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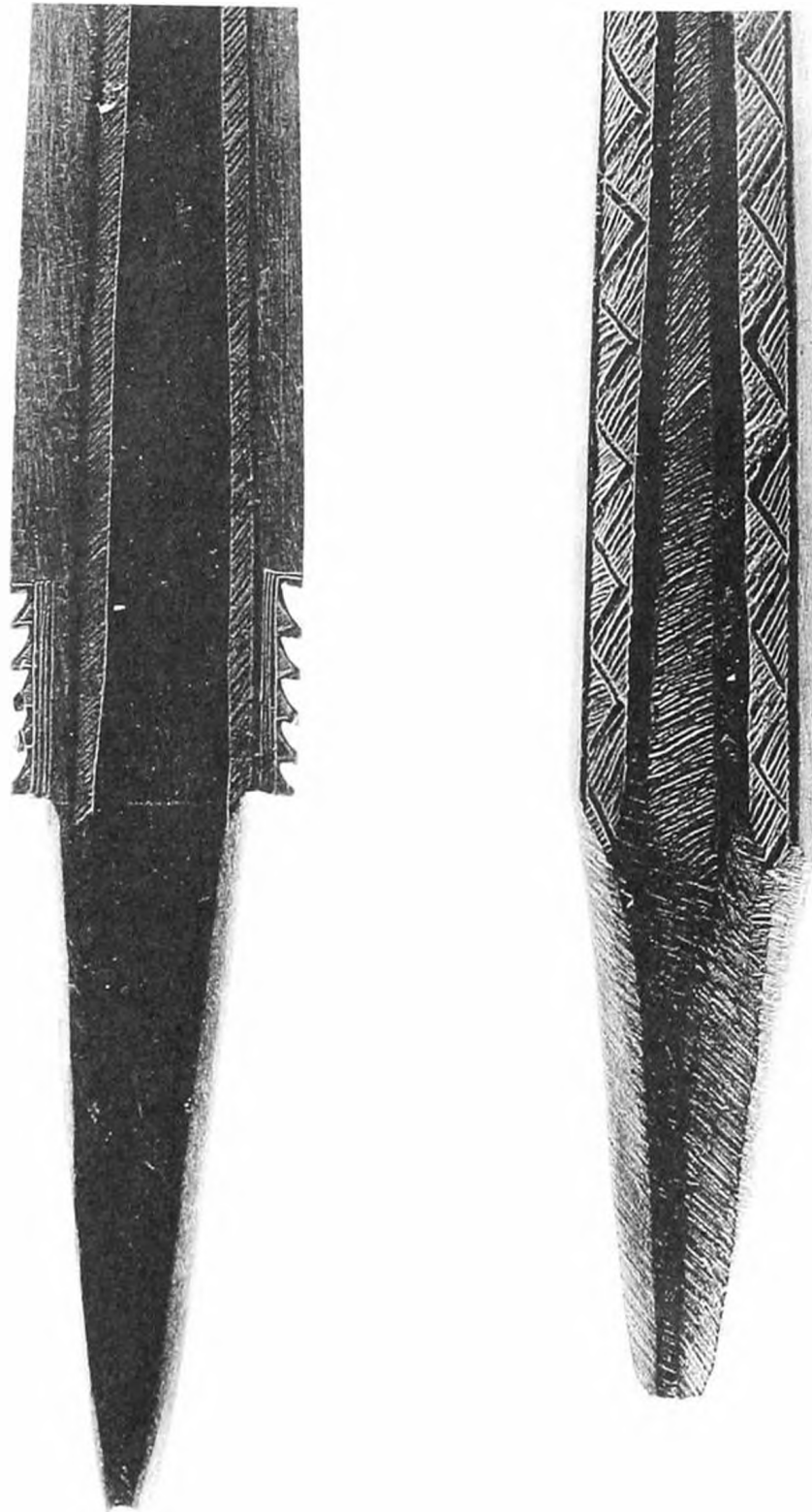


Plate 1. Engraved designs on bases of two ground slate points from Cow Point. Note the fine lines in the barbs on the specimen to the left.

# “RED PAINT PEOPLE” AND OTHER MYTHS OF MAINE ARCHAEOLOGY

By DAVID SANGER

*Maine archaeologists continue to learn more about the pre-European past, often changing once accepted ideas. Among these is the nature of the so-called “Red Paint People,” who were not a distinct race or people, but various Native Americans groups who happened to bury their dead with red ocher between 6000 and 2000 B.C. Another popular idea is the erroneous notion that early Maine Native peoples migrated from coast to interior on a seasonal basis. Recent research questions this belief and explores the reasons for its persistence. Finally, the paper discusses the problem of extending modern political-ethnic terms, such as Penobscot Nation, back into pre-European times.*

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## Introduction

In the current climate of disciplinary specialization it is not unusual to find that controversial or even discarded ideas in one discipline continue to persist in another or in the local folklore. Utilizing examples from the pre-European period (also known as the prehistoric period) in Maine, this paper focuses on three instances of this phenomenon: the so-called “Red Paint people”; popular perceptions of how the Native peoples migrated seasonally from the coast to the interior; and the question of how best to refer to people in the past. In this paper I present some background about each topic and then offer my understandings based on the most current data available.

## The Red Paint People Problem

### *Background*

For decades, no professional archaeologist in Maine has used the term “Red Paint people” in scholarly discourse unless it related to a discussion of the profession’s history.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the concept remains very much alive in the popular media, even in alleged non-fiction television documentaries.<sup>2</sup>

It has been over 100 years since Maine antiquarians found patches of red ocher (powdered hematite) and artifacts in what appeared to be ceremonial caches. Vociferous arguments over the meaning of these finds assumed national prominence. Some considered them burials, while others described them as non-burial deposits. Two things seemed certain: first, the habit of burying artifacts and red ocher did not match burial customs recorded in early historical (Contact) times; and second, the artifacts were unlike those made by the Native American people at the time of European contact.<sup>3</sup> Although the absence of human bones among the artifacts provided ammunition for those who rejected the burial hypothesis, the highly acidic nature of the soil meant that skeletons would not be preserved except in rare cases.

Warren K. Moorehead, long-time director of the R. S. Peabody Foundation in Andover, Massachusetts, immortalized the Red Paint people in his 1922 book, *A Report on the Archaeology of Maine*.<sup>4</sup> Moorehead excavated a number of graves, and he amassed a great deal of information from sites disturbed in previous years. Although the name Red Paint people was not invented by him, the reputation of Moorehead seems to have ensured its acceptance by subsequent generations of Maine people. The “Red Paint” part may owe its existence to the use of powdered red ocher (hematite) in red paint used in New England. Moorehead was convinced that these burials represented the oldest remains found in the area. He noted that despite diligent search his “force,” as he called his field crews, had not located a single habitation site of the Red Paint people.

