

Summary

Phase II and III archaeological investigations were conducted at Site 7NC-E-152 as part of the project for roadway improvements at the intersection of Airport and Churchman's Roads. Site 7NC-E-152 is situated on a gently sloping terrace overlooking the Christina River and near the headwaters of a small tributary stream. It clearly represents an attractive location, since the site was occupied from as early as 6500 B.C. to as late as the early twentieth century. The river and adjacent wetlands, along with nearby Churchman's Marsh, provided fish and plant foods that grow in wet environments, such as wild rice and the thick, edible roots (tubers) of cattails. Cobbles found in the stream channel and erosion gullies were suitable for making stone tools.

Field investigations were undertaken to recover significant archaeological information from the portion of Site 7NC-E-152 to be affected during roadway construction. The work involved the hand excavation of an area covering 129 square meters (423.2 square feet). The testing focused on five high-artifact-density clusters, but areas of the site outside these clusters were also sampled. In all, the investigations produced 6,170 artifacts, including stone tools, waste material from tool manufacturing, and pottery sherds. Three pit features were also found, consisting of a fire-related feature interpreted as an earth oven, a cache of cobble tools, and a pit of indeterminate function.

When the site was first occupied, Churchman's Marsh was a freshwater wetland. Bifurcate base points, the Archaic point type recovered at 7NC-E-152, have been found at a number of sites in the vicinity of the marsh. These early occupants were likely highly mobile, living in small family groups and moving their camps frequently to be close to needed resources. The Archaic occupation (or occupations) at the site appear to have been relatively short term, perhaps for only a few weeks, and focused on making stone tools from cobbles found near the site. They also engaged in activities associated with daily life, such as butchering game and grinding nuts or seeds into flour.

During the Woodland I period, which began circa 3000 B.C., this adaptive strategy continued, centered on the resources of Churchman's Marsh, now a tidal marsh. Three different types of site are clearly identifiable around the marsh. Procurement camps are small sites showing a limited range of activities. They represent very brief occupations focused on acquiring specific resources. At other locations, groups settled for periods likely extending across several seasons, in localities near the marsh and waterways. Archaeological sites indicative of this second type of settlement are large, with high artifact densities and many pit features for cooking and storage. In seasons when resources were limited, such as spring, family groups needed to be more mobile and established camps for short periods. Site 7NC-E-152 is an example of this third type of site. Activities focused on lithic procurement and processing plant foods and game. A small deep pit feature, likely an earth oven, was associated with one of the Woodland I occupations.

The Woodland II period occupations were in some ways different from the earlier periods, although the focus of activities on lithic procurement and food processing continued. The Woodland II occupants of Site 7NC-E-152 may have had a preference for higher-quality lithic

material and traveled as often as necessary to find it. However, the admixture of artifacts from multiple occupations makes firm conclusions problematic at this site and others in the Churchman's Marsh area. Because of the predominance of Woodland I artifacts at sites such as Clyde Farm and Newport, there is no definitive evidence of large, multi-seasonal camps dating to the Woodland II period. This suggests that Woodland II macroband camps may have been located in areas away from the marsh. The continuity in Woodland I to Woodland II settlement patterns, as proposed by Custer (1989) and others, may still be open to question.

The historic artifact assemblage from Site 7NC-E-152 dates to the early nineteenth century. There are no foundations or other evidence to identify the exact location of the house associated with these artifacts. The residence was likely destroyed during construction of Airport Road, but may have been abandoned long before. The historic artifacts include dishes, glassware, and personal items, such as a small hand mirror. Architectural debris from destruction of the building was also found. It is possible that the building was beneath or on the opposite side of the road, and that the artifacts and demolition debris were disposed of in the wooded area that comprises the site.

Overall, investigations at 7NC-E-152 have provided important information on prehistoric settlement around Churchman's Marsh. Few excavated sites in the Churchman's Marsh area have preserved intrasite patterning that permits temporally specific interpretations of site function. Temporal changes in the use of lithic materials and in lithic-manufacturing techniques were also identified. The site's role in regional settlement patterns was inferred using the recovered information. However, despite the large number of known and excavated sites, much of the information is from areas where artifacts from all periods of prehistory are mixed in the plowzone. Thus, additional information is needed to increase our understanding of the prehistoric settlement of the Churchman's Marsh area.