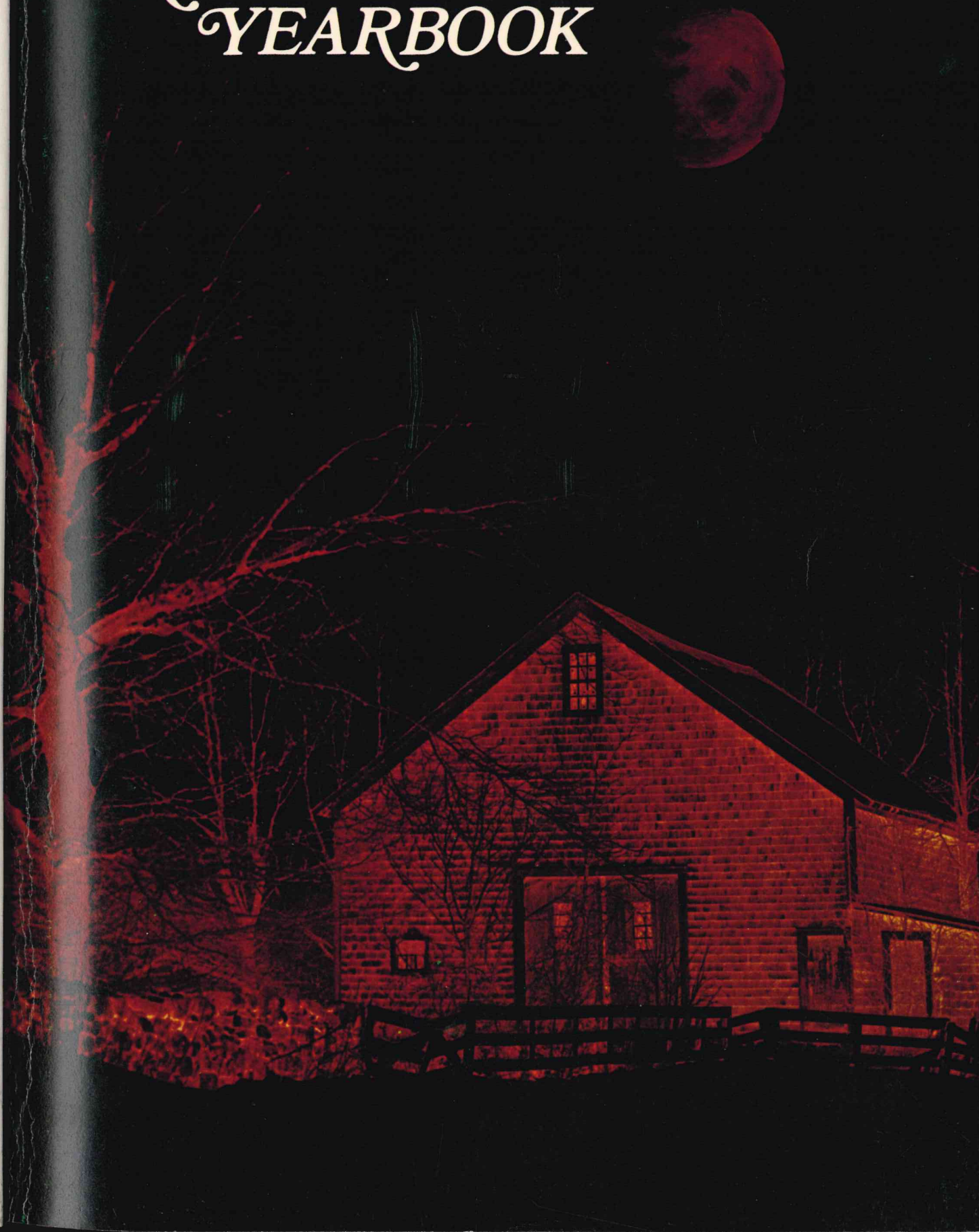


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The Hudson Collection and Rhode Island Prehistory

—By Carol Barnes

Carol Barnes, born in New Hartford, Connecticut in 1941, received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1963 from the University of Connecticut and in 1967 her Masters Degree in Anthropology with specialty in North American Archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania. She expects to receive her PhD in May, 1972. Miss Barnes, who is a resident of Rhode Island, taught Anthropology at Rhode Island College from 1967 to 1971 and is an active member of the Narragansett Archaeological Society of Rhode Island, the Massachusetts Archaeological Society, Society for American Archaeology, and the American Anthropological Association.

