

4.0 REGIONAL PREHISTORY

Current interpretation of the Native American past in Delaware is based on the organization of material culture into temporal sequences, with general chronologies of site occupation developed from this ordering. The prehistory of the region is conventionally divided into three main periods, which are seen as reflections of widespread technological and social characteristics. Following Griffin's (1967) chronology for eastern North America, these periods are referred to as the Paleo-Indian (ca. 12,000-8000 BC), the Archaic (ca. 8000-1000 BC), and the Woodland (ca. 1000 BC-AD 1600). The latter two periods are typically subdivided into early, middle, and late sub-periods. An alternative chronology has been proposed for the Delmarva Peninsula that was developed with an explicitly ecological perspective, focusing more on evidence for environmental changes and adaptive strategies than on diagnostic artifacts (Custer 1984, 1989). Much of the existing database for Delmarva, as well as various settlement pattern models derived from that data, results in large part from work conducted by Custer and his associates (e.g., Custer 1984; Custer and Bachman 1984; Custer and DeSantis 1985; Custer and Cunningham 1986) and is referenced to this chronology. However, to allow reasonable comparison with data from across the Middle Atlantic and beyond, the conventional eastern North American model is the main organizational framework used the present study. Figure 4-1 summarizes the correspondence between the two chronologies, along with their relationships to the climatic periods discussed earlier.

	CLIMATIC EPISODES	CONVENTIONAL EASTERN CHRONOLOGY	CUSTER'S DELMARVA CHRONOLOGY	HIGH COASTAL PLAIN AND PIEDMON/FALL LINE COMPLEXES
1600	SUB-ATLANTIC	LATE WOODLAND	WOODLAND II	MINGUANNAN
1000		MIDDLE WOODLAND	WOODLAND I	WEBB- DELAWARE PARK
500				CAREY
AD	WOLFE NECK— DELMARVA ADENA			
BC	CLYDE FARM—BARKER'S LANDING			
500	SUB-BOREAL	EARLY WOODLAND	ARCHAIC	
3000		LATE ARCHAIC		
4500		MIDDLE ARCHAIC		
6500	ATLANTIC	EARLY ARCHAIC	PALEO-INDIAN	
8500	BOREAL			
10,500	PRE-BOREAL			
12,000	LATE GLACIAL	PALEO-INDIAN		

Figure 4-1. Comparison of Prehistoric Chronologies with Climatic Episodes.
(adapted from Custer 1984; note that the chronological scale is not proportional)

The discussion that follows summarizes the current understanding of these periods to provide a context for the interpretation of the archaeological remains at the Black Diamond site

(7NC-J-225). While all of the temporal periods are mentioned for context, particular emphasis is paid to the component occurring at the site.

4.1 Early Native American Inhabitants of the Region: Paleo-Indian and Archaic

The generally accepted record of human habitation in the Middle Atlantic begins approximately 14,000 years ago, near the end of the cool and relatively wet Late Wisconsin Glacial period. As previously detailed, the retreat of the glaciers brought a fairly rapid warming trend throughout the Middle Atlantic, a phenomenon directly reflected in the replacement of northern plant and animal species by southern types. Like much of the region, New Castle County and the area surrounding the Black Diamond site was characterized by a relatively complex set of overlapping micro-environmental zones that would have provided a variety of subsistence resources for prehistoric populations. Archaeological sites dating to this era, which is known as the Paleo-Indian period, are comparatively rare, usually identified by the presence of fluted stone projectile points that were often made of high quality, cryptocrystalline lithic material such as chert or jasper. No evidence was found at the Black Diamond site of occupation during the Paleo-Indian period.

The traditional eastern chronology describes a break in cultural patterns around 8000 BC, approximately corresponding with a warming trend that signaled the Boreal climatic episode. The new pattern, referred to as the Archaic, is usually recognized as ranging temporally from ca. 8000 BC to 1000 BC, during a period in which the physical environment became increasingly like that of the present (Joyce 1988). Major sub-periods are recognized within the Archaic, referred to as Early (8000-6500 BC), Middle (6500-3000 BC), and Late Archaic (3000-1000 BC).