Not all archaeologists found the Red Paint terminology useful. In his 1935 book on New England archaeology, Charles Willoughby divided the archaeological record of Maine into two major periods—the Algonquian (or recent Native peoples) and pre-Algonquian.<sup>5</sup> Into the latter group he placed the enigmatic red ocher clusters of Maine and the Maritime Provinces.

Interestingly, both Moorehead and Willoughby explained the red ocher burials with reference to an extinct people, different from the Al-

gonquian speakers of later times. As it turns out, there may be something to this notion, but in a way neither scholar could have anticipated at the time.

Walter B. Smith, a resident of Brewer, Maine, was a professional geologist, an active artifact collector, and an acquaintance of Moorehead. In 1929 Smith published his account of the Red Paint people. As a geologist, Smith recognized that the coast of Maine was subsiding. He suggested that sea level-rise had drowned the habitation sites, which explained why Moorehead and other workers could not locate them. But how to explain the presence of burials in the absence of camp sites? Smith suggested that the people, seeing their sites inundated, moved their sacred burials to higher, presumably safer, ground. He attributed the final disappearance of the Red Paint people to a tidal wave propagated by an earthquake.<sup>6</sup> That older sites have been drowned by sea level-rise is recognized by modern archaeologists; however, the tidal wave hypothesis lacks credibility.<sup>7</sup>

In 1948, avocational archaeologist Benjamin Smith performed a highly useful service by pulling together known collections into a single publication that illustrated and tabulated artifacts referenced to specific sites.<sup>8</sup> In his introduction he recognized the problem with the name "Red Paint people," suggested it should be abandoned, but professed not to have a good alternative. He simply referred to the sites as the "Maine Cemetery Complex."

As archaeology matured in North America, the assignment of artifacts and sites to ethnic groupings, or named people, gave way to a very different type of taxonomy, one which emphasized relationships between specimens. William A. Ritchie, the highly influential archaeologist for New York State until his retirement in 1971, organized the prehistory of the Northeast into three major stages, Paleo-Indian, Archaic (Early, Middle, and Late), and Woodland (Early, Middle, and Late). A fourth, the Terminal Archaic, was added later. Significantly, each stage was identified primarily by the kinds of artifacts found and was not ascribed to a particular people or ethnic grouping. In his terminology, the red ocher "boneless cemeteries of Maine" fell under the Late Archaic stage because of the absence of pottery and the presence of many ground stone tools. Ritchie recognized that many of the artifacts associated with the burials paralleled those from New York in sites he labeled the Laurentian Tradition.<sup>9</sup>

The advent of radiocarbon dating in the 1950s dramatically changed prehistoric archaeology. For the first time, sites in Maine could be collated in time with sites in New York and far beyond. And while the precision left much to be desired, the general conclusion that the Maine red

other cemeteries dated to at least 2000 B.C. vindicated Moorehead's assertion that the burials were indeed old.

Given the long history of interest in red ocher burials it is probably no accident that four young archaeologists developing careers in the Maine-Atlantic Provinces region homed in on the topic. In Newfoundland, James Tuck, newly appointed to Memorial University, learned of a cemetery at Port au Choix in the western portion of the province. This exciting find combined the now familiar objects with amazingly good preservation of human remains and bone artifacts.<sup>10</sup> Also in the late 1960s, Dean Snow, recently appointed to the University of Maine (Orono) re-opened the Hathaway site at Passadumkeag, Maine. This site, explored by Moorehead and later by Hadlock and Stern, continued to yield burial assemblages and some new radiocarbon dates.<sup>11</sup> A few years later, Bruce Bourque, now with the Maine State Museum, re-examined new amateur finds at Eddington Bend and the Bradley Cemetery site on the Penobscot River.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in 1970, while employed by the Canadian National Museum, I directed the excavation of a large ceme-

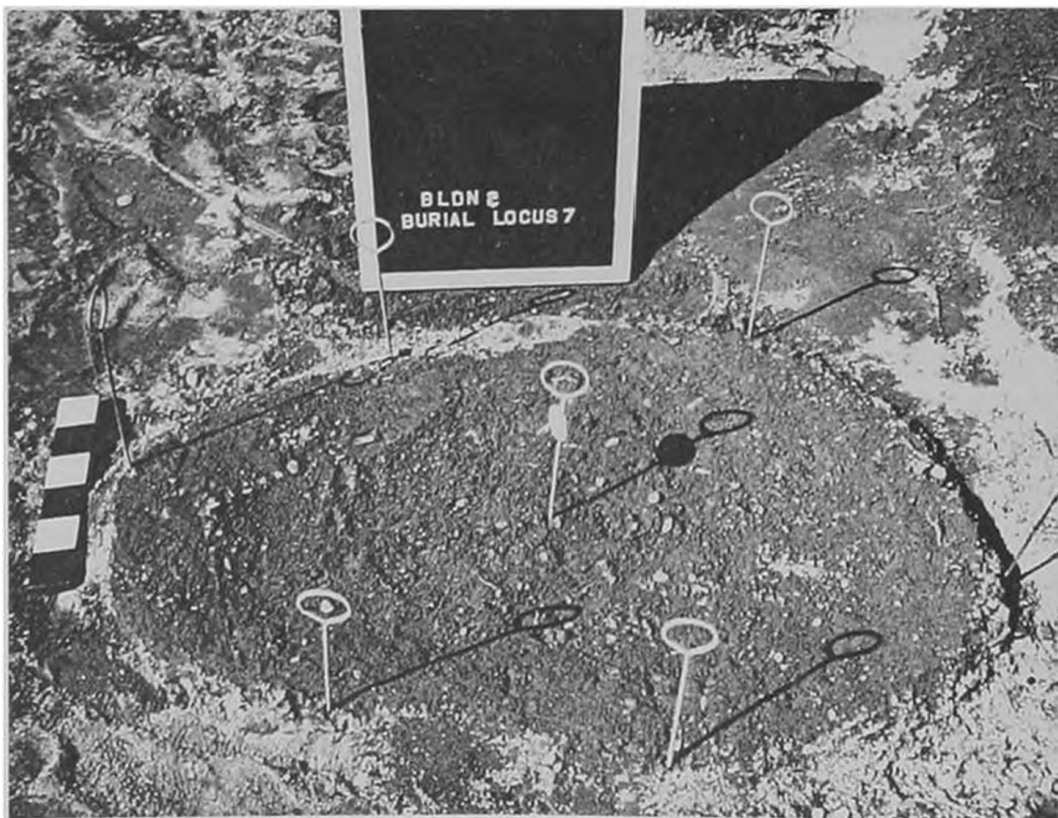


Plate 2. A typical basin-shaped red ocher burial pit at Cow Point. The surveying pins mark the edges of the dark red stain. Pits of this size imply a flexed (fetal position) interment or a secondary burial composed of a bundle of bones. Scale is 30 cm or about 1 foot.

