard, compacted area below Feature 3 contained 21 netsinkers along with a partially-finished yellow jasper, square based, triangular point.

There is a generalized site map showing the village area and the cemetery area, along with these three features, but the actual field records are not present, and it appears that the quality of the recording varied considerably.

According to the site report in *Pennsylvania Archaeologist*, "It had been agreed at the onset of excavations that each Chapter member was to retain the artifacts he or she excavated, but that a record of each feature and each artifact was to be provided to the Chapter as a permanent record. Regrettably, not everyone complied with this request and the records vary widely in both detail and reliability" (pg 9).

Chapter members recorded 14 burials and provided them to Witthoft for study.

Repatriation Preparation

On July 28 and 29, 2011, Brice Obermeyer, Greg Brown, Bonnie Thaxton, and James Jackson visited the State Museum of Pennsylvania for consultation. We were met by curators Kurt Carr and Janet Johnson.

On August 16, 2011, Greg Brown returned to the museum to view the material again.

Greg Brown and Janet Johnson of the State Museum of Pennsylvania (SMOP) completed the final reconciliation of information about this site on February 23 and 24, 2012 at the SMOP in Harrisburg, PA. Significant highlights of this week of work are as follows:

The Overpeck material consists of three sets of donations, only the first of which had been accepted at the time of the 2000 Notice. Donation 1 (by William Strohmeier and Elmer Erb of Chapter 14 of



the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeologist, two of the original excavators) was reported in the 2000 Notice and included six sets of human remains.

Donation 2 was accepted in 2011 and includes catalog numbers 36BU5/212 through 36BU5/218. It was catalogued last fall and thus was not part of the 2000 Notice.

Donation 3 is a set of what Janet Johnson thinks is two individuals. Details of the donation are still being worked out, and the material has not been received by the SMOP. This material will be added to the correction of the Notice once it has been catalogued and analyzed; Janet states that she has a physical anthropologist who will be able to look at the remains within a month or so of when the material is accessioned.

Field records show only a few associated funerary objects, or at least only a few that made it into the museum. Burial 3 (catalog 214) has a pottery sherd, and Burial 6 (catalog 215) has three flakes. All of these were found and have been associated with their burials, and these changes will be reflected in the revised notice. The site report notes 19 brass beads and 4 shell wampum beads that were associated with Burial 7, and these were never received in any of the donations although it is possible they will accompany Donation 3. Records for Burial 10 note staining from a "brass earring," but this was not catalogued and the site report does not make it clear whether the earring was actually even found or if instead all that was noted was the green stain. Burial 11 notes hematite paint (probably red ocher), but again it was probably not collected, or in any case never made it to the museum.

The original 2000 Notice included 142 unassociated funerary objects listed from catalog 36BU5/163. This catalog number was listed in the catalog as a pit "125 feet south of the cemetery area," and we think that it was mistakenly described as funerary simply because it included the words "cemetery area." Review of the map shows that it is nowhere close to the well-defined cemetery zone, and the nature of the artifacts from 163 (chipping debris, an arrow point, two pebbles, and 134 pottery fragments) are totally unlike what was found in the cemetery contexts. For that reason we chose to eliminate it from the unassociated funerary objects list in the revised notice.

We tried to find any other features in the cemetery zone that might be deemed funerary, but were unsuccessful. A pair of overlapping pits (described in the Background section below) were mapped near the burials, but it is not at all clear whether or not either or both of them were contemporary with the burials. The potsherds in the upper pit are of a type that have been associated with Susquehannock peoples of this general time period (Late Woodland through the early period of Delaware migrations); the lower pit (which stratigraphically would be earlier) contains only a pipe fragment and netsinker, neither of which is described well enough to be datable. However, **even if we were to claim that either pit is associated with the cemetery**, we are unable to isolate the artifacts found in these pits due to the way that they were collected; apparently the excavators did not save the contents of these pits separately and the material is mixed in with the general site contents (the unprovenienced material described above as catalog 154 and 208).

Once the Notice is revised and republished, all material will be ready for repatriation once Donation 3 is integrated into the collection. All material is currently stored in Hollinger boxes in the Museum's



OFFICIAL WEB SITE OF THE
DELAWARE TRIBE OF INDIANS

secure collection area, and the museum staff is ready and willing to transfer the material when the time comes.