The transition from Paleo-Indian to Early Archaic has often been viewed as a cultural continuum rather than a break, at least in terms of evidence for socio-economic activities (Custer 1989, 1990; Gardner 1974). No evidence from the early parts of the Archaic period, either Early or Middle, was found at the Black Diamond site.

4.2 Later Native American Inhabitants of the Region: Later Archaic and Woodland

One of the most important environmental changes affecting prehistoric populations throughout the Middle Atlantic region during the entire Archaic period was the gradual rise in sea level accompanying the retreat of the continental ice sheets. Beginning during the Paleo-Indian period, the so-called Holocene marine transgression led to rising sea levels and widespread lowland flooding of coastal areas. This flooding extended up many Pleistocene river valleys, including those of the Delaware and Susquehanna (Stuiver and Daddario 1963). Among the effects of the inundation were marked rises in local water tables, an increase in shoreline complexity associated with estuary development, and a consequent increase in floral and faunal resources in newly formed marsh or wetland areas (Potter 1982). Large marshes and swamps became important points of focus for settlement-subsistence during the period (Gardner 1978).

The first concrete evidence of Native American presence at the Black Diamond site is associated temporally with the end of the Late Archaic period. Occupation of the site appeared to correspond with a marked increase in site frequency throughout the region that

began during the early portions of the Late Archaic, suggesting overall population increase, settlement of new parts of the landscape, and in some instances population movement or immigration (Dent 1995; Turner 1978). Evidence from some sites in riverine and estuarine areas suggests that occupations were larger and more complex than in previous periods, implying a trend toward sedentism, or more settled occupation, and organized strategies for harvesting resources (Johnson 1986).

The Late Archaic describes a span extending from ca. 2500 BC to 1000 BC. At this time, regional environments were characterized by the prevalence of an oak-hickory forest. The rate of sea level rise slowed, allowing riverine and estuarine environments to form that were stable enough to support significant populations of shellfish and anadromous fish in larger streams. The focus of settlement shifted during the initial part of the period to these riverine and estuarine locales to take advantage of the increasingly predictable fish and shellfish resources (Custer 1978; Gardner 1978). A pattern of warmer and drier climatic conditions, referred to as the mid-postglacial xerothermic, led to the relatively rapid burial of certain Delmarva landscapes through aeolian or windblown deposition. The process has been observed in association with xeric soils throughout the upper and lower coastal plains of the Middle Atlantic (Curry 1980, 1992; Ward and Bachman 1987; Curry and Ebright 1989; Daniel 1993; Heite and Blume 1995).

Chipped stone artifacts characteristic of the Late Archaic period included a wide range of broad-bladed, stemmed, and notched points. Custer (1994) suggests that due to an apparent profusion of point types during the period, chronologies based on typical specimens are problematical and thus unreliable. In this view, point types considered to be useful temporal indicators include Otter Creek; broadspears such as Susquehanna, Perkiomen, Koens-Crispin, and Savannah River; and Fishtails. Other points, ranging from Vosburg and Brewerton, through types such as Normanskill, Lamoka, Bare Island, and Piscataway, have less well-defined contexts and are considered to be more problematical in establishing chronological trends.

Certain tool associations have also been documented for the Late Archaic period throughout the region. Specific broad-bladed point types were characteristically manufactured from particular lithic raw materials: for example, Susquehanna points were often made from rhyolite, and Koens-Crispin points from argillite. In addition, certain broadspears, such as Susquehanna, are often found in association with bowls carved from steatite. Based on artifact associations, it has been suggested that the wide-bladed points were designed in part to exploit new riverine resources present in the Late Archaic (Witthoft 1953; Ritchie 1965).

Around 1000 BC, techniques for pottery manufacture were introduced across the region. This innovation has traditionally defined the beginning of the Woodland period in the Middle Atlantic. Evidence has been documented for an increase in sedentism as the people living in the region displayed growing efficiency in exploiting available resources. Little direct evidence of Woodland occupation was found at the Black Diamond site.

4.3 Ethnohistorical Records

Although there is some archaeological data related to the Contact period in Delaware, much of the information on settlement patterns and territorial boundaries during that time is drawn from ethnohistorical accounts, which are descriptions of Native American groups written by contemporary Europeans. Attempts to connect ethnographic groups with archaeologically derived culture complexes have generally been unsuccessful, an outcome resulting from a combination of the incomplete nature of the archaeological record and the prejudiced and sometimes erroneous accounts of colonial Europeans (Custer 1989).