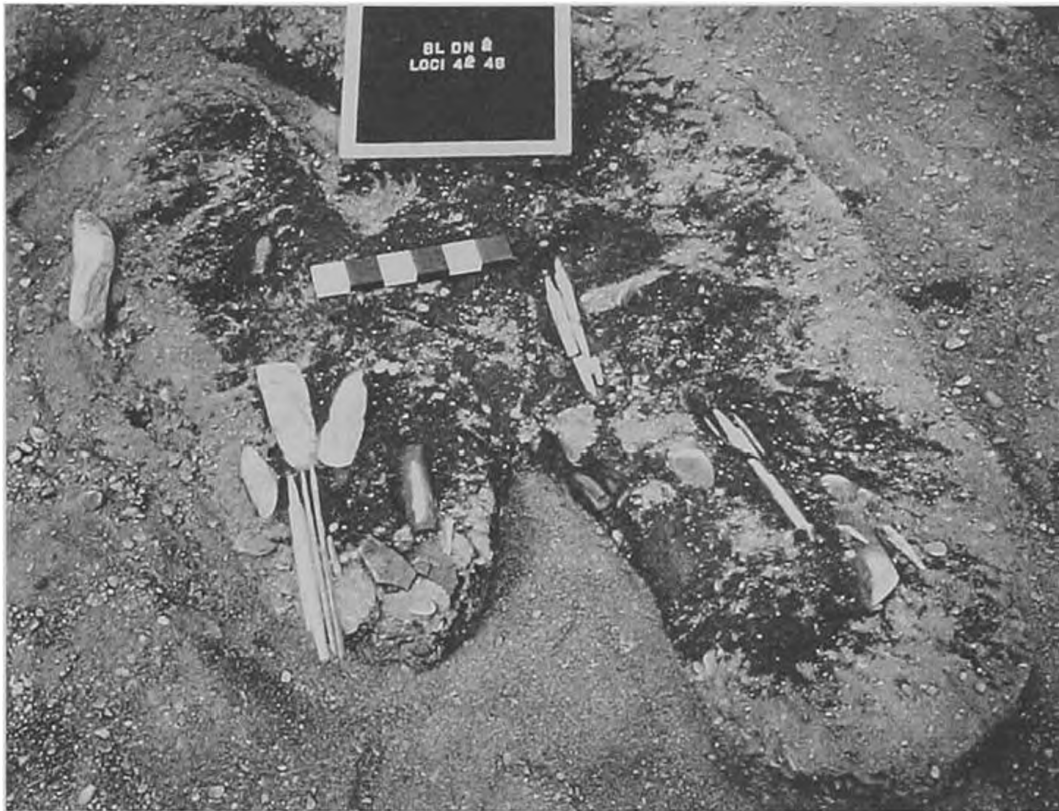


Plate 3. Two red ocher stains at the Cow Point site. These two separate interments have similar artifacts associated. The long slender pieces are ground slate points, or bayonets. Others represent celts (wood working tools) and abrasive (grinding) stones.

tery at Cow Point, near Fredericton, New Brunswick.<sup>13</sup> Each archaeologist developed his own conclusions and lively debate ensued.

The various viewpoints were aired at a three-day working session sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and subsequently published as a collection of essays that summed up the state of knowledge in 1974.<sup>14</sup> The intense focus on the Late Archaic of the “far Northeast,” as it became known, provided opportunities for the attendees to state their positions and comment on competing models. By this time it was clear that the early emphasis on the burials and their fancy artifacts had begged the issue of habitations and all other aspects of the culture. And so began an earnest search for habitation sites.

Bourque initiated excavation at the important Turner Farm shell midden site on North Haven Island, Penobscot Bay, where he uncovered what appeared to represent habitation counterparts of the red ocher burials.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Robert MacKay, then with the University of Maine, had tested the *Hirundo* habitation site on Pushaw Stream, near Old Town. Upon my arrival in Orono in 1971, I led a multi-year interdis-

ciplinary investigation at the Hirundo site and its environs in expectation of linking the cemeteries with more secular aspects of life, including the contemporary physical environments.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these efforts, the data remained too few to resolve the fundamental question: How should we characterize the overall culture represented by the burials? On one point we could all agree. The term “Red Paint people” should be erased from our vocabulary as it did nothing but confuse the issue.

Tuck’s work at Port au Choix demonstrated that the artifacts accompanying the burials differed significantly from those found in New York generally assigned to the Laurentian Tradition. Based on a number of similarities with artifacts from the Nevin site, a Maine coastal shell midden and cemetery in Blue Hill, Tuck proposed a single culture, the Maritime Archaic Tradition, stretching from Newfoundland-Labrador to mid-coastal Maine.<sup>17</sup>

Taking an alternate tack, I suggested that to base an entire culture on burials ran the risk of ignoring possible differences in other aspects of life, as one might anticipate when comparing Newfoundland-Labrador with Maine. I advanced the term “Moorehead burial tradition” to refer just to the red ocher burials and pointed out that habitation sites in each area should be examined before casting a single net over the whole region.<sup>18</sup> At the time insufficient evidence was available to decide the issue. It should be noted, however, that professional archaeologists in Maine rarely use the term Maritime Archaic Tradition to refer to Maine sites, while those working in the Maritime Provinces, where the evidence is the most sketchy, seem to prefer it.

