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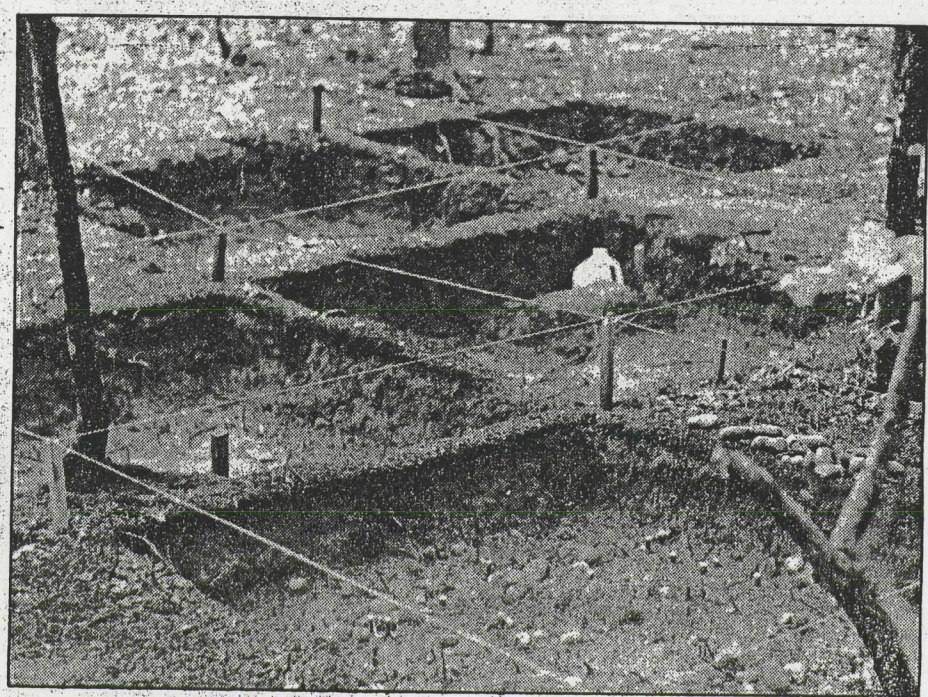
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EARTHEN HISTORY BOOK—A photo provided by the Shelter Island Historical Society shows the secret site on Shelter Island that points to a prehistoric link to Connecticut.

Shelter Is. Blade Cache Reveals Ancient Trade Link

By Bill Fallon

In November of 1985, John Witek was poking around some tidal wetlands on Shelter Island when he discovered an 800 x 150-foot scatter of Indian artifacts that appeared to be completely undisturbed.

The resulting excavation of the site was reported this month in the Journal of the New York State Archeological Association. The findings are evidence of a trade network dating to the time of the pharaohs that stretched across the Sound to Connecticut and may have been a bloody business.

Although archeological sites are common on the East End, the pristine nature of the Shelter Island site made it a valuable find, according to the report by Mr. Witek, who is a member of the New York State Archeological Association. The report does not give the exact location of the site, which is traditional for archeologists who try to protect sites from pot-hunters.

Connecticut Connection

The site is similar to another at Old Lyme, CT, which could have been the source of 20 basalt blades found on Shelter Island. The Old Lyme Indians were from the Susquehanna Tradition — a river-oriented people whose largest site, in Old Lyme, dates to 1500 B.C.

The blades discovered on Shelter Island resemble those found at Old Lyme, according to the report. As the crow flies, the sites are 17 miles apart.

The Shelter Island site is unusual for this area because there is no evidence of shellfish harvesting or fishing, both of which provided mainstays of the prehistoric diet. Because of the dearth of aquacultural remains (shellfish, harpoon points), the site is thought to have harbored hunters or nut-pickers.

"It is very unusual if there is no evidence of fish or shellfish," William Golder said Sunday while giving a tour of the Southold Indian Museum on Main Bayview Road in Southold. Mr. Golder is a lifelong devotee of archeology and the author of *Long Island's First Inhabitants*, a 9,000-year history of the peoples who lived here before the arrival of Europeans.

Mr. Golder and 50 other people had come to the museum to explore a very different anthropological angle, the spirituality of Plains Indians as presented by ethnic anthropologist, Robert Vetter of Westhampton. Mr. Golder's enthusiasm for the prehistory of this area won out, however, and he missed the presentation while he waxed elo-

See **Blades**, next page

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Continued from previous page

quent on local cultures with a Suffolk Times reporter.

Mr. Golder said the Shelter Island site might be the remnants of a winter hunting camp. If the winter was particularly hard, he said, the Indians might have resorted to the high-calorie chestnuts and hickories in the area to survive. "There have been prehistoric nutcrackers found in the area, so we know they harvested and ate nuts," he said.

Still, Mr. Golder noted the dense protein stores in marine animals and again called their absence on the Shelter Island site "most unusual. Generally speaking, if there's an easy way to get food, man will do it. And the creeks and bays around here were full of food. All you had to do was kick at the mud and there was something to eat."

Dangerous Journeys

The thought of Connecticut Indians plying the Sound in dugout canoes and coming to Shelter Island is a romantic one. But the picture has a dark side, as well.

"If an Indian traveled 50 miles he was likely to become a pin cushion for the arrows of another tribe," Mr. Golder said. He said the Iroquois Federation, which lived from present-day Ohio to New England, were great warriors who extracted tribute from more peaceful tribes, such as Connecticut's Susquehannas and this area's Corchaugs. He said groups of Iroquois visited our area to collect the tribute — anything from stone and leather-work to food. If modern-day extortion is any indicator, the idea was to keep the Iroquois happy... or else.

Mr. Witek reports that the one- to two-inch blades found at the site are historically linked to increased grave numbers. No graves were found at the Shelter Island site, however. That absence leads Mr. Witek to speculate on the "benign coexistence" that may have existed between the Shelter Island people of the Algonkian Tradition and the Connecticut tribes of the Susquehanna tradition.

Whether from paying tribute or from sustenance, Indian trade networks spanned the continent, according to Mr. Golder, who noted that hammered copper from the Great Lakes region has been found on the North Fork. As such, a Connecticut-Long Island trade connection in basalt blades is not unusual. What is unusual is that they apparently were not using them to fish.

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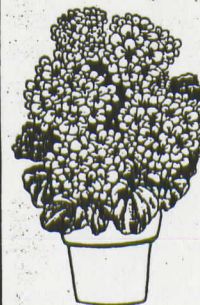
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