The Hudson collection of archaeological material had its beginning about the year 1909, when the five Hudson brothers, Archer, Royal, Albert, Wilton, and John, developed an interest in Rhode Island's heritage of Indian artifacts. The state is rich in prehistoric remains. Tools made and used thousands of years before Christ can be found in many places, and the Hudson brothers took full

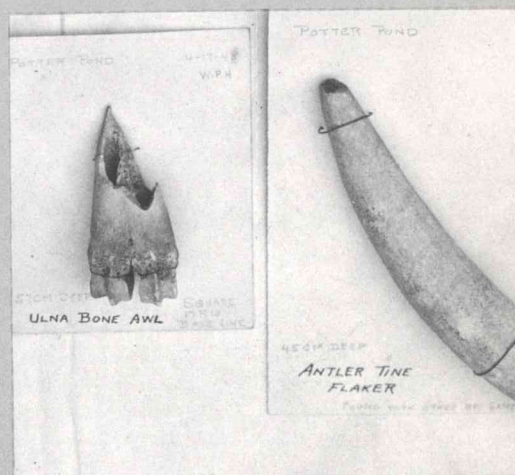
Photos Courtesy of The Providence Journal/Bulletin.

advantage of this fact in building their collection. The family homestead was located in good Indian country on Flat River in Coventry, and many friends came from this area. But the brothers also searched for Indian artifacts in other places. While attending the University of Rhode Island, they surface-hunted in the fields of Kingston. Rock shelters in the western part of the state also yielded many artifacts. One point was even found in the "flower garden, front of Union Station, Providence."

When the Narragansett Archaeological Society of Rhode Island was formed in 1926, the four brothers then living in Rhode Island became active members and took part in the scientific excavation and recording of several prehistoric campsites. These include the Jones Pond Shell Heap at the head of Narragansett Bay, published by the society in 1939; Potter Pond Cove in Matunuck (Fowler and Luther, 1950); Twin Rivers campsite in North Providence (Fowler, 1952); Green Point, North Kingstown (Fowler, 1954); Rattlesnake Ledge Rock Shelter, West Greenwich (Fowler, 1962); Locust Spring Campsite, Greenwood (Fowler, 1962b); Sweet Meadow Brook, Apponaug; a campsite in Seekonk; and three sites on Flat River in Coventry (in press). These sites have contributed greatly to our knowledge of Rhode Island prehistory. If digging is properly and carefully done and all the data are saved and analyzed, it is possible to learn a great deal about the way of life practiced by Precolumbian Rhode Islanders.

Thanks to a great deal of such careful, scientific digging, much of it done by dedicated amateurs, it is possible to sketch the outlines of a Northeastern prehistory which is divided into three main stages: *Paleo-Indian*, from about 9000 to 7000 BC, *Archaic*, from 7000 to 1000 BC, and *Woodland* or *Ceramic* from 1000 BC to the European conquest.

The *Paleo-Indian* stage began as the last glaciers retreated from the North American continent. During this period herds of big game like the hairy mammoth roamed over a cold, treeless tundra in North America. The first *Americans* were small bands of hunters who followed the big game herds. They made fine fluted points for their spears, and crude scrapers and choppers of stone for butchering, skinning, and other tasks. No undisturbed campsites of these hunters have yet been found in Rhode Island, but we know they came here because we find their distinctive fluted spear points