Another approach, broadly similar in philosophy to the Maritime Archaic concept, but more localized in scope, is the Moorehead phase, a term preferred by Bourque which refers to all aspects of life as defined most recently through his seminal work at the Turner Farm site.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Moorehead Burial Tradition*

A significant advance in our knowledge came with the discovery by Brian Robinson of a collection in the Haffenreffer Museum, Bristol, Rhode Island.<sup>20</sup> This collection derived from a destroyed burial site located at the mouth of Sunkhaze Stream, which enters the Penobscot River in Milford. That these specimens related to the Red Paint issue was obvious. Yet, they displayed some clear differences from the usual cemetery artifact assemblages, especially some long, cylindrical stone tools, known to archaeologists as “rods.” Lacking associated charcoal it was not possible to date the finds, but because of the rods Robinson felt the site



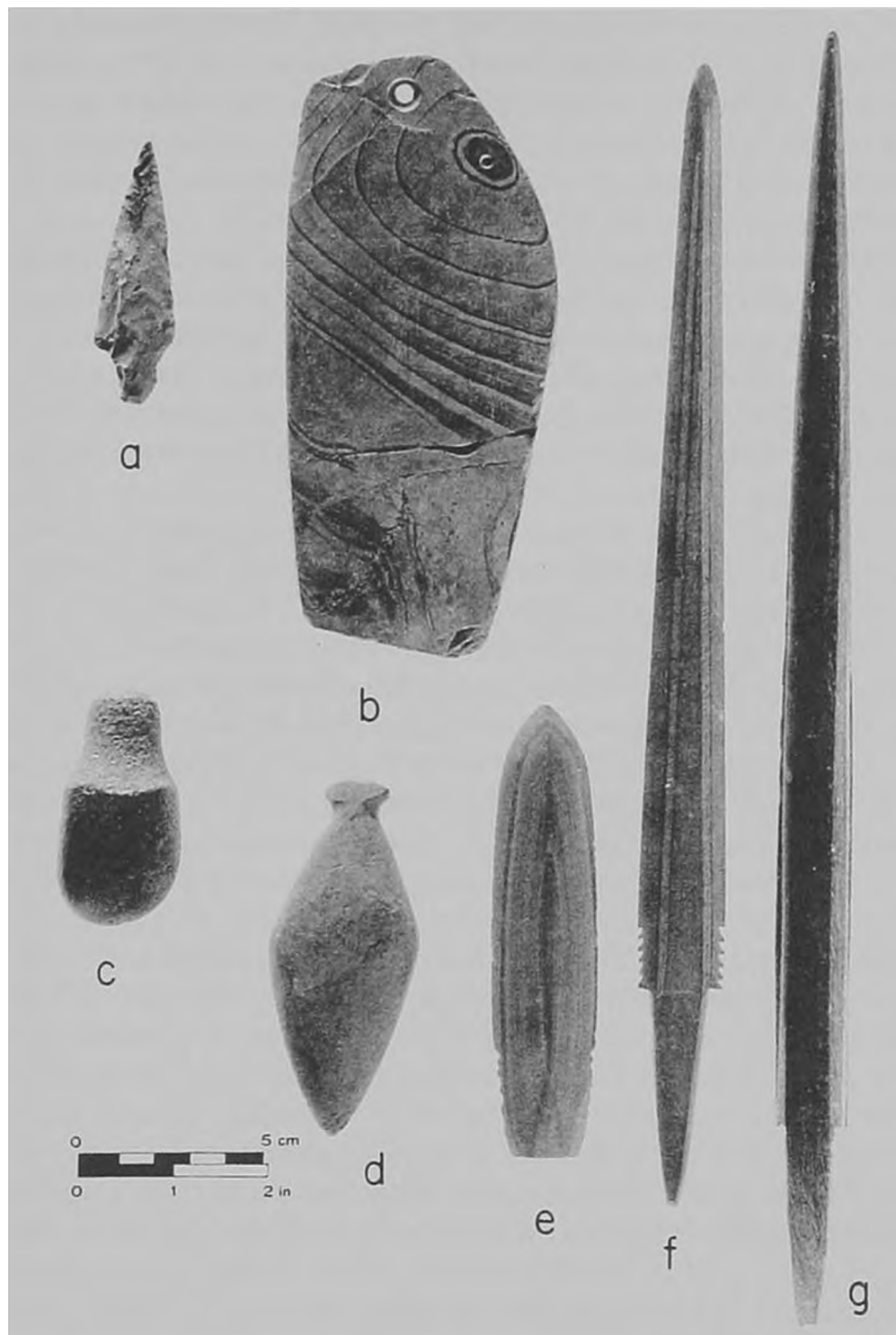


Plate 4. Moorehead burial tradition artifacts from the Cow Point site: a) chipped stone spear head b) perforated pendant c, d) plummets e) ground slate point (non stemmed variety) f, g) ground slate points or bayonets of the stemmed variety.

must be older than the previously known Maine cemeteries and probably closer in age to the Morrill Point cemetery, Ipswich, Massachusetts, radiocarbon dated to about 5500 B.C. Once alerted, Robinson sought, and found, other sites with Sunkhaze site characteristics that had been dug in the past. Whereas our 1970s data indicated a time range of perhaps 3000 B.C. to 1800 B.C. for the red ocher cemeteries, the new information pushed the tradition back to at least 6000 B.C.

What are the characteristics of the Moorehead burial tradition that convey its distinctiveness? Red ocher as a grave inclusion has a long history. It has been found with human burials from Europe to Asia, some dating to tens of thousands of years before humans are known to have colonized the New World. By itself, placement of red ocher with the deceased is not sufficiently unique to define a culture, or even a common burial practice.

As I define the Moorehead burial tradition, it includes the development of cemeteries usually separated from habitation sites, a preference for sandy land forms, usually overlooking water, the inclusion of substantial amounts of red ocher and, perhaps most importantly, the tendency to include as grave offerings a highly selective suite of artifacts.<sup>21</sup>

Widespread among Native Americans is the belief that after death the human soul departs the body. Consistent with this belief is the idea that tools and prized possessions must accompany the spirit in its new surroundings. Thus, it is not unusual to find the owner's artifacts placed with the deceased in the grave. However, this does not seem to have been the philosophy with the Moorehead burial tradition.

Participants in the Moorehead burial tradition interred in the graves a number of well-crafted, ground and highly-polished tools, few of which ever appear in habitation sites. This confused early archaeologists who assumed the specimens they found could not be related to the camp sites that yielded more utilitarian, often heavily-used artifacts. The notion that two very different cultures (therefore people) were represented led to the Red Paint and pre-Algonquian racial ideas. Combined with a misguided belief that the more finely-fashioned specimens represented a more highly developed culture, it contributed to the erroneous idea that the Red Paint people were "more advanced" than the Native peoples that inhabited Maine when the Europeans first arrived. Such patent nonsense has laid the foundation for racist viewpoints to the effect that modern Native peoples in Maine could not have made these elegant tools.

