

**A Preliminary Report of the Smith Site, Shelter Island
By Roy Latham, Long Island Chapter**

These notes present a preliminary account of our excavations and of the material recovered on the Smith Site, Shelter Island, from 1943 to 1953. A complete report with full descriptions and details is in preparation.

This coastal site is strictly prehistoric, but continued close to the contact period. No trade evidence was recorded. In the original surface, underneath the shells, were remains of an older occupancy. This older culture was not the Orient focus. The projectile points found below the shells were the narrow types, side-notched with straight bases, or stemmed. None had the notched base of the fishtail type. Except for one each of flint, jasper, argillite and slate materials, all were of white quartz. This type of point, commonly made from the core of quartz pebbles and frequently with the skin of the stone left on the base, probably antedates the fishtail type of Long Island, where it is common throughout on the surface. It is not found in the shellheaps of the later Indians of eastern Long Island. With the narrow points, below the shells, were found seven sherds of steatite; two sherds 38 feet apart contacted. The sherds represent two small vessels with notched rims. The steatite vessels in the Orient are so extremely variable that no comparison can be made with those from the Smith site. Twenty-seven pieces of rubbed graphite were taken from the lower culture; one was associated with a stemmed point and a steatite sherd. No graphite or steatite was found in the later culture on the site. Hematite paintstones were in both cultures. An incisor from a bear, drilled for a pendant, was in the lower, the only remains of a bear from the site. There were scanty remains of bone and antler, worked or unworked, in the lower. One long antler awl, four worn awls from deer bone, and two bore pins were the total worked bone from the bottom culture. Worked bone and antler were common in the upper leavings. Broken and flaked stones were common below, but only two hammerstones were found. Hammerstones were common at all levels above. Below were four small completely grooved axes and none above. One axe is somewhat adze-like; another is broken in the middle, and the fractured end has been used as a muller or hammer.

Shells were nearly lacking in the old cultural floor. There was a layer of large oyster valves 15 inches thick, which had been set down below the old floor, and a hearth had been built on them. In the lime, ash and charcoal were charred deer bones. This hearth was attributed to the older culture. Aside from this hearth, nine others, placed with the older aspect, contained no firestone. Some of these hearths were quite large, four or five feet across, with the soil below reddened from the heat. The drilled bear incisor and some of the old type points were associated with these fireplaces.

It is not certain if the older culture had pottery. A few sherds of old grit-tempered pottery were in the soil below the shells, but it is uncertain to which people they belonged. Sebonac pottery was common in the later culture on the site. Associated with the later Debonac types of pottery were various Niantic styles. The Niantic pottery, showing Iroquoian influence, came in after the middle of the Sebonac period on the site (pottery from the site will be described in the final report on the site).

A large pot was found cached on the rim, intact with an arrowpoint at the side. This pot was cached over a pit filled with scallop shells, the valves covered with eight inches of sand. Two similar pots were found, likewise cached nearby over pits covered with sand which contained shells. Each of these two pots had the bottom third of the pot taken off by the plow (the site was a cornfield at one time). A small pot, 2 by 2½ inches, was found intact in a small pit of soft-clam shells. It is decorated with fingernail punctuations, partially done by the left hand and the balance by the right hand.

Corded, stamped, incised and punctate are all present. More than 50 decorative designs are recorded from the site.

There were two hollows on the site which, from the material uncovered, were winter quarters. In these hollows were no whelks, and only bone of fish that hibernate or are otherwise found here in winter. The floor of these winter lodges were 12 to 16 inches thick of broken, crushed and trampled quahog shells, leveled flat. On these had been built elevated stone hearths up to a foot in height, with an opening at the top to support a pointed bottom pot. About 7 to 8 feet outside the floor on the north side was a line of post-molds, but none could be detected on the other sides. This shell floor was below the plowing depth of 200 years later. No pits were within the paved area, but they were common without on all sides.

There was a knoll between the hollows with many remains of migrant fishes, summer whelks, turtles and land snails, manifesting this higher spot to have been a summer resident section of the site. In one pit 470 whelks or conch shells were taken out. Every shell had the customary hole broken through the back of the shell so that the meat could be readily removed. In one pit was found the skull of a muskrat, also, an individual human mandible which had been gnawed by a dog or some other mammal.

