

**ABORIGINAL FISHING
STATIONS ON THE
COAST OF THE MIDDLE
ATLANTIC STATES. [1906]**

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Aboriginal Fishing Stations on the Coast of the Middle Atlantic States. [1906] by Jr. Jordan

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PLATE I. REMAINS OF PILE DWELLING VILLAGE ON MARSH NEAR TUCKERTON, NEW JERSEY.
CENTRE OF SHELL MOUND EAST SIDE.

ABORIGINAL
FISHING STATIONS

ON THE COAST OF
THE MIDDLE ATLANTIC STATES

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PHILADELPHIA

1906

ABORIGINAL FISHING STATIONS ON THE COAST OF THE MIDDLE ATLANTIC STATES.

THEIR CHARACTERISTICS.



N that part of the Atlantic seaboard lying directly east of the Alleghanies, which embraces the Middle Atlantic States, the remains of the aboriginal American have no features that arrest the attention of the superficial observer, and hence their identification requires some little knowledge of archaeological field work. Here there are no vast sepulchral mounds nor other structures of a pre-historic origin, such as astonish the beholder in the valley of the Mississippi. As we approach the walls of the Alleghanies from the west those ancient monuments of a mysterious and extinct civilization gradually fade away, and having crossed that barrier abruptly disappear; a fact which must convey a significant meaning to the student of American ethnology.

There are, of course, Indian graves in the district we are considering, and they contain the usual mortuary objects, but they rarely have any visible existence.¹ These unmarked tombs are about the

¹The mortuary objects from a grave on the Atlantic slope have a direct bearing on its antiquity. If articles of European

depth of a modern plough-share, generally the medium of their discovery, and one very apt to destroy or mutilate the contents.

As the aborigine of our eastern coast, unlike his brother of Continental Europe, obviously lived an arboreal life, cave dwellings are almost unknown whence we might hope to find traces of his primitive life. If he sought the shelter of a cave, it was a contingency, not a custom; he did not adopt it as a permanent habitation. It is true caves have occasionally been found in the Middle States containing implements and bones, but in their general character the objects suggest a secret work shop or storage house rather than a domicile.²

manufacture are found associated with those of native origin, such as trinkets of brass and glass and cooking utensils and weapons of iron—which the Indians obtained by barter from the whites—the age of the grave must be limited to the early colonial period. Dissociated from the former it may exceed five hundred or a thousand years.

²Of these perhaps the most important was found in 1878 by Professor S. S. Haldeman (Samuel Stehman Haldeman, naturalist, born in Locust Grove, Pa., August 12, 1812; died September 10, 1903) at the base of a cliff washed by the Susquehanna River, at Chickies, Pa. It could not be approached from the land side, and discovery from the water was effectually concealed by shrubbery. It was a secure and almost impregnable hiding place. Professor Haldeman stated that it had served as a retreat and lapidary's shop for not less than two thousand years, and it was also clear that it had not been occupied within two hundred years. It contained one hundred and fifty stone implements, consisting of arrow-heads, tomahawks and flaking-hammers, innumerable stone chippings and the bones of various animals. Many of the articles were found at a depth of thirty

Although there are no great tumuli on the Atlantic Coast, it does not follow that this part of the United States is destitute of aboriginal remains. On the contrary, as in its prehistoric village sites, in which environment plays an important part, the Middle States possess archaeological features that, if they do not equal, exceed in variety of

inches, underlying a rich black mold. Human bones were absent.

See a paper entitled "Contents of a Rock Retreat," read before the American Philosophical Society, June 21, 1878, published in its proceedings.

The Rt. Rev. John Etwein, a Moravian missionary, who labored among the Indians in colonial days, encountered cave tombs in his journeys over the mountains in Pennsylvania, although he made no examination of their contents. His interesting daily journal, written in German, has recently been found in the archives of the Moravian Church at Bethlehem, Pa., in which, under date of April, 1768, he says: "In descending the Wyoming Mountain into the Valley my Indian guide pointed out a pile of stones which he said indicated the number of Indians who had climbed that Mountain, it being the custom for each one to add a stone to the heap in passing over the trail. The Shawnees have all left the Wyoming and Susquehanna; the only traces of them are their places of burial in crevices and caves in the rocks at whose entrance stand large painted stones."

It was Etwein who in 1768 first brought to public notice the existence of the sepulchral mounds in the Mississippi Valley. These amazing structures which attracted his attention on the Muskingum and Ohio rivers were so completely at variance with the capabilities of the present race of Indians as he knew them, that he unhesitatingly expressed it as his belief that they were the creation of a remote and far more enlightened people.

Many years after he had recorded his observations an expedition under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution made a survey of the ground plan of the largest mounds and a study of

interest the antiquities of the Mississippi Valley. The former are better preserved on or near the sea, and while they may not inspire the beholder with awe or wonder, almost as much may be learned from them of aboriginal culture as from the imposing relics of the mound builders.

One may expect to find these deserted fishing stations, for such they really were, on the shores of all the bays and inlets that indent the low sandy coast-line of New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland, where fish and mollusks of unsurpassed quality were abundant.

In the following pages I shall endeavor to describe their prominent characteristics—where the remains have survived the leveling process of the

their contents, which fully warranted this belief. Etwein and his coadjutors, among them the Revs. John Heckewelder and David Zeisberger, penetrated the wilderness far in advance of the earliest white settlement, and to these zealous and self-denying men we are indebted for the most authentic accounts, written in the simple but expressive language of the Moravian missionary, of the life and character of the Indians of the eastern coast of the United States prior to the American Revolution.

Heckewelder's contributions to our knowledge of the aboriginal American are particularly valuable as they include a vocabulary of the principal words and phrases of the Delaware tongue, together with the names of the rivers, lakes and mountains of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. A daughter of Heckewelder, who married a Moravian missionary by the name of Holland, was the first female white child born in the State of Ohio, and incredible as it may sound in the year 1905, in which I write, I had the pleasure of meeting her in her declining years.

elements and the modern ploughman—from which we are permitted to learn something of the domestic economy of these ancient fishermen and their means of subsistence.

Heaps of discarded shells and kitchen refuse, in some instances of extraordinary size, indicate their locality. I venture to say that nowhere else on our eastern coast are there so many unmistakable evidences of a large aboriginal population. Where the settlements were not permanent, as were those on the Chesapeake and upper Delaware Bay, they were abandoned in winter and revisited with every recurring autumn.

In selecting a site for this purpose adaptability was the first consideration. An elevation safe from inundating tides, a water course which gave easy communication with the open bay or sea, and proximity to fresh water and timber were the essentials. Here the natives sought the invigorating air of the sea and its attractive fisheries with an avidity which we of the present day have only followed. Those who composed these annual excursions were principally the nearby tribes, but that others from the interior participated, is shown by the discovery on our eastern coast of objects made from metal and bone that have an exclusive origin west of the Alleghanias; silent witnesses of an intercourse between widely separated tribal communities.

Primarily the object of these visits to the sea-coast was to obtain a supply of fish and mollusks,