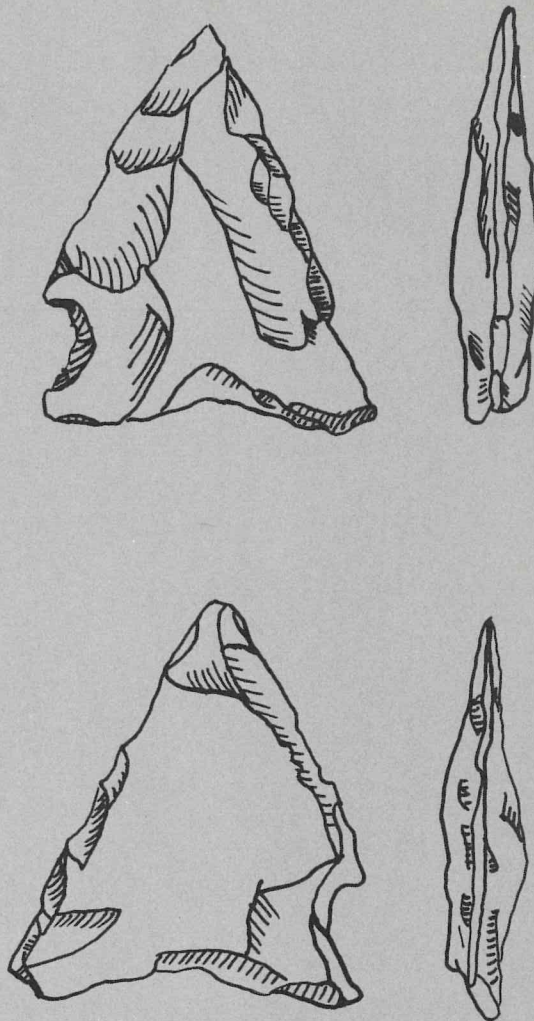
Artifacts from Potter Pond Dig.

scattered in our fields.

Toward the end of *Paleo-Indian* times, the climate began to get warmer. Eastern North America became a temperate land of forests, lakes, and rivers. Peoples of the succeeding *Archaic* stage took advantage of this new landscape. They settled down to hunt small game, to fish, and to gather shellfish or vegetable foods like nuts, acorns, roots, berries, and maple syrup. They even developed special woodworking tools to deal with the forest. Many campsites of the *Archaic* people have been found in Rhode Island. We know that, lacking agriculture, they moved around their territories with the seasons, harvesting natural crops as they ripened. Sometimes we can see several different kinds of sites, used by the same group of people for different purposes. They are quarry sites, fishing camps, hunting camps, and many others.

The environment did not change much between *Archaic* and *Woodland* times, but culture began to change rapidly. In *Late Archaic* times the idea of permanent containers for liquids was developed, and people began making bowls from soapstone like that at Ochee Spring in Johnston. The soapstone bowl makers were rivermen who travelled long distances by canoe. They carried many new ideas, perhaps including agriculture and pottery-making, across the Northeast. During *Woodland* times, agriculture became important. The women grew corn, beans, squash, and other vegetables; the men hunted, fished, and fought. Population increased, and settled villages developed. Trade flourished. Political alliances were formed. Groups in the Midwest and Southeast built large pyramids and earthworks, but our local *Indians* had simpler cultures which persisted until the European conquest and were recorded by men like Roger Williams and his contemporaries.

Each of these stages can be subdivided, and we can see in each area how groups of people moved here and there, met and parted, and developed new and more efficient tools in their quest for food and shelter. Some of our evidence for these developments comes from excavated sites; but not all sites can be excavated. Scientific excavation and recording are slow, painstaking, and laborious. There simply isn't enough time or money available to excavate all the sites in Rhode Island. And even if there were unlimited time and money, it would be impossible to excavate all the evidence for the prehistory of Rhode Island. Some of it lies hidden under lawns, gardens, and fields which cannot be



Four views of an eared No. 4 type projectile point from Hope Furnace Road, Scituate. Late Archaic.

Drawings by Armando Marini, Jr.