At the Cow Point burial site in New Brunswick, a large, nearly intact but eroding cemetery on the Thoroughfare between Grand and

Maquapit lakes, we found over 120 ground stone celts, or adze blades, only a few of which exhibited any signs of use at the bit end.<sup>22</sup> Also included were literally handfuls of elegant, symmetrical slate points, or bayonets, so-called because of their long (up to 40 cm), narrow dimensions. Just the weight of sand over the graves resulted in numerous fractures, so delicate are these specimens. Clearly, they are unsuited to offensive tasks. Many of the bayonets display intricate geometric incisions, carved into the rock with skill matching that of a gunsmith's checkering on a prize stock. Significantly, all of the bayonets except one have incisions on one face only, always the face grave-side viewers would see as the grave was covered. That these were highly specialized grave goods cannot be doubted. But what did they signify to the society that made them? We can never be sure, of course, but it seems possible they functioned to make a final connection between the deceased and surviving family members or more extended social unit.

Through time the nature of the grave goods changed. From 6000 B.C. until 1800 B.C. the emphasis was clearly on ground stone tools, many never used for daily tasks. This trait of including a select group of artifacts, combined with the red ocher, constitutes the most compelling argument for nearly six millennia of cultural continuity in mortuary practice. This does not mean, I would argue, that we can proceed from there to claiming a single people or ethnic group for that long period of time. To reiterate, the Moorehead burial tradition applies to a burial and ceremonial practice, not a whole way of life, and most certainly not a single ethnic grouping.

The last two decades in Maine archaeology have added to the secular side of the equation. Thanks in large part to research mandated by federal and state laws related to cultural resources management, archaeologists have found clear evidence for occupation in Maine almost without break from 11,000 years ago to the period of European contact.<sup>23</sup> Still, links between the red ocher cemeteries and the habitation sites remain tenuous, in part due to the highly specialized items found in the cemeteries, combined with the tendency to separate camp sites from burial grounds.

University of Maine excavations at the Gilman Falls site, a multi-component habitation and quarry site in Old Town, forged a stronger link.<sup>24</sup> Gilman Falls, at the confluence of Pushaw Stream and Stillwater River, owes its existence to exposed bedrock which creates the falls or rapids. As long ago as 5500 B.C., Native peoples found the metamorphic bedrock ideally suited to the manufacture of the enigmatic rods, similar to those described by Robinson from the cemetery at the mouth of

Sunkhaze Stream.<sup>25</sup> Our excavation located rods in all stages of manufacture, from crude “rough-outs” to broken, nearly-complete pieces, to an occasional finished specimen. The overall similarities of the latter to the Sunkhaze Stream finds, less than six miles by canoe, are striking.

### *Conclusions*

To recapitulate, what has been known as the “Red Paint people” since the early decades of the 20th century is not a distinct race at all. The distinctive cemeteries and their finely-fashioned artifacts represent burial grounds and associated practices of Indian people who lived in Maine between at least 6000 B.C. and 1800 B.C. There is no great mystery, no justification to invoke a seafaring culture with Old World connections, or thinly-veiled racist suggestions of superiority relative to more modern Native peoples.<sup>26</sup> They simply practiced a burial tradition connected with a set of spiritual beliefs unknown to us. Evidently those beliefs underwent a dramatic change about 1800 B.C. when red ocher all but disappeared from Maine graves, many of the distinctive artifacts dropped out of the archaeological record, and cremation replaced inhumation.

Nearly 100 years after the Red Paint people were christened by archaeologists we still do not have a satisfactory alternative with which all archaeologists will agree. Part of the problem is the long duration of the red ocher practice and the changes that occurred in that period. Another piece of the problem relates to how archaeologists interpret ostensibly identical evidence. Can one extrapolate from cemeteries to a whole lifestyle, or is it possible that otherwise dissimilar people can share aspects of culture, such as mortuary practices? I would, of course, argue in the affirmative. At this point it seems to me that while we can use Moorehead burial tradition to refer to the burials, no one term is appropriate to describe the non-mortuary behaviors over the four millennia represented. As frustrating as the situation might be for archaeologists, most of us recognize that for the nonspecialist it is all very confusing. As usual, more data and syntheses are required.

Help, or at least new data, may be forthcoming. A newly discovered habitation site, located near the Port au Choix cemetery and currently undergoing excavation, has the potential to add much to our knowledge of daily life for that part of Newfoundland.

The abrupt changes in way of life, including cremation burials, at about 1800 B.C. usher in the Susquehanna Tradition, thought by most archaeologists to represent an influx of people from southern New England by a process not yet understood.<sup>27</sup> In the past, every culture change evoked a population migration, with the result that archaeologists grew

increasingly skeptical of any purported movement of people. Stringent criteria developed in response.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the Susquehanna Tradition, the evidence continues to uphold the migration hypothesis, although the precise events that triggered the movement remain elusive. Anthropologists have much to learn about migrations of hunters and gatherers into another group's territory.

## Seasonal Migration Myth

### *Background*

One of the most valuable sources of information for any field archaeologist is the willingness of local people to share their knowledge and insights. Many highly significant sites in Maine have been "discovered" by avocational archaeologists who then shared their information with professionals. When in the field, what I am usually seeking are data on site locations, who has a collection of artifacts, and who are the local historians. It is tremendously helpful when these people are willing to share their information. Sometimes, however, generally accepted wisdom is erroneous. Next to the "Red Paint People," I think the most common myth is that of seasonal migrations from coast to interior.

Over a career spanning nearly three decades in Maine, I have heard over and again the story of how the Native peoples lived on the coast in the summer and moved into the interior during the winter. The story seems to have two sources, both inherently credible, but neither beyond question when examined closely.

First, it is clear from earliest European accounts that Native people were on the coast during the summer. This is not surprising given the European sailing schedule of crossing the Atlantic Ocean during the calmer summer months.<sup>29</sup> Inland exploration remained cursory.

Second, the primary literary source for Maine's Native populations, Frank Speck's book, *Penobscot Man*, describes departure from Indian Island for the coast in the spring, followed by a return in the fall to engage in inland hunting and trapping.<sup>30</sup> Herein, I refer to this as the "traditional model of seasonal occupation" for Maine's Native peoples in the pre-European era.

