

Appendix F



Bill Wallen

Farm Creek on Featherstone Refuge

Archaeological and Historical Resources Overview

- Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge
- Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge

Archaeological and Historical Resources Overview: Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge

Compiled by Tim Binzen, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Northeast Regional Historian

Archaeological and Historical Resources

Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge (Mason Neck Refuge, refuge) contains an unusually important and diverse archaeological record, which offers evidence of thousands of years of settlement by Native Americans and of later occupations by Euro-Americans and African-Americans. The variety within this record is known, although no comprehensive testing program has been completed at the refuge. Archaeological sites in the current inventory were identified by compliance surveys in highly localized areas, or on the basis of artifacts found in eroded locations. The refuge contains 25 known Native American sites, which represent occupations that began as early as 9,000 years ago, and continued into the mid-17th century. There are 15 known historical archaeological sites, which offer insights into Euro-American settlement that occurred after the 17th century. The small number of systematic archaeological surveys that have been completed previously at the refuge were performed in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and focused on specific locations within the refuge where erosion control activities were considered (Wilson 1988; Moore 1990) and where trail improvements were proposed (GHPAD 2002; Goode and Balicki 2008). In 1994 and 1997, testing was conducted at the refuge maintenance facility (USFWS Project Files). A recent reconnaissance study assessed the serious effects of erosion on shoreline sites to assist with obligations under Section 110 of NHPA, and resulted in the identification of 14 Native American sites that had not been previously recorded (Johnson 2005). The refuge does not contain any significant historical structures.

Native American Archaeological Resources

The availability of natural resources influenced Native American settlement on Mason Neck. The combination of resources was shaped over time by patterns in the geology and ecology of the Chesapeake Bay region. In geological terms, Mason Neck has not been a riverine peninsula for very long. During the late Pleistocene, 18,000 years ago, sea levels were approximately 300 feet lower than they are today, and Mason Neck was an inland ridge. The Potomac River was a narrow channel, which carried glacial meltwater from inland areas to the coastal edge of the Continental Shelf, located many miles to the east of its modern location. Between 10,000 and 7,000 years ago, in the early Holocene, sea levels rose rapidly as waters from melted ice sheets flowed into the Atlantic. Consequently, the valleys of the Potomac, James, and Susquehanna Rivers were inundated under hundreds of feet of water, and the approximate outlines of Chesapeake Bay were formed. Notably, it was not until 3,000 years ago that sea levels stabilized, and the shorelines of the Bay and its tributary rivers and promontories (including Mason Neck) took the forms that are recognizable today. During the historical period, notable changes to the shorelines of the Bay have continued. The cliffs seen on the Bay's middle-western shore by the explorer John Smith in A.D. 1607-8 have eroded as much as 300 feet inland over the ensuing centuries (Dent 1995). Shoreline erosion poses a major concern at Mason Neck today.

The first human inhabitants of the Chesapeake Bay region were the Paleo-Indians, who reached the eastern seaboard approximately 11,500 years ago. Organized in small bands, the Paleo-Indians were highly mobile people who used a specialized toolkit of fluted spear points and distinctive scrapers. The environment that they knew was cool and dry. Their landscape was vegetated in a spruce-pine forest and was populated by temperate terrestrial animals, which included many species still seen in the region today. Some displaced boreal species may have been present as well. Archaeologists have found no evidence that the Paleo-Indians coexisted with mammoths or mastodons in the Northeast, prior to the extinction of those species in the region. While no Paleo-Indian sites are known in the direct vicinity of Mason Neck, two such occupations have been reported less than 25 miles to the north (Dent 1995). During the Paleo-Indian period, Mason Neck was a high bluff overlooking the valley of the ancient Potomac River, which flowed hundreds of feet below.