Five burials were recorded during our excavations. (Several graves were opened about 50 years previous when the grounds were graded for a residence. These will be treated in the final report of the site). In four of the graves, the subjects were tightly flexed just under the plowing depth, with no offerings, which is normal for the eastern Long Island shell-midden complex. The fifth burial, which because of its departure from the usual burial is doubtfully attributed to the older culture, was deep, 58 inches, and the subject was extended, lying on the back, head west. The skeleton was a middle-aged female, judged by a dentist to be 40 years old. Around the neck of the skeleton was the remains of a necklace consisting of 825 *Marginella* and a few *Olivella* shell beads. At the waist, on the left side, was an offering of two needles made from ribs of a deer, and two awls made from the ulna of a deer; two unworked deer ulna, to be made into awls later, were with them. At the breast was a pin made from deer bone, evidently used to pin wrapping together. At the knees was half of a pestle. About eight quarts of a bright limonite-stained sand were at the head, and the same amount was deposited at the feet. The skeleton was on light quartz sand and the golden-hued substance contrasted strongly in color. Its use explained the presence of several deep pits, barren of anything except soil: They were dug down into the stratum of this sand, which underlies the site in the section where the deep barren pits occurred. This material was the same as found in grave No. 5. It is believed that the people of the older culture used this substance with burials and dug the deep pits to obtain it. There was none of it with the later regular burials. The bone offerings show evidence that the woman made and used needles and awls. Shell beads were probably used by both sexes.

A catalogue of the material from the Smith site

The two cultural layers are designated as the Upper and Lower.

		Upper	Lower	Total
Chipped stone				
Projectile points				98
	Triangle, all quartz	46		
	Triangle, straight sides and base	11		
	Triangle, concave sides and base	17		
	Triangle, straight sides and concave base	18		
	Narrow, side-notched and concave base		15	
	Notched	7	19	26
	Stemmed		15	
Knives	All plain forms	36	11	47
Scrapers		66	1	67
	Circular of quartz	64		
	Cache of 16, circular	16		
	From broken arrowpoint, argillite		1	
Drills				
	Straight and expanded bases	11	2	13

Polished Stone (cont'd)		Lower	Upper	Total
Beads	From vertebrae of shark	2		
Arrowpoints	Feer bone and antler, all socket types	11		
	Wild turkey bone	1		
	Deer bone with angled edges	1		
Pendants	Drilled deer bone	1		
	Drilled bear tooth		1	
Pottery Tools	Beaver incisor for punctata work, No. 20568	1		
	Paddle of whale bone	1		
Cups	Land turtle carapace	2		
Flakers	Cut antlers used on ends	14		
Steatite	Contacting sherds		7	
Pipes	All pottery, one perfect	<u>UPPER</u> 17	<u>LOWER</u>	
Pottery	Vessels determined by rims	117	2?	119
	Sebonac, as applied here	96		96
	Niantic, type showing Iroquoian trend	21		
	Cached pots, and one small pot intact	4		
Shells	Necklace with 825 Marginella and Olivella shells		825	
	Clam shells with worn edges	3		
Burials	Of our excavation	4	1?	5
	Flexed with no offerings	4		
	Extended with offerings		1	
	(Others, uncovered about 1902, reported to have been from 2 to 28.)			
Hearths	Elevated stones to 12 inches;	3		
	on oyster shell bed;		1	
	on ground with no firestones; firepits	5	9	
Miscellaneous				
Natural History	Species recorded on site as utilized by Indians			
Mammals	Dog, muskrat, raccoon, beaver, bear, mink, cottontail, woodchuck, <u>whale</u> .			
Birds	Merganser, sea ducks, wild turkey, night heron, bobwhite, large hawk			
Reptile	Box turtle, loggerhead turtle, diamond back terrapin, black snake skull			

		Lower	Upper	Total
Polished stones				
Celts	Regular types	12		
	Celt blank	1		
Gorget	Slate, two holes	6		
	Hematite, one hole	1		
Axes	Completely grooved		4	
Odd Forms	Pebble grooved around one end, probably pendant		1	
Rough Stones				
Hammerstones	Plain, used on ends	33	2	35
	Pitted	7		
	Grooved	1		
		5		
Mullers	Stones abraided on ends			
Pestles		4	1	5
	Cylinder pebbles used on ends		1	
Whetstones	Offerings in grave			
	from working on celts, etc.	3		
Hoes	Edged	2		
Stone-working tools		2		
	Small slender pebble used on ends			
Net sinkers		22		
	Stones notched on side edges			
Mortar		5	1	6
	Heavy stones with cups	1		
Pigment	Bicupped			
		22	10	33
	Hematite paintstones		27	
	Graphite		1	
Bone and Antler	Limonite sand in grave			
			5	108
	Awls	103	5	90
	Deer bone	85		
	Bird Bone	17		
	Sting-ray spine	1		
Needles	Notched on side near base	1		
		5	2	7
	From deer ribs		2	
Pins	In grave offerings			
		10	2	12
	Deer bone and antler		1	
Harpoon Points	In grave			
		3		
	2 antler, one sturgeon bone			