The earliest general information about Native American groups in the region is from John Smith, from his account of early explorations of the Chesapeake Bay area. Smith reported that the dominant groups of the southern Delmarva were the Accomac and the Occohannocks. Both were allied with the Powhatan of the Virginia mainland for at least the early portion of the seventeenth century (Smith 1986a, 1986b).

The Assateague appear for the first time in Maryland records in 1659 as residents on the Atlantic coast near the head of the Pocomoke River (Browne 1885). They had several villages along the seaboard side of present-day Worcester County, Maryland, between the Pocomoke River and the ocean bays and inlets (Marye 1939a). Some of the Assateague moved east to the Assawoman Inlet area in the later seventeenth century, and then north to Indian River. In the 1680s, they become known as the Indian River Indians (Browne 1904, 1908; Marye 1939b). Land sales and other records can trace the presence of Indian River Indians in the southern part of Delaware through the 1740s (DeValinger 1940, 1941; Marye 1939b, 1940).

The Kuskarawaok, who became known as the Nanticoke Indians, inhabited the area along the "Kus flu" or Nanticoke River drainage, occupying between 5-10 villages contemporaneously during the seventeenth century (Browne 1905; Smith 1986a, 1986b). This group was reportedly the largest and strongest on the Delmarva: Smith estimated as many as 200 warriors (Smith 1986a). He described their language as different from that of the Powhatan, and acknowledged them as significant participants in the indigenous prestige goods trade through their manufacture of white shell beads. They also were known for their abundance of furs (Smith 1986a, 1986c). The Nanticoke remained a strong presence on the Peninsula throughout the Contact period, maintaining possession of significant portions of their core territories (Busby 2000; Porter 1979).

North of the Nanticoke, along the Choptank River drainage, was the territory of the Choptank Indians. The Maryland colonial government initiated interaction with the Choptank in the first half of the seventeenth century (Browne 1885; Marye 1936). They were divided into three bands, each with a territorial base but residing predominantly within a definable, contiguous area in the vicinity of present-day Cambridge, Maryland (Browne 1896; Marye 1936; McAllister 1962). This group also maintained possession of their core territories throughout the Contact period primarily by cooperating with the colonial Maryland government (Busby 2000; Porter 1979).

The Siconesse were an Atlantic seaboard group associated with the large Lenape entity of the Delaware/New Jersey/Pennsylvania area. At the time of Contact, they inhabited the area around Cape Henlopen and Lewes, Delaware (Browne 1896). Other Native groups associated with the larger Lenape designation were resident in the extreme northern sections of the Delmarva. The Lenape can be divided along linguistic lines. A relatively homogenous dialect was spoken north and east of the Raritan River and the Delaware Water Gap, while a more diverse group of dialects was spoken south of this line (Goddard 1979). The northern people, inhabitants of northern New Jersey, Manhattan Island, and the area of the North River (Hudson River), are generally defined as Munsee. Unami speakers inhabited areas along the South River (Delaware River) encompassing central and southern New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, and northern Delaware at the time of Contact (Kraft 1986).

The Native groups resident in the northern part of present-day New Castle County, Delaware, in the Brandywine River Valley, included the Quenomysing and the Minguannan who were collectively referred to at times as the Brandywine Indians (Weslager 1972). The Brandywine Indians maintained a separate identity from other Unami-speaking Lenape to south and east and from Munsee speakers to the north through their patterns of settlement, land transactions, and cross-cultural associations (Weslager 1972).

The Susquehannock Indians entered the Delmarva peninsula around 1608, making forays from their villages along the Susquehanna River in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. By the late 1650s, they had expanded their fur trading territory to the north shore of the Choptank River (Jennings 1968; Smith 1986a, 1986c). Their presence affected the form and substance of Lenape life and pushed other groups, such as the Monoponsons, of Kent Island, and the Wicomiss, of Maryland's side of the Delmarva, southward with sustained hostilities (Jennings 1968; Marye 1938; Rountree and Davidson 1997:80).