The successors to the Paleo-Indians were the Native Americans of the Early Archaic period, which occurred between about 9,500 and 8,000 years ago. These people knew a climate that was increasingly warm and humid, and an environment where woodlands dominated by beech, hickory, hemlock, birch, and oak replaced open

conifer-dominated parkland (Dent 1995). This change in vegetation was accompanied by shifts in animal populations in the Chesapeake Bay region. The Native Americans modified their technologies in response, adopting new forms of corner-notched and side-notched spear points and using spear-throwing devices to launch projectiles over greater distances than was possible by hand (Egloff and McAvoy 1990). As forests of deciduous trees closed in over the landscape, previously barren zones offered attractive resources, such as hazelnuts, hickory nuts, butternuts, and some tuberous plants. The innovative subsistence strategies practiced by the people of the Early Archaic led them to adjust their system of settlement, as they used longer-term occupations and took advantage of resources that were seasonally available and found in a wider variety of locations (Dent 1995). Mason Neck was still an elevated bluff, not yet a peninsula, although sea levels (and the level of the Potomac) rose steadily throughout the Early Archaic period. An Early Archaic spear point has been recovered from an archaeological site in the southeastern part of the refuge, overlooking the Great Marsh (Goode and Balicki 2008). This indicates that Native Americans were attracted to Mason Neck as early as 9,000 years ago.

During the Middle Archaic period, between 8,000 and 5,000 years ago, a climatic warming trend prevailed, marked by sub-episodes that were moister or drier. Oak and hickory became the dominant tree species, and by the end of the period, mixed deciduous forests prevailed, similar in composition to those seen in the region today. Mast products, such as acorns and nuts, were both nutritious and easily stored and became a key source of food for Native Americans (Dent 1995). Another ecological trend with major implications for Native American settlement was the development of estuarine conditions along the shorelines of the Potomac River as the water level continued its rise in the river valley and the Chesapeake Bay came into being (Dent 1995). The effects of tidal action on the Potomac reached as far upriver as Mason Neck (Wilson 1988). Within the Potomac, freshwater fish were joined by marine species that had left their natural predators behind in the open sea. Abundant resources were available for all fish in these newly formed estuarine habitats, resulting in great species diversity (Dent 1995). The seasonal migrations of anadromous fish, and the greater availability of shellfish, waterfowl, and terrestrial species, did not escape the attention of Native Americans who lived near the Bay and its tributaries during the Middle Archaic period. This was reflected in their settlement system, which was oriented around a seasonal system of floodplain base camps and smaller settlements located near wetlands in upland areas (Gardner 1987). The Fall Zone of the Potomac offered hundreds of locations for seasonal fish harvesting (Dent 1995).

Native Americans of the Middle Archaic period devised a variety of contracting-stem and side-notched projectile points that were suitable for hunting and fishing, and supplemented their tool kits with grinding and milling stones, ground-stone axes, drills, and wood-working tools such as adzes and celts (Dent 1995). Evidence of Middle Archaic settlement has been reported from two sites on the refuge (USFWS Site Files; Goode and Balicki 2008).

Between 5,000 and 3,000 years ago, sea levels stabilized and the coastline of Chesapeake Bay took the form that is recognizable today. Native American populations grew in size and social complexity, and the settlement system became more sedentary. There was a profusion of artifact styles, as projectile points included broadspear variants, notched broad spears, and narrow-bladed, stemmed forms. Stone bowls were fashioned from steatite. Distinct cultural groups, or traditions, emerged throughout the region during the Late Archaic, and the people of these traditions adopted contrasting settlement systems, focusing variously upon the vast woodlands beyond the Fall Line or upon the riverine and estuarine resources of the Fall Zone and Coastal Plain (Dent 1995).

Formerly an elevated bluff standing hundreds of feet above the Potomac, Mason Neck became a riverine peninsula, defined by the confluences of the Occoquan River and Pohick Creek with the larger river. The interior of Mason Neck featured loamy, well-drained soils (USDA 1963) and gentle terrain crisscrossed by creeks. A variety of wetland, estuarine, and mast forest resources became easily accessible to the Native American inhabitants of the area. From the southern escarpment of Mason Neck, there was a commanding view for miles down the middle Potomac River. Archaeological evidence from three sites on the refuge suggests that Native Americans settled Mason Neck more intensively during the Late Archaic period (USFWS Site Files).

