

Traces of Vernon's Earliest Inhabitants

by Jean Luddy

By the time that Vernon was incorporated in 1808, the Native American presence was almost non-existent. Individuals with Native American heritage lived in the area, but little remained of the tribes that once roamed the woods or camped by the streams and lakes. Local Native American tribes like the Podunks, the Nipmucks and the Mohegans are remembered in place names, paths that become roads, and artifacts. Stone tools and arrow heads have been collected by residents for years.

The collection of the Vernon Historical Society has a few Native American objects. One intriguing item is a collection of stone arrow heads and tools which have been mounted on a wooden plaque in the shape of arrowhead.



Each piece has been labeled with its use and type of stone. The plaque came to the Society as part of a large donation from the Rockville Library in 1981. Little is known about who collected the stone items and where they were found. There are 26 pieces attached to the plaque. Nineteen are arrow heads or “projectile points.” Two are labeled “perforators.” Two are “cutters” and two are “scrapers.” One is called a “blade.” All of the items were made from stone; 7 from quartzite, 6 from flint, 5 from quartz, 4 from yellow jasper, 2 from rhyolite and 2 from red chert. An examination of the artifacts on the plaque sheds a light on Native American weapons and tools.

While many refer to the stone weapons as “arrow heads”, archaeologists call them “projectile points” Experts believe that Native Americans probably did not begin using bows and arrows until about 500 B.C. The points were used as spear tips. “The points were attached to carefully straightened wooden shafts using sinew from large animals, like deer. The binding might have been straightened with pine tar or resin... In New England, where Indians didn’t develop an agriculture-based economy until about 1,100 B.C., hunting and pointmaking might have been a daily activity....The final product was often leaf-shaped, with a short tip and ridged sides, about 1 ¾ to 3 ¾ inches long.” (Paul)

