

APPENDIX J

SMALL SITE, INTERESTING STORY

APPENDIX J

SMALL SITE, INTERESTING STORY

By

**Barbara J. Gundy, Ph.D.
and
Christopher T. Espenshade**

SMALL SITE, INTERESTING STORY

Welcome

This story is called *Small Site, Interesting Story* and is set in both modern-day and pre-contact New Castle County, Delaware, as archaeologists work to find out exactly how the earliest residents of Delaware lived. The title of this document refers to the size of the site, the limited number of objects that early residents left behind, and the experiences they underwent during their daily lives, as preserved at the archaeological site 7NC-B-54, also known as the Ronald McDonald House site. In order to fully enjoy the story, there are some things that you should know about the storytellers, setting, characters, and plot.

The Storytellers

The storytellers for this story are archaeologists. Archaeologists study the buried remains that were left behind by people who previously lived in or used an area, so that these people's stories can be told. These buried remains may include man-made objects such as tools, baskets, pottery vessels, ornaments, etc., or naturally occurring items such as animal bone, seeds, shell, and nuts that were used by the people. Archaeologists use many different techniques to try and coax as much information as they can about past people's lives from the archaeological remains that they find. These techniques include talking to other people, such as descendants of these earliest Delaware inhabitants, who may have ideas and information to contribute to the interpretation of the story, as well as studies that may help to date the site, or determine the exact activities that took place there.

Many times, archaeologists have tended to tell the stories related to the biggest, most exciting types of archaeological sites, such as large villages where many families lived together, or caves where the preservation of artifacts is unusually good. Although these large archaeological sites are interesting and educational, focusing on only these types of sites overlooks the literally thousands of smaller sites where past peoples carried on their daily lives. It's as if we tried to tell a story about life in modern-day Delaware by only visiting the largest cities, such as New Castle, Wilmington, and Dover. All of the small town, rural, and coastal information about life in Delaware would be missed, and the stories about the everyday lives of most of the residents of Delaware would go untold. This would present a very unbalanced image of life in Delaware. That is why telling the story of the early peoples who used small sites

like the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) is so important for our understanding of our past.

The Setting

Our story began several years ago when the Delaware Department of Transportation, DelDOT for short, decided that the roads around the Blue Ball area north of Wilmington were inadequate for the amount of traffic that needed to use those roads. In order to resolve this problem, DelDOT decided that improvements to the roads would be necessary. As part of planning for these road improvements, DelDOT completed cultural resources studies to give us information about Delaware's past. This is when the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) was found.

Archaeologists name the sites that they find after many things, such as nearby landmarks, interesting events that happened at the site, or a landowner's last name. In the case of this site, it was named after the nearby Ronald McDonald House facility for sick children and their families. In addition to this common name, archaeological sites are also given a unique identification number, in this case 7NC-B-54, which is recorded by the State of Delaware. This avoids potential confusion if two sites have the same or similar name.

In Delaware, this identification number has three parts. The first part is always the number 7 which indicates that the site is located in the State of Delaware (Delaware is the 7th state in alphabetical order, minus Alaska and Hawaii) combined with the initials of one of the three Delaware counties ("NC" for New Castle, "K" for Kent, and "S" for Sussex) where the site is located. The second part of the identification number, in this case "B," tells us what part of the county the site is located in. Each of the three counties in Delaware has been divided into smaller areas called blocks and assigned a letter of the alphabet. The third part of the identification number is a sequential number which indicates the order in which the site was recorded with the state. In the case of the Ronald McDonald House site, the "54" indicates that the site was the 54th recorded archaeological site located in Block B of New Castle County.

The time period when the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) was visited by these early peoples is called the Pre-contact period. This is the period of time in North and South American (also called the New World) before any Europeans explored these lands and when only native peoples were present. This period generally describes the years prior to approximately A.D. 1500. However, based on archaeological evidence recovered at the site, we can say that native peoples visited the site at least four times during a specific portion of the

Pre-contact period called the Woodland I period. The Woodland I period in Delaware dates from approximately 3,000 B.C. to A.D. 1000. This is the time when the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) story takes place.

The Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) is located in the northern part of Delaware on a landform called the Piedmont. The Piedmont is an area where several ancient mountain chains have been worn away to form a plateau in the eastern United States. The Piedmont stretches from New Jersey in the north to central Alabama in the south, covering only the northernmost part of Delaware. During the Woodland I period, this area would have contained all of the natural resources that would have been used by these early native people in their everyday lives, such as fresh water for drinking; plants and animals for eating, housing, and tool making; clay for pottery making; and stone for tool making.

The Characters

The characters in our story are the native peoples of northern Delaware who visited the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) location and used the natural resources around it to feed, clothe, and provide shelter for themselves and their families. These people are the ancestors of the Native American peoples who still live in and around Delaware today. The way these early people of Delaware lived was influenced by strong cultural beliefs, as well as changes in the climate, environment, and natural resource distributions during the Woodland I period, and this is the focus of our story.

The Plot

So what exactly were the native peoples of Delaware doing at the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54)? The evidence that archaeologists found at the site shows that the location was used for a short period of time at least four times during the Woodland I period. Three of these visits can be generally dated; however, one can not. The only objects found at the site that were left by the native peoples, were stone tools and the stone remnants from the manufacturing and/or sharpening of stone tools. However, since different stone tools can be made in different ways and used for different tasks, we can say a little bit about what was happening during these short visits.