The greater Woodland period, which archaeologists divide into three sub-periods, began approximately 3,000 years ago and continued until the era of first contact with Euro-Americans. It is clear from the archaeological record that by the onset of the Woodland period, Mason Neck had become an important focus of Native American settlement on the Potomac.

The Early Woodland period, between about 3,000 and 2,300 years ago, saw the introduction of fired clay pottery and the Native American occupation of large villages located in the floodplains of major rivers. The use of storage pits and larger habitation structures indicates that these larger settlements supported long-term occupations. People evidently used smaller sites in upland settings for specialized and seasonal purposes, such as hunting for deer and turkey, and harvesting nuts and wild plant foods. The consumption of shellfish became an increasingly important element of Native American subsistence. There was considerable continuity in settlement locations between the Early Woodland period and the Middle Woodland period, which occurred between about 2,300 and 1,200 years ago, indicating that Native American subsistence strategies and settlement systems persisted during a time of climatic stability (Dent 1995). According to archaeological evidence, these regional patterns were reflected on Mason Neck, where artifacts of the Early Woodland and/or Middle Woodland periods have been reported from at least seven sites on the refuge (USFWS Site Files).

The Late Woodland period, from 1,200 to 500 years ago, marked the final centuries before contact between Native Americans of the Northeast and European explorers. Starting about A.D. 900, maize horticulture was adopted by Native American societies in the Middle Atlantic. Hunting, gathering, and fishing remained important subsistence activities, which shaped the annual cycle (Dent 1995). After A.D. 1300, the storage of surplus crops enabled the establishment of permanent hamlets and larger villages. An increase in the Native American population between A.D. 1300 and 1400 may have led to competition between neighboring groups. Nucleated settlements were frequently enclosed in palisades, indicating that territorial conflicts may have flared. Village sites were marked by deep cultural deposits and many storage pits, suggesting the accumulation of surplus crops and increased sedentism. The factors of population growth, food surpluses, and permanent villages may have led to the development of complex social and political structures and the emergence of the ranked chiefdoms that the first Europeans encountered in the late 16th and early 17th centuries (Turner 1992).

No sites representing large, Woodland-period villages have been recorded to date on the refuge, but it is possible that evidence for long-term settlement during the late pre-Contact period may yet be found. Between 1991 and 1993, investigations were conducted at the Hartwell Site (State Number 44FX1847), located outside the refuge on the shoreline of upper Mason Neck, near Colchester. The site included extensive shell midden deposits and produced Late Woodland projectile points, pottery, and a soapstone animal effigy (VA DHR Site Files). Early European accounts provide strong indications that Mason Neck and the Occoquan River confluence area were a focal Native American settlement locale on the Potomac (Barbour 1969). Given the rate of shoreline erosion since the 17th century, it is possible that some large sites at Mason Neck may have already been lost.

In summary, the inventory of pre-Contact Native American settlement locations at the refuge includes 25 sites, with evidence of occupation as early as 9,000 years ago. Several of the sites were re-occupied multiple times during different time periods, suggesting that they offered access to natural resources that remained important over time. Remarkably, one refuge site (the Great Marsh site, State Number 44FX410) produced an assemblage of projectile points that date to the Early Archaic, Middle Archaic, Late Archaic, Early Woodland, and Middle Woodland periods (Goode and Balicki 2008). Only two of the Native American sites on the refuge are well understood archaeologically (the Great Marsh Site, State Number 44FX410, and the Little Marsh Creek Site, State Number 44FX1471). Most of the sites represent occupations of undetermined period (Johnson 2005) and have never been subject to subsurface testing, so their dimensions, integrity, and levels of significance are unknown. All but one of the known refuge sites is located on the modern shoreline or next to an estuary or marsh. While this likely reflects a Native American preference for such locations, as of 2010 no archaeological survey has investigated the margins of creeks or the interior upland zones of Mason Neck. It is very likely that additional sites await discovery in such interior settings.