### *Archaeological Evidence*

Archaeological research in the last two decades has led to a re-examination of the traditional seasonal migration idea. During the late 1960s, research in Penobscot Bay by Bourque and Ritchie, and simultaneously

by me in Passamaquoddy Bay detected unmistakable signs of winter occupation on the coast.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, I even went so far as to suggest that year-round coastal occupation might be represented.<sup>32</sup> The evidence for winter habitation sites consisted of the presence of birds, such as ducks like oldsquaw, that today only winter on our coast. Large numbers of tom cod bones, a species that spawns in fresh water in the dead of winter, was also a good indicator. Indeed, in the suite of sites explored, the surprise was the absence of any strong summer indicators. In an attempt to explain this apparent anomalous situation in Penobscot Bay, Bourque thought the commonly-held, summer coastal pattern represented a reversal of an older one in which Native people spent their winters on the coast and summers inland.<sup>33</sup> European presence on the coast during the summers apparently acted as a magnet for the Native peoples, while the Contact period fur trade encouraged the use of the interior for trapping fur-bearers. This model explained why the Penobscot Bay sites contained winter-only species and why he could not demonstrate coastal summer sites.

In order to pursue seasonality estimates in the archaeological record a limited number of species are useful. The presence or absence of white-tail deer means little because they live year-round in a restricted territory. However, some resident species undergo changes, either seasonally or through maturation and, once understood, these can be very useful. For example, wildlife managers routinely extract teeth from dead deer to estimate age based on the knowledge that an annual cementum layer is deposited. If one knows the rate of growth throughout the year, it is possible to estimate the time of year the animal died. Arthur Spiess has utilized this procedure to estimate kill dates in a number of Maine sites.<sup>34</sup> Another useful indicator is the fact that male deer drop their antlers in the winter. The finding of skull bones in which the antlers have been shed indicates a winter kill. On the other hand, antlers hacked from a deer taken in the summer will leave tell-tale cut marks on the skull bones. These indicators led to recognition of near year-round occupation at the Turner Farm site, ca. 2500 B.C., on North Haven Island, Penobscot Bay.<sup>35</sup>

Deer, although common in coastal sites, are rare when compared with the ubiquitous shells from many thousands of clams and other mollusks gathered and discarded at shell middens. The large numbers lead to increased confidence in our statements regarding season of occupation. Each mollusk undergoes a period of summer shell growth when food is readily available. It ceases to grow in the cold water months when food becomes scarce and it then deposits an annulus or check ring. Like the annual growth rings on a tree stump or deer teeth, we can observe

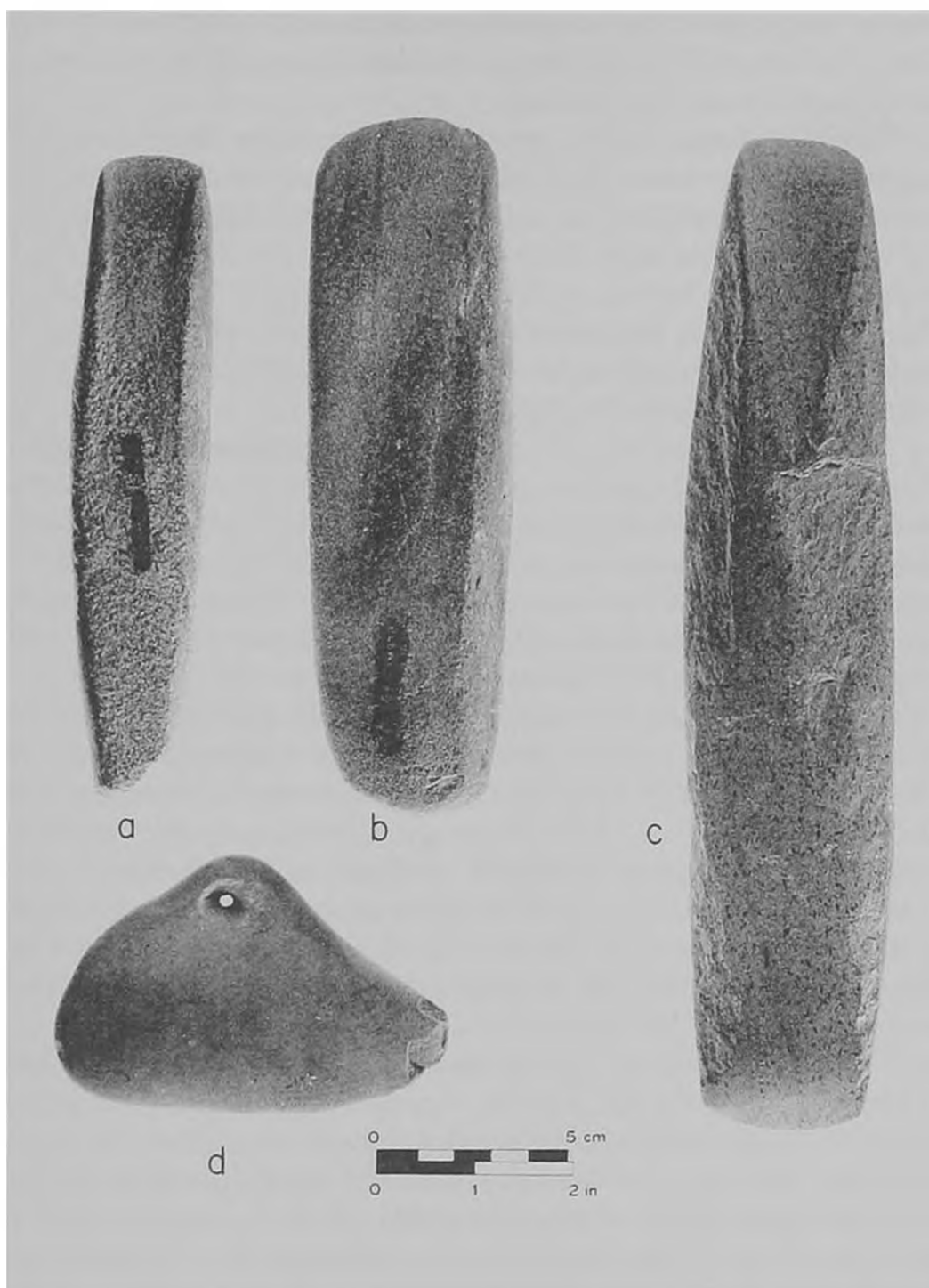


Plate 5. Ground stone artifacts from the Cow Point site a) gouge b) celt or adze blade c) unusual celt-gouge combination d) perforated abrasive (grinding) stone.

the alternating light and dark rings in magnified cross sections of shells.<sup>36</sup> When all of these seasonality indicators are combined, the evidence becomes more and more convincing that people spent much, if not most of the year, on the coast.

