



The OSPREY'S NEST

ROY LATHAM

Orient, New York 11957

28 March, 1974

Miss Helen Wortis
Shelter Island, N. Y.

Dear Miss Wortis:

The Manhansett tribe of Indians on Shelter Island prehistorically were of the Sebonac stock, same as the Shinnecocks, Three Mile Harbor and Indians of all Long Island. The Niantic race of New England came in and merged with the Sebonacs about 500 years before the Europeans contacted them. The culture of the Sebonac and Niantic was similar, but there was a difference in pottery types.

There were many village and camp sites on Shelter Island. One of the main village sites was the Smith Site on the F. M. State, near the South Ferry. Mr. Smith, of the 20-Mule team tradition, constructed his house there about 1928. At that time they uncovered 28 Indian graves. Mr. Smith was to place the graves contents in a California museum in which he was connected. Apparently the material from the graves were lost. I wrote to the museum in 1940 when I was excavating on the Smith Site. Their reply was that Mr. Smith had written to them that he was sending the grave finds to them, but they had never received them and nothing from Shelter Island was in the museum there.

I excavated the Smith Site in 1940 and found five additional graves. My work there was from 1938 to 1941. A report was written and published under the Long Island Chapter of the New York State Archaeological Association. I had planned to send you a copy with this letter, but I have been unable to find a copy left. If I can locate a copy I will send it to you.

It is a complete record of my work there, but no photographs. When I feel fit, I will see if I can find some photographs I took of Indian graves on Shelter Island, for your records. I am now an old man of 93 years with poor eye sight.

Other Indian graves were found on the Loper Site on the west side of Cocks Harbor, on the Lily Pond Site, sites near Fresh Pond, along the bluff facing Gardiner's Bay, Nichols Point and several other locations on the Island. Indian graves are likely to occur anywhere on Shelter Island or other regions on Long Island. They are more certain to be found on or near village sites.

An older culture called the Bare Island, much older than the Sebonac was found in the old floor under the Smith Site. In the surface I also found records of the very old Orient Focus fishtail type arrowpoints dating to 3000 years old or 100 B. C. in time. These old cultures cremate most of their dead, so little is found in the graves except bits of calcined bone, but their graves were rich with goods - tools. The Sebonacs gave little in goods to the graves. The Sebonac was a member of the great Algonkian family of Indian Nations.

I have no collection here now. Most of my Indian material is in the museum in Southold. I am sorry I cannot give you the information you want, but I cannot write a good letter anymore. Feel free to ask anything you are interested in as I probably have it here somewhere.

This is all I can do right now

With best wishes, sincerely yours

Roy Latham

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