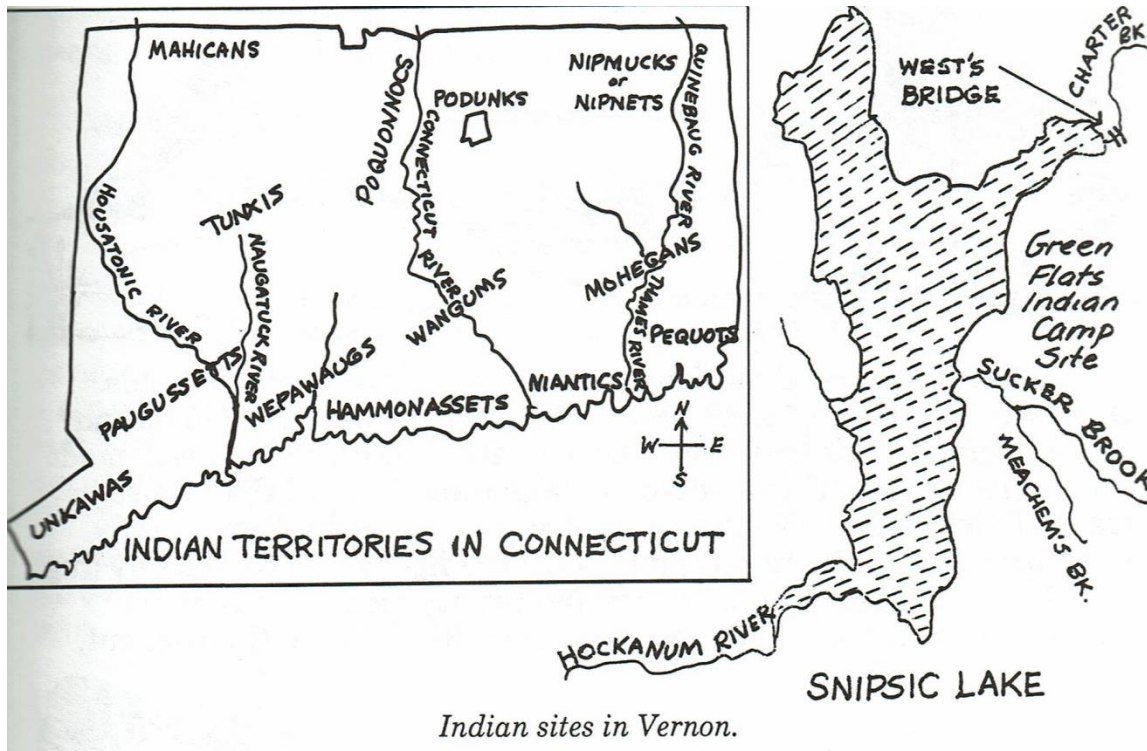


Other tools mounted on the board include scrapers, cutters, perforators and a blade. Cutters and blades were employed for many purposes such as making weapons for fighting, hunting, fishing, engraving, and carving wood. Stone tools were also used to make clothing, transport such as boats, shelter and decorative art. Scrapers were used to prepare animal hides for use as clothing or shelter. Perforators were used for piercing holes or drilling. (www.warpaths2peacepipes.com)



Points and tools were made from local stone. “Native Americans made the points from varieties of quartz (chaldedony, chert, flint) and other rocks that were relatively easy to work and could be made sharp. But the process wasn’t rudimentary. Look at the symmetry and elegance of the points. The ancient makers seem to have taken pride in their work.” (Noel) The majority of the points and tools on the board are made from quartz and quartz varieties including quartzite, flint and chert. Yellow Jasper, a banded sedimentary rock, is also referred to as a chaldedony and is part of the quartz family. Rhyolite is a volcanic rock of various densities and is found in the eastern United States. (World of Earth Science)

Northern Connecticut was home to Podunk and Nipmuck tribes. The area around Snipsic Lake (originally called Lake Mishenipset) was the border between the Podunks to the west, the Nipmucks to the east and the Mohegans to the south.



Indian sites in Vernon.

As hunter gatherers, the tribes followed a yearly pattern of migration as they tracked animals for their food. The terrain of Vernon has the Hockanum and Tankerhoosen Rivers as well as Snipsic Lake which were suitable for camps. Members of the Podunk and Nipmuck tribes frequently spent summers along Snipsic Lake, setting up their encampments along Green Flats near Sucker Brook. (Vernon, Our Town, p15)

Projectile points and stone tools reveal areas where Native Americans spent time. They have been collected by many over the years. The shores of lakes, rivers and streams can yield artifacts. Sometimes they appear in newly plowed farm fields or in building sites. These finely honed weapons and tools are silent witnesses to a vanished culture and way of life.

Sources Used

Connecticut History.org. "Native Americans".

<http://connecticuthistory.org/topics-page/native-americans/> Accessed 1/29/2016.

Paul, Noel. "You can help to piece together the past". Christian Science Monitor. 10/10/2000. Vol.92. Issue 223, p22.

Vernon Historical Society. *Vernon, Our Town*. VHS, 1989.

Warpaths2peacepipes.com. "Native American Weapons and Tools". 3/2015.

<http://www.warpaths2peacepipes.com/native-indian-weapons-tools/stone-tools.htm>

Accessed 1/29/2016.

World of Earth Science. Ed. K. Lee Lerner and Brenda Wilmoth Lerner. Vol. 1. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 54. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 30 Jan. 2016.

To learn more about Native American tribes in our area, visit the Wood Library & Museum on Main Street in South Windsor. Two major Indian artifact collections are on display.

"In the second floor museum room is the Ellsworth/Jennings/Spe



rry Collection, picked up on the flood plain in South Windsor, where several generations of one family farmed. The collection ranges from fluted and bifurcate points of the late Paleo and early Archaic Periods, some 8000 years ago, to late Woodland tools from the time of European contact.

In one case, projectile points are arranged along time-lines, making the display an effective diagnostic tool, particularly for amateur collectors, who can drop in directly from the field to check their finds. Points, pestles, knives, scrapers, hoes, axes, gorgets, bird stones(atl-atl weights) soapstone ware and pottery are in the display. A self-guide brochure, "First People," accompanies this display.

In the basement reception area are two chests displaying part of the Barney E. Daley Family Collection, a selection of over 5000 artifacts picked up over half a century of surface-hunting on the South Windsor flood plain. The entire collection is searchable through a database available on-site at Wood Memorial Library & Museum. Unique among such surface collections, the field location for most of the Daley pieces is also recorded."

<http://www.woodmemoriallibrary.org/collections/museum-collections/>