The Titicut Site in Bridgewater, Massachusetts is located south of Beach Street, at a 90 degree bend in the Taunton River and near the 1800's shipyard. From 1946 to 1951 the Warren K. Moorehead chapter of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society excavated at Titicut. Dr. Maurice Robbins, of Attleboro, MA, was the dig director from 1946 to 1949 and Mr. Burleigh Moulton directed field work in 1950 and 1951. More than 6,000 artifacts were uncovered, including projectile points, knives, drills, scrapers, as well as larger implements-grooved axes, celts, gouges, pestles, plummets, atlatl weights and hammerstones, 168 clay potshards (stage 3 & 4), 16 soapstone fragments and several polished slate artifacts such as gorgets, pendants and ulu. Contact artifacts such as musket balls, gunflints, a powder horn, fragments of clay (kaolin) pipes, blue glass beads, copper or brass points, pendants and disks and early coins were also present.

In addition to the many artifacts, 241 hearths and pits, 416 post molds, five red paint ceremonial deposits and one rectangular lodge floor were uncovered. This dwelling measured 40 feet by 32 feet, with 42 post molds along the outside perimeter and 26 post molds inside the structure. One row of post molds along the inside edge suggests the presence of bed platforms. The Titicut Site was a concentrated multi-component site, extending from the Early Archaic to the Contact Period (8,600 to 400 B.P.). Three cultural periods existed – Archaic (Early, Middle, Late), Woodland (Early, Middle Late) and Contact.

In 1947 the Robert S. Peabody Foundation was invited to excavate a portion of the Titicut Site and to make a study of the artifacts and data found and then to write a comprehensive report. Dr. Frederick Johnson was in charge of field operations during the summer dig. One burial was found (No. 4) and held a nearly complete Stage 4 pot. Nearby a dog burial was also uncovered. After the Peabody Foundation left the site, many additional burials were discovered. Eventually a total of 26 were found, which included two cremations (Late Archaic Period) and 24 flexed burials from A.D. 1500 to A.D. 1620. The presence of European origin items found in these graves, including copper or brass artifacts and a clay pipe, confirm this period in time. Fifteen of these skeletons were sufficiently preserved to be removed for further study. This study was undertaken on our behalf by the Department of Physical Anthropology at Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Dr. Edward E. Hunt, Jr. and Dr. Ernest A. Hooten made the morphological examination. Findings included sex, age, diet (tooth wear), bone structure, mortality rates, etc.

By 1959 the Peabody Foundation concluded that they could not publish a final report of the Titicut Site. Artifacts were returned to the W. K. Moorehead Chapter, who then redistributed them to the individual diggers. In 1963 the Moorehead Chapter was disbanded due to inactive members. In 1951 most of the original diggers at Titicut had joined the newly formed Cohannet Chapter of the M. A. S. and were excavating the Wapanucket Sites at Assawompsett Pond in Middleboro, MA. Dr. Robbins was asked to try to complete the Titicut Site report. During the years 1947 and 1963 many records went missing, field members became blurred and memory is not as clear after an interval of several years. Much to his credit, Dr. Robbins was able to complete a fine report. However, the results were not as meaningful as if written in 1950. Radio-carbon dates collected in 1949 were 5750 +/- 720 B. P. “These dates were obtained by the black carbon method at a time prior to the refining of carbon dating techniques.” (Robbins 1967). In recent years radiocarbon ages have been found in Raynham of 8600 +/- B. P.

MORPHOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

"Rapid teeth wear from early adult life shows that the dietry of these people was very abrasive, wearing down the front teeth mainly. Some individuals showed dental decay and loss in middle life". (Robbins 1967).

"The long bones in this group reveal their mode of life. Muscular attachments of the upper limbs were
strong, while those of the lower extremities were weaker. This kind of musculature is to be expected in a people who prefer to travel by boat, rather than on foot. Some evidence existed of a preference for squatting (male) rather than sitting.” (Robbins 1967).

“The high frequency of death before middle age was evident. Also noted was the high incidence of female deaths in young adults during the reproductive span. The findings emphasize the hazards of primitive life, especially to young women as a result of childbirth.” (Robbins 1967).