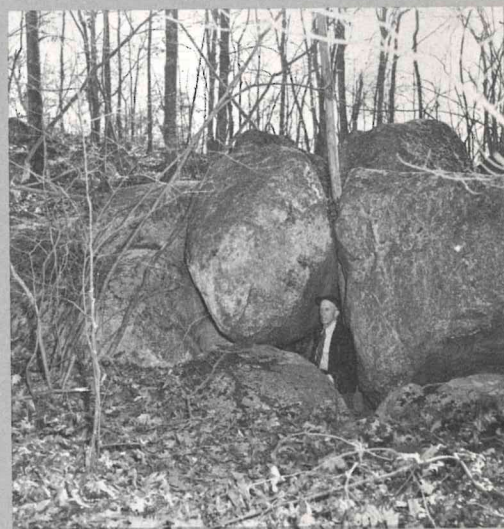
torn up at the whim of the archaeologist; and a tragically large percentage of it has already been destroyed forever by the construction of roads and buildings.

This is where carefully recorded and catalogued surface collections like that made by the Hudson brothers come to our rescue. Artifacts from sites which have never been excavated, and which may even have been destroyed since the surface collection was made, can be compared with those from excavated sites. By such comparisons we can gain a fuller idea of how prehistoric people moved in space and time, and how they used the resources of their environment. But this can be done only if we know the precise spot where each artifact in the collection was found. The unique value of a heritage like the Hudson collection lies not in the artifacts, which have little monetary worth, but in the records, which allow us to use the artifacts in gaining priceless knowledge of local prehistory. Which brings us back to the Hudson collection itself, and to its custodian, John Hudson.

Though all five of the brothers contributed to the collection, it was John who cared for it and kept the records. By all accounts, he was a most unusual man. According to his obituary, he was born on April 3, 1878, in Harris, R.I. He graduated from Cranston High School and Rhode Island School of Design, and spent 45 years as a draughtsman for Brown and Sharpe. He never married, but divided his time among the Masons (he was a 50-year member and belonged to the Providence council of Royal and Select Masters), the church, the Historical Society, the Boy Scouts—and archaeology. This was his great and abiding love, and the headline of his obituary reads “John P. Hudson dies at 77: Archaeologist.” The title was deserved. In a time when even professional archaeologists had not set up standards of scientific recording, John Hudson kept a catalog of the family collection. And it is this catalog that makes the collection so valuable today. Apparently from the very first, John Hudson tried to record where each artifact was found. He numbered the specimens in ink, and recorded in his ledger the meaning of each number. Unfortunately, he did not know the origins of all the specimens. Some were given to him by friends or acquaintances who had kept no records. Others were given to his brother Royal, a medical doctor who often accepted artifacts from his patients in lieu of payment. None of these specimens are numbered. None can be used in



John Hudson with part of the family collection.



John Hudson at Queens Chamber at Queens Fort, North Kingstown.

reconstructing the prehistory of Rhode Island. They can serve as examples for display and teaching, but scientifically they are useless. It is the specimens numbered and recorded by John Hudson that make the collection so uniquely valuable.

John had lived alone with the collection in the old family homestead on Flat River. When he died, the house and collection were left alone. Vandals broke in and stole some furnishings, but left most of the collection undisturbed. Nevertheless, the surviving brothers were worried about the collection. They wanted to sell the house, and the specimens had to be removed. Albert, Wilton and Archer agreed that the collection should go to someone who would love and care for it as they had done. It was at this point that Rhode Island College appeared on the scene.

For a number of years Rhode Island College has had a thriving program in cultural anthropology, which studies the life-ways of living groups of people. This program is being expanded to include archaeology, the reconstruction of life-ways which have disappeared in the past. But archaeology is a practical subject. Giving students an idea of how people lived in the distant past, and of how we can reconstruct those past cultures, requires teaching collections of artifacts. And teaching collections normally cost money. As a new program, the archaeology courses did not yet justify a large expenditure. So the college was overjoyed when the Hudson brothers offered it their collection. Their terms were more than generous. They asked only that the college promise to use and display the collection instead of letting it molder away in storage. The promise was easily made because teaching collections by their very nature are constantly being used and displayed in new ways. So the Hudson collection came to Rhode Island College.