For historians and archaeologists alike, Mason Neck belongs to an elite group of places for study of the Contact period (A.D. 1500-1600) and of 17th-century cultural dynamics in the Chesapeake Bay region. This high level of research value can be attributed to several factors. First, Mason Neck was the main settlement location for the Native American tribe (known as the Dogue) that held sway over the middle Potomac during the Contact period (Moore 1990c). Second, this prominent Dogue settlement was documented in the accounts of the area's first European explorers and early colonists, linking the location to the documentary record (Moore 1990c).

Third, much of the landscape within the refuge and in adjacent portions of Mason Neck has been spared intensive development, resulting in a greater likelihood that Contact-period archaeological resources may be preserved (erosion of shoreline sites notwithstanding).

During the Contact period, the Powhatan chieftanship dominated the Virginia tidewater area. One of several Potomac River groups, the Dogue, were a large tribe, with subgroups in Virginia and Maryland (Johnson 1986). The name “Dogue” may have been derived from the Powhatan word “taux” (Harrington 1955), which was subject to numerous alternative spellings in early colonial records. Their language may have been Siouan, and not Algonquian as was the case with many of the neighboring tribes in the region (Moore 1990c). Their way of life was similar to other Chesapeake tribes of the period, which included the Potomac Tribe further up the river and the Piscataway of the western shore of Maryland. The Dogue occupied large focal settlements and used small satellite camps for seasonal resources, following an annual cycle of hunting, fishing, gathering of plant foods, and maize horticulture (Moore 1990b). They may have been less amenable to close relations with Europeans than other tribes (Moore 1990c).

When John Smith voyaged up the Potomac in 1608, he mapped the village of the “Tauxenent” near the mouth of the Occoquan River (Barbour 1969) and noted that the settlement featured a “king’s house” defended by 40 “bowmen,” with a population of 135-170 people, who occupied as many as 20 longhouses enclosed within a palisade (Johnson 1986). The Dogue settlement at Mason Neck was called “Moyumpse” and was visited by the sachem Powhatan in 1617 (Kingsbury 1933) and by Henry Fleet in 1632 (Neil 1876). It has been suggested that this main village may have been located in upper Mason Neck, near Colchester, while the Dogue maintained smaller villages and seasonal encampments on the lower part of the peninsula (Wilson 1988). According to documentary sources, the area that is south of Kanawha Creek and west of Great Marsh within the refuge was called “Dogues Island” in early deeds related to the general vicinity, and the tribe cultivated fields of maize in an area separated from the mainland by a swamp (Moxham 1975; Moore 1990c). The Dogue may have relocated their main village several times on Mason Neck during the period between 1608 and 1654. After the latter date, colonial settlement increased in the Mason Neck vicinity and the Dogue likely discontinued settlement there at that time (Moore 1990c).

By 1658, relations between the Dogue and the colony of Virginia had deteriorated, as the tribe and colonists on the frontier became increasingly antagonistic. In 1666, the colony slated the Dogue for complete annihilation, but the directive was not carried out. Members of the Dogue joined their Susquehannoc counterparts in frontier raids in 1675. Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676-1677 was a colonial protest against the colony’s handling of Native American raids, in which the Dogue had played a central role. The Dogue population was reduced by warfare and disease, and after 1681 many survivors joined members of other tribes who sought refuge at the large and densely vegetated Zachiah Swamp in Maryland. By the early 1700s, documentary sources ceased to refer to the Dogue as a distinct tribal group (Moore 1990c).

Notably, an archaeological site at the refuge (the Little Marsh Creek Site, State Number 44FX1471) has provided evidence of 17th-century Dogue settlement (Moore 1989). It is the only conclusively Dogue site known to exist in Virginia, and one of only two that have been identified, the second being in Maryland (Moore 1990b). The artifact assemblage from the site includes chipping debris of various materials, forms of Potomac Creek pottery and small triangular projectile points that date to the Late Woodland or Contact period, and three gunflints that were manufactured by Native Americans using both domestic raw materials and European flint (Moore 1989). Cumulatively, the artifacts suggest that the Little Marsh Creek Site was occupied by members of the Dogue between A.D. 1625 and 1650 (Moore 1990a).