One must not overlook the fact that five burials showed the results of raiding parties, probably Narragansett Indians. Quartz arrows were imbedded in the skeletons found in burial numbers 6, 7, 10, 16 and 17, and were inflicted on the young and defenseless. These raids probably occurred when the men of the village were off hunting or fishing. Only young children, old men and middle aged women were tending the camp at the time of conflict.

During the early 1990’s, all skeletal material and items such as hair were given by The Robbins Museum to the Mashpee (Wampanoag) Indians for reburial in their cemeteries. Today new rules apply regarding discovery of skeletal remains found while excavating in Massachusetts or by natural erosion. An information sheet put out by the Massachusetts Historical Commission detailing what to do if you find remains is available on the website, so any new burials discovered in the future may be properly addressed.

REFERENCES:


THE TITICUT RESERVATION

The Indian meaning of Titicut is “the place of a great river” and is situated in the northwest portion of Middleboro. This area was the old Indian reservation and was officially deeded to the Indians on June 9, 1664, by Josias Wampatuck, the son of Chickataubut. This deed covered a three-mile long parcel of land along the Taunton River called Cotunicut.

The earliest map of Titicut was found in the Archives Division of the State House, Boston, Massachusetts. It appears in volume 113 on page 653 and reads as follows:

Taunton and Middleborough March 30th, 1724 we ye subscribers in observance of an order from His Majesties Judges of the Superior Court of judicature held at Plymouth for the County of Plymouth Barnstable and Dukes County on the last day of April 1722 for the renewing and running the ancient bounds of Ketiticut plantation according to the order of said Court – we proceeded as followith ----first we begun next to Middleborough at a great horn pine tree on ye bank of Ketiticut River thence ranging south sixteen degrees west about three miles to a heap of stones and a stake on a plain thence south nine degrees west to an old white oak tree at baiting brook thence north about three degrees and a half westerly about three miles to a heap of stones near Trout Brook thence the said brook to be the bounds to run to Ketticut river.

This description of the ancient bounds of Ketiticut plantation, plus a roughly sketched map, led to several land disputes because of the indefinite boundary markers. In 1853 the legislature incorporated the southern portion of the Indian reservation between Poquoy (Trout) Brook and Baiting Brook with the Sixteen Shilling Purchase, under the name of Lakeville (Weston, 1906). Baiting Brook is located at the East Taunton/Lakeville line at Route 79 on Rhode Island Road. The brook runs north into Big Bear Hole pond in Massasoit State Park.

Controversy over Bridgewater and Middleborough boundaries were finally settled in 1681, with the Taunton River becoming the town boundaries. The Taunton River has always been the boundary between Raynham and Middleborough and also separates Bristol and Plymouth Counties (Weston, 1906).

The Titicut Purchase was made April 20, 1675, from Owen, alias Thomas Hanter, and Popennohoe, alias Peter. Consideration was twelve pounds. They sod a tract from Pachusett (Purhade) Brook on the east, where it runs into Titicut, or Great, River to the lands before purchased; and from the mouth of the brook westward, butting upon the river, one mile, until it meets with certain trees by the side of the river, and thence to the Taunton bounds at the highway to
Taunton and Rhode Island, where a brook runs through it (Weston, 1906).

Other small tracts of land appear to have been sold by the Indians from the Titicut plantation, especially along the southeastern boundaries. Weston's history of Middleboro notes a revised and considerably smaller Indian reservation. The southern boundary (after 1853) is located at a point where the present boundaries of Middleboro, Lakeville and East Taunton meet. This point is on Poquoy Brook, just east of Vernon Street. It extends from this point northeast, to an old oak tree on the south side of Center Street, 30 rods west of Pleasant Street. It stretches thence easterly by a black oak tree to what was known as the old English line; thence to the river.

This point is very vague and open to interpretation. However, this eastern boundary appears to be east of the Titicut Street (Aldens) Bridge and west of where Purchase Brook empties into the Taunton River. The reservation also included the southern portions of Bridgewater, though these limits are not defined. One can assume the description to mean that the boundary extended approximately one half mile north of the Taunton River, on average. The exceptions being Vernon and South Streets, where known Indian sites extend to a mile or more. This assumption is based on sixty years of collecting Indian artifacts in these areas (Taylor, 1969). By 1770 most Indians from the Titicut reservation had died.

REFERENCES:


Map of the Titicut Reservation, March 30, 1724