Estimates of season of occupation became a major focus of research on the Maine coast once we realized that the traditional model needed review. In 1982 I published an article which cautioned against an uncritical acceptance of the early historical records as explanation for archaeological evidence.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, on the question of seasons of occupation in the pre-Contact era, I suggested that the issue could only be resolved by archaeological means given the abrupt and catastrophic changes that occurred with the arrival of Europeans.

Accordingly, when the University of Maine initiated the Boothbay Harbor archaeological project in 1979, I built into the research design a detailed examination of season of occupation. We recovered live soft-shell clams from local mud flats each month and sectioned them to study the amount of growth. From this, and research conducted by shellfish specialist Carter Newell, a pattern developed that allowed us to characterize groups of shells as winter or summer death assemblages.<sup>38</sup> We now have records from well over 1,000 soft shell clams recovered from shell middens ranging from Passamaquoddy Bay to Casco Bay.<sup>39</sup> In those areas where we have conducted detailed survey and testing, we can demonstrate both summer and winter occupation on the coast based on shells and other indicators. Generally speaking, in those sites better protected from north winds, and situated to exploit terrestrial resources, we find a predominance of winter sites or sites occupied off and on throughout all seasons. More exposed sites on offshore islands tend to represent summer habitations.<sup>40</sup>

The above pattern does not necessarily mean year-round occupation at any one site. Given the number of coastal sites that would imply an unreasonably high population which would quickly exhaust the available resources. Rather, I believe people moved on a fairly regular basis, in response to availability of food and shelter, but in the littoral zone. For example, analysis of shellfish and other indicators from the Knox site, near Isle au Haut, indicated only sporadic summer residence starting around 700 B.C., ending by A.D. 1000.<sup>41</sup> Nearby, in the Isle au Haut Thorofare, then a protected embayment open only to the west, we found evidence for winter occupation. We do not know if they were the same people, despite an approximately equivalent time period.

To recapitulate, evidence now supports the hypothesis that in pre-European times Native people lived year-round in the coastal zone, mov-



ing from site to site in response to resource availability and the need for shelter in the cold seasons. This reconstruction is very different from the traditional model derived from documents produced by the first European visitors to the coast of Maine, and echoed in *Penobscot Man*. If this reconstruction is accurate, it would leave very little time for the Native peoples to create sites in the interior. Therefore, we then have to face the question of who left all the archaeological sites in the interior of Maine.

### *Interior Maine Occupation*

Archaeological surveys have demonstrated the presence of a great many sites arranged along Maine's rivers and lakes. If we are correct about year-round occupation on the coast, who created these interior sites? Clearly, they could not have been the same people if the year-round occupation of the coast was the prevalent pattern. Artifact analysis also supports this two population idea, as explained below. Unfortunately, seasonal indicators for the interior are much diminished in the archaeological record, such that the currently available evidence cannot either support or deny what I call "the two population model."

Unlike the coast, where we have so many biological seasonal indicators, our interior sites are impoverished. There, because of the acid soils, remains of animals consist of highly fragmented pieces, nearly always heavily burned or calcined, a process which alters the chemistry and effects better preservation. The bone collections are dominated by small fragments of muskrat and beaver in addition to occasional deer-sized remains. In rare instances, such as rapid deposition by flood-borne sand, a few fish bones and even edible plant remains survive.<sup>42</sup> All indicators found to date support warm season occupation in the interior extending back to over 4000 B.C. These include anadromous fish such as shad, mature eel bones, and immature turtle remains.<sup>43</sup> Winter indicators have not been reported.

I do not believe, however, that we can, or should, eliminate the possibility of winter habitation. The vast majority of sites that have produced any faunal remains are riverine habitation sites which, while ideal for summer exploitation of fish, would make very poor winter campsites because of their exposed nature. Smaller sites, tucked away in sheltered locations, seem much more plausible winter locales. Unfortunately, these are unlikely to preserve animal remains because the preservation environment is not as good as the deeply-buried river bank sites, where repeated flooding and deposition of river sand and silt results in partial survival of food bones. In short, the chances are good that we simply have not identified an interior winter habitation site with good enough

faunal preservation to evaluate seasonality. It constitutes yet another major challenge for Maine archaeologists.

Alternative explanations or scenarios should be explored whenever possible. It is always possible that Native people spent most of their lives on the coast, coming inland only for brief visits during the summer, mostly for fishing. But that strains credulity given the number of interior sites located well into the interior (such as the Allagash) the extensive size of some, and the growing evidence for subtle artifactual differences between coastal and interior collections. Most reasonable, I think, is to give up on the coast to interior seasonal migration or transhumance model as archaeologists call it and focus instead on testing the two populations paradigm. It is important to emphasize that by “two populations” I am not claiming two ethnic groups, the equivalence of tribes. That requires even more evidence and may never be solved by purely archaeological techniques.

### What Tribe Lived Here?

A question frequently asked of archaeologists is, “What tribe lived here?” For the pre-European period no archaeologist can answer that accurately on the basis of the site record alone. That Native Americans lived in Maine cannot be denied, but to state the ethnic identification in unequivocal terms is anthropologically unsound. Although one suspects it is often done rather than avoid the following rather pedantic and lengthy explanation.

Ethnicity is a complicated issue because it involves the question, “Whose ethnicity?” There is a huge difference between what people call themselves and how outsiders refer to them. Coincidentally a person may recognize self, family, lineage, community, tribe, and nationality, among other affiliations. To phrase the question simply as tribal affiliation makes sense only in the most restrictive instances, such as dealings with institutions like state or federal agencies. As Bourque demonstrates in his article on early Contact period ethnicity in the Maritime Peninsula, this is a complicated issue when approached from documents and open to multiple interpretations.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than focus on group names found in the often ambiguous early historical records, my approach, when dealing with the pre-European period, has been to identify regions with similar modes of adaptation and use of space.<sup>45</sup> In other words, I anticipate that interior-based people had a different way of making a living than those living on

the coast, by virtue of a different mix of food species and access to those resources. Yet that does not make them different in all respects. They may have shared many social customs, spoken dialects of the same language, and practiced common religion. Additionally, they may have intermarried and participated in social events that included widely-dispersed people, just as Native people do in the area today. Yet their sense of land-based identity, what constituted “home” in a broad sense, may have been Casco Bay, the Old Town area, or Moosehead Lake: regions in which they habitually made their livelihood.