Unfortunately, the Native American archaeological record at the refuge is under imminent threat from shoreline erosion. Numerous sites literally are vanishing, as artifacts fall out of eroding banks and are exposed to visitors who may be tempted to remove them. Archaeological resources are finite and unique, and much important information may be lost if action is not taken (Johnson 2005).

Historical Archaeological Resources

Even as Mason Neck had figured prominently in the Native American settlement systems of the Potomac, it was also significant in the geography of the Euro-American occupations that followed. The first colonial land patent in Fairfax County involved property on Mason Neck and was granted to Richard Turney in 1651 (GHPAD 2002). Soon thereafter, the Dogue vacated the locale (Moore 1990c). In 1690, George Mason II started acquiring lands on Mason Neck, including Turney's Patent (GHPAD 2002). By 1704, he had a house on the western shore (Wilson 1988). The tobacco port of Colchester was established on the Occoquan River shore of western Mason Neck in 1753. Six years later, George Mason IV established the Gunston Hall Plantation in the eastern part of lower Mason Neck (GHPAD 2002). An American patriot and statesman, George Mason IV served as a delegate from Virginia to the U.S. Constitutional Convention. Along with James Madison, he is called the "Father of the Bill of Rights" and is considered one of the "Founding Fathers" of the United States (Heymsfeld and Lewis 1991).

While the main house (Gunston Hall) and its associated complex of structures and outbuildings were situated in the southeast corner of Mason Neck, outside the current refuge boundary, the plantation as a whole encompassed an area of 5,500 acres in the southern part of the peninsula (GHPAD 2002), much of it within the current boundaries of the refuge. The Mason family owned dozens of slaves, who lived on the plantation in quarters near the mansion and also under overseers in four outlying hamlets at Mason Neck (Mitchell 1987; Wilson 1988). After 1750, soil depletion led Virginia plantation owners to phase out labor-intensive hoe tobacco cultivation in favor of wheat production (Copeland and McMaster 1975). This may have affected the number of slaves owned by the Mason family in the later 18th century (Wilson 1988). Approximately one quarter of Mason Neck was still wooded during that period (Wilson 1988). Several parcels of land were occupied by tenant farmers, who also owned slaves (Copeland and McMaster 1975).

In 1775, George Mason IV apportioned 1,000 acres in the west-central part of Mason Neck to create the Lexington Plantation, which he gave to his eldest son, George V. During the 19th century, the Mason descendants sold off the holdings in parcels, and after the Civil War the family no longer owned any land on Mason Neck (GHPAD 2002).

Commercial fishing, logging, and farming were the main enterprises at Mason Neck in the late 19th century. Hunting and fishing camps were used seasonally, and a few summer homes were built. Between 1900 and 1960, logging continued, but there was very little development in the lower section of Mason Neck, where the refuge is located. A small number of seasonal dwellings were built along the shoreline. The lands narrowly avoided development in the mid-1960s, and the refuge was established in 1969. The dwellings dating to the first half of the 20th century were demolished (Wilson 1988; GHPAD 2002).

Fifteen historical archaeological sites have been recorded at the refuge (USFWS Site Files). As with possible Native American resources, it is likely that a program of systematic survey that addresses the refuge as a whole will identify numerous additional sites. No Euro-American sites dating to the Contact period or to the 17th century are known, but there are five 18th-century sites. Two of them (the Moore's Farmstead Site and the Bronaugh's Landing Site) are located in the eastern extremity of the refuge, near Gunston Hall, while the other three (the Mail's Landing Site, the Dogues Neck Site, and the Crawford's Landing Site) are on the south-central shoreline. Six of the known sites include evidence of 19th-century land use, and six have components that date to the first half of the 20th century.

The Gunston Hall historical museum, located to the east of the refuge, has sponsored archaeological research programs to better understand the heritage of the Mason family. John Mason, the fourth son of John Mason IV, wrote a set of boyhood "recollections" that described the 18th-century layout of buildings, grounds, and landscape features at the plantation (Mason 2004). In addition to the mansion house of Gunston Hall with its lawns and gardens, buildings included the slaves' quarters, stables, a corn house and granary, and outbuildings. Agricultural facilities featured a hay yard, cattle pens, and agricultural fields. Extensive orchards were planted with fruit and nut trees. Hundreds of ornamental trees were planted in carefully designed rows in order to screen the slaves' quarters and agrarian structures from line of sight from the mansion.

