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Introduction to Symposium on Archaeology of the Revolutionary War Period

by Paul R. Huey

INTRODUCTION

It is indeed appropriate for the Council to hold its 1983 meeting at New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Site. The Temple building at New Windsor was the location for the first meeting of the Council on April 2, 1966, when it was known as the Symposium on Northeast Historical Archaeology.

The first Symposium resulted from an idea generated by Colonel Frederick P. Todd, the director of New Windsor Cantonment which was at that time owned and operated by the National Temple Hill Association. Colonel Todd proposed the Symposium to Jack Mead who proceeded to organize the first symposium. At Todd's suggestion, Mead contacted Charles F. Hayes III and William S. Cornwell, both with the Rochester Museum and Science Center. They also thought the Symposium was an excellent idea, and a letter announcing the meeting was sent out in February 1966 from the Cantonment.

The meeting on April 2 in the Temple building consisted of a morning round table session with Jack Mead presiding over a discussion on New Windsor Cantonment and his archaeological work at the site to date. The afternoon session was held at Hotel Thayer at West Point and included lectures by Colonel J. Duncan Campbell, Charles F. Hayes III, Gerald Stowe, Richard L. McCarthy, William S. Cornwell, Jack Mead, and Jacob Grimm. Topics included research in Revolutionary War sites at Morristown, Valley Forge, Fort Stanwix, and Fort Montgomery, as well as on Revolutionary War canteens and work at Fort Ligonier, at the Lewiston Portage site, and in the Genesee country. The evening speaker was Richard L. Koke of the New-York Historical Society, and he presented the story of early archaeological work in the Highlands by William L. Calver and Reginald P. Bolton.

New Windsor Cantonment was the location of some of this early research which has been documented in material copied and supplied by Jack Mead and Richard L. Koke. In August 1915 Calver, with John W. Dunsmore, Oscar T. Barck, and others, partially excavated hut sites of the New York, New Jersey, and New Hampshire Brigades. On August 8 Calver took the train from New York, met Dunsmore and Barck at the station, and drove with Dunsmore and "his old gray nag" out to the site. Barck went on his bicycle, and at the site they met Dr. John Deyo of Newburgh. Dunsmore and Barck had previously commenced clearing and uncovering a hut site which was measured and sketched. Later joined by Robert M. Hartley, these early historical archaeologists continued working

into September, uncovering additional remains. Calver initially reported to Bolton that he thought the sites would most likely yield material "like what we get from the British huts at Inwood." He wished "some opulent antiquarian" would finance their activities, and he predicted at New Windsor Cantonment "I think I can see about fifty years digging ahead of us."

Exactly fifty years later, the New Windsor Cantonment hut sites again became the subject of archaeological research. This time the work was conducted and recorded by Jack Mead, who commenced work in the spring of 1965 in the Massachusetts encampment. His work represents a reborn interest in historical archaeology that began in the late 1950s and continued through the 1960s. Methods and techniques were greatly improved and research questions were more sophisticated than in the time of Calver and Bolton; and out of this grew the first Symposium.

The New York State Historic Trust, now the Division for Historic Preservation in the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, acquired New Windsor Cantonment in 1967. The Symposium continued to grow and mature under sponsorship of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, and subsequent meetings were held not only at the Cantonment but also at Bear Mountain Inn.

The announcement of the forming of the Symposium in February 1966 occurred the month after the organizational meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology at Dallas, Texas. Until these events, historical archaeologists had been without any organized society specifically devoted to historical archaeology except for the annual Conference on Historic Site Archaeology formed in the fall of 1960 by Stanley South in North Carolina. The Symposium and the Council have grown in strength and importance in the Northeast as a valuable regional forum for the presentation, exchange, and discussion of current research and ideas in the field of historical archaeology. Northeastern North America, despite the intensity of development in key areas, contains many as yet undiscovered and unstudied historical archaeological resources which, if protected and wisely managed, hold great potential for future research. During the eighteen years since 1965 we have seen only the beginnings of new and exciting developments in a field with the potential to make substantial and significant contributions to knowledge.