However, we recognize that physical separation of people can lead to a certain amount of culturally distinctive behavior, such as dialects and even language differences to a point of unintelligibility when the period of separation is long enough. Archaeologists cannot hear the old languages, but we can document tools and their variability over time. As mentioned previously, a review of artifacts we consider to have potential to reflect the maker’s traditions, such as pottery and flaked projectile points (arrow and spear heads), supports a long-standing separation of interior and coastal peoples. I suspect this goes back to our earliest coastal records, perhaps 3000 B.C.<sup>46</sup> Finer distinctions also occur. For example, archaeologists have recognized that starting around 6000 B.C. the Kennebec River has formed a cultural boundary. East of the Kennebec, and including the Maritime Provinces, we see many similarities in the cultural province of the Maritime Peninsula.<sup>47</sup> The reasons for this remain speculative; however, it is clear that west of the divide the archaeological cultures remind us more of southern New England. “Two Maines” has a long history!

Along the coastal zone, where our data for the last major period of prehistory, the Ceramic period (1000 B.C. to A.D. 1600), are becoming quite refined, we recognize differences between the assemblages of artifacts from Passamaquoddy Bay and Penobscot Bay. What these mean is problematic. Options might include: environmental differences; historical relationships; and even deliberate attempts to signal individuality through manipulation of style in artifact manufacture or embellishment. Although artifact style undoubtedly says something about the maker and his or her traditions, it is a leap of faith from there to ethnic assignment at the level of a named tribe with respect to the archaeological record.

It is convenient to have the tags we assign to people; otherwise, communication is greatly hampered. Anthropologists and historians have imposed their terminology on the Native people. Only recently have these groups elected to refer to themselves by terms of their choosing.

The point is when asked, "What tribe lived here in pre-European times?" we ought to admit we cannot say. In my opinion, the bits and pieces left behind in archaeological sites cannot support a conclusion as complicated as ethnic identity. When queried, "Did people of the Penobscot tribe live in the Penobscot Valley?" my answer invariably is a cautious, "Some members of the modern Penobscot Nation undoubtedly had ancestors who lived in the valley in pre-European times." Anything more definitive lies, in my opinion, beyond the realm of what an archaeologist can determine.

### *Source Critique*

There would appear to be several intertwined threads that need to be teased apart. First, comparison of historical documentary sources with evidence from the archaeological record has produced two different models of how aboriginal people adapted to Maine. These are not irreconcilable. Frank Speck's classic ethnographic monograph *Penobscot Man*, originally published in 1940, has been reissued recently by the University of Maine Press, a reflection of the study's value and demand by modern readers.<sup>48</sup> For the 1997 printing I was asked to comment on the book in light of current scholarship.<sup>49</sup> To critique it effectively would mean a lengthy article that neither I nor the press was prepared to produce. Yet there is one overriding problem with *Penobscot Man* that is a product of its time: namely, an attempt to derive what is sometimes referred to as the "ethnographic baseline," a period in which Native cultures were not yet impacted by Europeans. Modern anthropologists recognize the fallacy of this methodology and we have to admit to this failing in Speck's voluminous works on northeastern Native peoples.

Speck conducted his research with Native informants on Indian Island during the first two decades of the 20th century. His informants remembered life as it was in the latter half of the previous century combined with traditions that had been passed down from one generation to another. In 1936, nearly two decades after his initial research, Speck revisited Indian Island and found things much changed. He realized, and stated clearly in the Postscript, that he had *not* reconstructed a pre-European past, but rather, "a record of the historic era of transition to European forms, under predominating influences of the French first, then the English." He goes on to state that, "the people we designate as Penobscot are in reality an ethnic composite, the tribe itself a political unit, its culture a blending. . . ."<sup>50</sup>

Viewed against Speck's own assessment of the changes that occurred over time, it should come as no surprise that the archaeological record of

the pre-European era reflects a very different lifestyle from that recalled by Speck's informants in the 20th century. This observation does not invalidate Speck's research; we simply have to remember that his information pertained to a period nearly 300 years after initial impact by Europeans.

It should be re-emphasized that the physical remains uncovered by archaeologists are not those aspects of culture most likely to be passed on from one generation to another. I refer, of course, to the traditions, the folklore, and world view conveyed from tribal elders to children. It is these that permit people to self-identify as Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, etc. Archaeologists are left with fragments that have to be interpreted in order to yield up their secrets. We see the physical remains of decisions made by people, not the actual traditions behind the decisions themselves. This seemingly simple distinction is easy to gloss over. Speck's informants undoubtedly reflected attitudes and knowledge inherited from many past generations. Just because they gave up stone arrow heads for firearms, or incorporated European language and aspects of Christianity into their religious beliefs, does not mean that they lost all their traditions. As we attempt to construct a picture of what life in pre-European Maine entailed, we have to bear in mind the limitations of all the potential sources of information and weigh one against the other, ideally without disciplinary prejudice.

## Conclusions

It is not unusual for ideas and concepts derived from one discipline to become accepted in others, and then assume an authority that may be unjustified. In this paper I have identified several: the widespread acceptance of the Red Paint people which has so captured the public's imagination; the uncritical integration of the seasonal migration model into the thinking of regional scholars, including archaeologists; and the problem of ethnicity in the past.

In the case of the first, fascination with red ocher in burials and the elegant grave goods established an imaginary, even non-Indian population, at a time when archeological systematics were in their infancy. The made-for-television movie "Secrets of the Lost Red Paint People" which appeared on NOVA only reinforced this mis-perception. We now recognize that with better control over chronology, de-emphasis on the red ocher aspect, different ways of looking at artifacts, and new data from habitation sites, archaeologists can construct a series of burial behaviors

linked by the use of red ocher, and the inclusion of artifacts in graves that had special symbolic meaning once they entered the realm of mortuary practices.

Western European society is a literate society that leans heavily on the written record for confirmation and authority. Native American societies, traditionally non-literate, still depend on oral transmission. Archaeologists rely on artifacts, food remains, site locations, and other indicators of human behavior, which may or may not agree with the literary or oral evidence. That alone does not make any one explanation more believable than another. However, it tends to sway us into accepting that one "way of knowing" is somehow better, more believable, and therefore more accurate. One can, of course, assert that the past can never be knowable, a position this anthropologist is not about to espouse. It does seem, however, that the past practice of compartmentalizing knowledge based on traditional disciplinary lines runs the risk of ignoring potentially highly relevant data. Although better communication between practitioners and advocates of each "way of knowing" may not result in a simple compromise upon which all can agree, I hope the time will come when the Red Paint People are expunged from Maine folklore and we will think differently about how Native people integrate themselves physically, emotionally, and socially onto the Maine landscape.

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