



Newsletter of the

Archaeological Society of New Jersey

Newsletter No. 256

May 2017

The Richard Cook Collection: A First Look at an unusual artifact collection from Lower Twp, Cape May County

By Darryl Daum and Jack Cresson

On April 6th ASNJ members Darryl Daum and Jack Cresson met with several members of the Cape May Nature Center, NJ Audubon Society and the Cape May Historical Society to chart a course for the interpretation, assessment and ultimate disposition of this large artifact collection.

The meeting took place at the Cape May Nature Center, the organization that inherited the Cook collection after his passing in 2016. Mr. Cook was a lifelong resident of Cape May Point, founding member of the ASNJ who amassed this collection spanning some 60 years, from the 1930's to the 1990's.

Of unique disposition the collection is solely surface derived, principally from a single source location along Lower Township beaches. This fact greatly enhances its position in Cape May County prehistory and its importance in research value.

The Nature Center asked the ASNJ for help and advice in how to best proceed to develop a plan for curation, preservation and interpretation. The meeting was a first step in this direction.

The collection consists of 23 framed wooden panels of 'wire' mounted artifacts, one glass table display and a chest of drawers with 7 drawers filled with both historic and prehistoric artifacts. Also there were 14 plastic tubs (ca. 4"x 8"x 3") mostly filled with mixed artifacts, but some tubs contained other collectables.



Jack Cresson, Darryl Daum, Al Conly examining the Cook Collection.

Eg. petrified wood, fossils, shells, sea glass and beach polished pebbles. The sum total of the lithic and ceramic prehistoric artifacts is about 4900 items. All of the known prehistoric periods are recognized in the artifact types. The initial examination found at least two Paleoindian 'fluted points', as well as a number of Early Archaic Kirk/Palmer corner notched types, along with a number of Middle Archaic Stanly/Neville, Morrow Mountain, Stark and Poplar Island forms. Of interest and noticeably lacking were any of the other bifurcated types of the Early to Middle Archaic time frame.

The Late Archaic was well represented with hundreds of stemmed biface types dominated by the 'contracting' forms.

The Terminal Archaic was strongly present with Koens Crispin, Lehigh and Susquehanna types. Early Woodland types included Fishtrail and fishtail variants, Rossville and Teardrop points. There did not appear to be any Adena/Hopewell artifacts in evidence. The Middle Woodland Period revealed a high frequency of Fox Creek types but less also exhibited less Jacks Reef than expected. The Late Prehistoric was indeed dominate with a large contingent of triangular biface forms along with commensurate ceramics of the Period.

Of great interest were the quality and kind of toolstones used for the flaked tool inventory. Most of the materials were local; secondary gravels from the Cape May formation. Very few exotic or non local materials were noted except for the abundance of argillite in the Late & Terminal Archaic expressions. Even more perplexing was the near total absence of Cohansey quartzite; only one triangular biface manifest in this material. Very few quartzite materials were at all in evidence. The ground stone items of both formal and informal varieties were very small in number; so too for hearth or cooking rock. Both full grooved axes and celts were represented but there were no polished gorgets, atlatl weights or pendants. Ceramics were present but so few of these specimens retained any identifying markings because of beach abrasion. Based on some attributes the entire realm of ceramic using expressions were among these remains.

It was a telling and productive day. We look forward to a closer inspection of all of the materials to further unravel its prehistoric mysteries.