

Backward Glances: In Search of Native American “Footprints”

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Early Woodland (1000 B.C. - A.D.0) points and pottery from Richardson Park, Ridgefield

We know North Salem was settled in the 18th century by Dutch, English, Huguenot and other colonists. But did you ever think about the real beginning of the local story? When the Keelers, Purdys, Bloomers and others moved in, people had already been living here

for nearly 10,000 years. Where in North Salem were Native American villages and burial grounds? Where did they hunt? What paths did they travel? Did they use rock shelters and have sacred sites? How did they live? Nineteenth century histories, maps, settlers’ stories, old newspaper articles and oral traditions give us some clues.

With the hope of finding more answers and creating a timeline and map of Native American North Salem, I am working with lithic archaeologist Lynn Marie Wieland (many of you heard her talk “10,000 Years of Suburban Living” at the library on March 4, 2018). An expert in Ridgefield pre-history, and specializing in Native American stone tools, Lynn Marie has done extensive archaeology in Ridgefield and at Lake Kitchawan. Of course, there were no town borders in pre-contact times; so much of the Ridgefield Native American story is also ours.

YOU can help with this project. Have you found any projectile points, pieces of Woodland pottery, hammer stones, or grinding tools? If you find something, please record where you found it, and if you are carrying a cell phone, take a photo of the site and note coordinates. If you have artifacts you have found in the past in North Salem, we’d like to see them, too, even if you don’t remember exactly where you found them. If you know of anyone who has a collection of Native American artifacts, please let them know about our project.

Although Native Americans left no written records, their story can be reconstructed by archaeology. We won’t be digging at this point in the investigation, but every artifact will help illuminate the past. Wandering hunter/gatherers in the Paleo Period (10,500-8,000 B.C.) used fluted points on their spears. Native Americans became more territorial in the Middle Archaic, and by the Late Archaic (4000-1700 B.C.) became more sedentary, creating storage pits, using grinding tools for nuts and seeds, and making Lamoka projectile points. Soapstone bowls appeared during the Transitional Archaic (1700-1000 B.C.), and the first clay pottery appeared in the Early Woodland (100 B.C. - A.D.0). In the Middle and Late Woodland Periods, A.D.0-A.D. 1600, they began to

make coiled clay pottery, which was thinner and used for cooking and storage. Bows and arrows appeared sometime around A.D. 1000.

Please help with this project by sharing your finds -- and any family letters, histories, maps or stories that mention Native Americans in our area -- with me and Lynn Marie. Stop by my office in Lobdell House, call for an appointment 914 669 8459 or get in touch by email.