A preliminary inventory and a semester of study and analysis by students in Basic Archaeology have made clear the potential of the Hudson Collection for its new role as an aid to study and teaching. The collection falls into four main groups of material, which can be used in different ways. The first group is made up of site assemblages from over ninety sites, mostly in Rhode Island. Some sites are represented by only one or two specimens; others have one or two hundred. Most of the specimens are stone. There is a fair sampling of pottery and a little bone. There are also photographs of a number of rockshelter sites, and even



Weight for spear thrower used by Archaic people.

some excavator's field notes from the Potter Pond site in Matunuck. This last is one of the Narragansett Archaeological Society digs in which the Hudsons participated. The site has been published, but the collection contains enough material for restudy and reinterpretation if this should ever become warranted by new advances in archaeology. There is also material from the other society digs. But some of the most interesting material are from sites which were never published.

An example of this is the collection from a campsite near Perryville in South County. This campsite was apparently a workshop where stone points were made from quartz pebbles; and the Hudsons collected not only finished points but also the workshop debris, including a whole shoebox full of small chips. From this material Miss Jane LaMontagne, a student in Basic Archaeology, has been able to reconstruct the entire process of point-making, starting with the original quartz cobble and ending with the finished arrowhead.

Another very interesting and significant assemblage is the one from Hope Furnace Road in Scituate, analyzed by Mr. Armando Marini of the archaeology class. The collection from this site is relatively homogeneous, and it contains points of a type well known to local archaeologists. The Narragansett Society has found that these points appeared quite early in local prehistory. But the interesting thing is what can be learned by comparing them with material from the west. When we do this, we find that they closely resemble points which in New York State are called Vosburgh points. These New York points appear quite early in the development of a prehistoric tool tradition which has been called the *Laurentian*. It has been suggested that at some point in prehistory, people of the *Laurentian* tradition came east to the coast and mixed with the local population, blending tools and traditions as well as genes until both groups were modified. And this is precisely what we can see happening in the material from Hope Furnace Road. There are points like those from New York, typical local points, and points which are intermediate between the two. So the material from this site serves to support very strongly an hypothesis which had been suggested on the basis of excavated material.

The second kind of grouping in the Hudson Collection may, for lack of a better term, be called the artifact series. Each of these artifact series includes from three or four to twenty or thirty

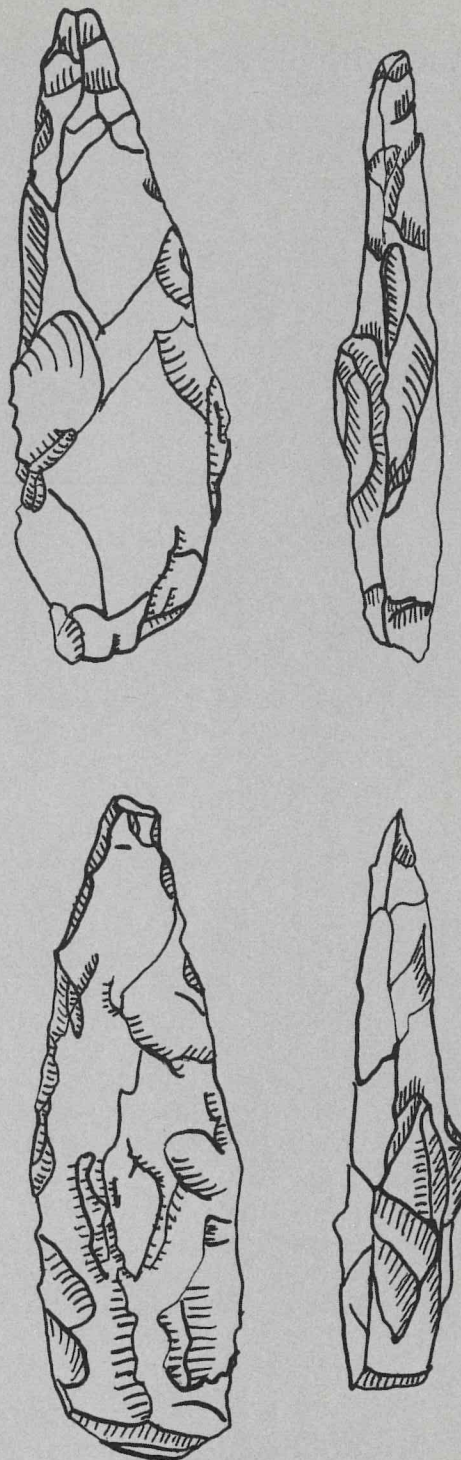


John Hudson, Carr Pond Rock Shelter,
West Greenwich.