“Knapping” is the word used by archaeologists to describe the process of making or sharpening stone tools by hitting and breaking large pieces of special types of stone with

another hard, rounded stone or a piece of antler. The special types of stone are those that are hard, fine-grained, and break in a predictable pattern called “conchoidal fracture.” You have seen a conchoidal fracture, if you have seen the rounded pattern that results on window glass when it is shot with a BB.

The earliest visit to the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) occurred after 4,500 B.C., and most likely was a man who stopped at the location to make some new stone tools and to replace some old worn-out ones. The man collected cobbles of quartz, quartzite, jasper, and chert from a nearby stream bank and brought the stones to the site location to be knapped. The older worn tools that he had brought with him were discarded at the site once he had made new ones. It is these old worn-out tools which were preserved at the site. The new tools he made were then carried away to be used for activities at another location. The man visiting the site did not leave behind any other types of objects, or if he did, they were not preserved. The man may have performed tasks other than stone knapping at the site, but we have no evidence for those activities.

The second visit to the site occurred between 3,000 B.C. and 2,000 B.C. when a group of people, which probably included both men and women and possibly a child, stopped at the site to collect some plants and make new stone tools and sharpen some that they had brought with them. The visitors collected jasper, quartz, chert, quartzite, and other types of stone from a nearby stream bank and brought the materials to the site to make new stone tools. They also brought with them some specialized stone tools called “unifaces” that they had already made somewhere else. These unifaces often were made when people wanted to participate in activities such as cutting or scraping, but did not want to invest a large amount of time and effort in producing a more complex tool. Archaeologists call these kinds of tools “expedient tools.”

An example of an expedient tool would be if you were outside in your garden and needed to cut a piece of string to tie up your tomatoes, but you had left the scissors in the house. Instead of walking to the house and retrieving the scissors, you pick up a piece of discarded metal that is lying nearby and saw the string to the length you need. You have used the piece of metal as an expedient cutting tool. Pre-contact period peoples must have commonly used expedient tools for activities such as plant gathering and processing; however, evidence of this type of use, because it is short-term and occurs as a result of individual choice or whim, is often not detectable in the things that they left behind. The presence of the unifaces at the site indicates that in addition to making new stone tools, the group that visited the site during this period also was performing other activities most likely involving the collection of plant materials for either food, medicine, or making other objects such as baskets and mats. Based

on information from descendents of these people, the women in the group were most likely collecting the plant materials.

The latest of the four visits to the site occurred after A.D. 600 when one or two men stopped at the site to make some stone tools after they had collected the stone from a nearby stream bed. In addition to making new stone tools, they were also sharpening old stone tools during their visit. The types of stone they used included quartz and just a small amount of chert. Both quartz and chert can be knapped to form sharp edged tools, which can then be used for many purposes such as cutting, chopping, scraping, or piercing. Since the only complete stone tool associated with this visit to the site is a quartz projectile point, the person who visited the site was most likely preparing for tasks associated with hunting and needed to make a new projectile point or sharpen an old one that he then took away with him. The newly made quartz projectile point was mistakenly left or lost at the site. The men visiting the site did not leave behind any other types of objects, or if they did, they were not preserved. The man may have performed tasks other than stone knapping at the site, but we have no evidence of what those tasks may have been.

Even though we have evidence for a fourth visit to the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54), there were no materials or artifacts that allowed us to date when this visit occurred. The recovered objects do indicate that most likely a group of several men and women visited the site at one time. Some of the group, most likely the men and/or boys were knapping large pieces of stone into smaller more manageable-sized pieces that they could take with them for later use. The reason we believe that more than one or two people visited the site during this visit is that the number of stone artifacts representing this visit is larger than any of the other visits. The larger numbers of artifacts may also indicate that these people stayed for a longer period of time at the site, although there are no indications that they built a fire, something they would most likely have done if they were camping overnight.

Some markings on the stone artifacts indicate that the objects were used. Archaeologists call the indications of use on an object "utilization." Activities such as cutting or scraping can leave utilization marks on stone tools similar to the dulling or nicking of the blade on a sharp knife in your kitchen with use over time. The utilization on the artifacts indicates that the people visiting the site were not just reducing large pieces of stone, but were also using the stone tools to engage in other activities as well. The people in the group may have been collecting, cutting, or processing plant resources, such as cattails, roots, or branches for food or use in house building or tool making. Unfortunately, since these objects made out of plant

materials usually decompose and disappear, we can not say exactly what activities they were doing.

Not the End

Archaeologists completely excavated four areas of the Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) that each represented a separate visit to the site by a person or persons, lasting one to a few hours in duration. By studying the types of stone tools and the wear patterns on the tools, we are able to suggest different reasons for why these people were visiting the location and the types of tasks that were performed during the visits. While we can never be sure exactly what people were doing at any given time in the past, these four different visits indicate the diversity of activities that these people may have been engaged in.

Although we label this site as a small site because of its overall size, limited numbers of archaeological artifacts, and the short duration of the visits to the site, many of the tasks represented at the site would have been important in the daily lives of the native peoples of Delaware, and this makes it an important site. The Ronald McDonald House site (7NC-B-54) is only one of many thousands of these small, but interesting archaeological sites which may be preserved in Delaware. Indeed, these little sites were much more frequent in number than larger sites during the early periods of Delaware history. The interesting story that is told by the objects left behind, as interpreted by archaeologists and descendants of the native peoples, will help us learn more about how the early peoples of Delaware lived their everyday lives.