Archaeological research undertaken by the museum has not yet identified the locations of the slaves' quarters or other structures and landscape features that may have been located beyond the immediate mansion grounds. It is possible that most, if not all, of these historical features were concentrated to the east of Gunston Road, in proximity to the mansion, and thus are located outside the refuge boundary. However, some 18th-century features related to the plantation, such as agricultural fields or outbuildings, may have been located west of the road, and thus may have resulted in archaeological resources that await discovery within the refuge. Other possible sites on the refuge may contain evidence of the outlying slave hamlets, tenant farmers' properties, landings, fishing stations, logging camps, and 19th-century seasonal homes.

Much of the land in the eastern section of the refuge was cleared and used for agricultural cultivation during the historical period. If useable farmland was abundant in the southeastern part of Mason Neck, the southwestern area (which constitutes the western half of the refuge) may have been used primarily for logging and not for cultivation after the early 19th century. Notably, a recent archaeological investigation of a Native American site located in a wooded area overlooking Great Marsh encountered a natural soil profile, indicating that the landform had never been plowed (Goode and Balicki 2008). This unusual circumstance is favorable for the preservation of archaeological resources that are not deeply stratified or buried. Possibly the Mason family or their successors intentionally maintained a strip of woodland along the southern shoreline of Mason Neck, perhaps to screen the view of their holdings from the Potomac or to inhibit erosion.

In summary, the inventory of archaeological resources at the refuge currently includes 15 historical sites, representing settlement and land use that occurred between the early 18th century and the mid-20th century. Euro-American resources dating to the second half of the 17th century may exist, but none has been identified yet. The archaeological record of the refuge may have particular research value for advancing knowledge concerning the agrarian lifeways of the early colonial period on the Potomac.

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Compiled by Tim Binzen, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Regional Historian

Archaeological and Historical Resources

Two archaeological sites have been recorded at Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge (Featherstone Refuge, refuge), each on the basis of artifacts that were visible on the ground surface. No professional archaeological surveys involving subsurface testing have been conducted at the refuge. One of the sites is Native American in origin and is located in the northern part of the refuge. Its condition is unknown, and its period of occupation has not been established. One historical site was recorded in the southern part of the refuge and contained materials dating to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The refuge does not contain any significant historical structures.

Native American Archaeological Resources

Featherstone Refuge has much in common with neighboring Mason Neck Refuge in terms of its geological and paleoenvironmental history. Consequently, it can be expected that there are parallels regarding the forms of Native American settlement that were seen in both refuges prior to European contact. The landform at Featherstone offered gentle terrain and access to the estuarine environment, just north of the confluence of Neabsco Creek, Occoquan Bay, and the Potomac. The density of sites and the duration of occupations likely were much less complex at Featherstone than has been recognized at Mason Neck, but landscape settings like that of Featherstone nonetheless figured significantly in Native American land use practices. One Native American site of undetermined age has been recorded at the refuge. It is likely that systematic testing at Featherstone would result in the identification of additional Native American archaeological resources.

Historical Archaeological Resources

Little is currently known about possible historical resources at Featherstone Refuge. One historical site has been recorded on the basis of artifacts observed on the ground surface. Deeds dating to the late 17th and early 18th centuries suggest that the lands within the refuge, along with other areas on the west side of the Occoquan River, were part of the extensive holdings of the historic Deep Hole Farm. Given the mainly estuarine environment of the refuge, it is not likely that extensive agriculture or domestic settlement occurred there prior to the mid-1800s, when the railroad corridor for the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad was constructed. The railroad bed, with its cinder and coal slag, is still a prominent feature that traverses the refuge from north to south, following the west shore of the Potomac. For the residents of the nearby community, the presence of the railroad line inhibited access to the lands now within the refuge. Thus, it can be expected that any unrecorded historical resources are low in density and may be related to seasonal fishing and hunting camps of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.