artifacts of the same kind—seven drills, eight trinkets, 99 points, 22 pestles, etc. Each artifact in the series is from a different locality. Together, they serve to suggest both the range of variation and the spatial distribution of the kind of artifact represented. Studies of this artifact series can shed new light on the way tools were made and used, as well as on local variation in standard tool types. Studies of the raw materials from which the tools were made, and of the localities where these materials outcrop, can tell us something of how the tools were distributed from group to group.

The third kind of grouping in the collection is the collection of “foreign material”, if we interpret “foreign” to mean anything outside of Rhode Island. There are numerous cards of prehistoric tools and trinkets from other states in the United States, from Mexico, and even from Rivadavia, Argentina. But the prize for sheer distance must go to a collection of small, three-cornered bronze arrowheads from the Great Wall of China. Obviously these small groupings of from six to fifty or sixty artifacts from a state or country are not going to tell us anything new about the area they come from; they are too limited. But they have great value in a teaching collection. For one thing, they provide a contrast to local materials. They go to prove how much local traditions and raw materials can influence even things as simple as arrowheads or knives; and they show the tremendous range of variation that can result from differences in tradition and resources. Secondly, these specimens are concrete examples of tools and weapons that help to make written descriptions of prehistory more real and vivid for teacher, student, and museum visitor alike. For those of us who cannot go to Argentina or China, these artifacts are the only way of bringing *Argentine* or *Chinese* prehistory out of the textbook and into actual experience. So as the archaeology program at Rhode Island College is expanded, the groupings of “foreign material” will find increasing use.

The fourth and final grouping of material in the Hudson Collection is the mass of unmarked specimens about which we know nothing more than the nature of the artifact itself. The only new information which could possibly be gained from these specimens is a clue to the making or use of a given artifact type. But even then we would have no idea who made and used it or where they did so. Scientifically, these specimens are almost entirely useless, simply because the people who gave



Four views of an unfinished point.

them to the Hudson brothers never bothered to record their provenience. The only use we can make of them is in museum displays and multi-media kits for classroom teaching. Which brings us at last to the future of the Hudson Collection at Rhode Island College. The case here is a simple and concrete one, but it has implications for any collection of prehistoric or historic material which has been accumulated by past generations and given to us as a heritage for the future. How may such a heritage best be used and preserved?

Rhode Island College is in the process of building a combined storage and display area in which the Hudson Collection can be permanently housed. This area is being fitted around and into an existing classroom, which will subsequently serve as an anthropology classroom and laboratory. Part of the collection will be housed in easily accessible storage; another part will, at any given time, be undergoing analysis by archaeology classes; and a third part will be on display in a format designed and constructed by the previous year's class as part of their laboratory work. When the new display is ready for presentation, the old one will be partially dismantled. Numbered specimens, which have scientific value, will go back into storage for future study in other ways. They will be replaced in the displays by duplicate specimens selected from the unmarked specimens which have no scientific value. The displays will then go on file for possible use by schools, libraries, and other organizations interested in local prehistory. We hope eventually to have a lending library of multi-media kits pertaining to the prehistory of Rhode Island.

This cycle of analysis, display, storage, and reanalysis can be expected to go on almost indefinitely with the material at hand. The collection is very extensive, and the artifacts in it can be analyzed in many different ways to shed light on a variety of problems of local prehistory. There is also the chance of comparison with similar collections at other institutions, and with newly excavated material as this becomes available. By having students do the analysis, we hope to make archaeology at Rhode Island College a living program in which students contribute new knowledge instead of memorizing old. By making the student displays available to the general public, we hope to disseminate this new knowledge and increase popular interest in Rhode Island prehistory. And in doing so we hope to make maximum use of the heritage given to us by John Hudson and his brothers. We hope he would be pleased.

Further Reading

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