

Cunningham Kevin (DelDOT)

From: Mark_Schoepfle@nps.gov
Sent: Wednesday, June 04, 2008 4:25 PM
To: Cunningham Kevin (DelDOT)
Cc: FP_McManamon@nps.gov; Daniel_Odess@nps.gov
Subject: Mitsawokett to Bloomsbury – Received May 14, 2008

Dear Kevin

Thank you very much for the opportunity to review the above-referenced. A substantial amount of work has gone into this document since our review February 2001. The earlier document adequately met standards of archeological documentation; the problem was the interpretation of fragmentary secondary historical documentation as evidence for some kind of continuous community with a Native American identity. Disclaimers in the Abstract and Forward of the present document make more explicit that the central purpose of this historical archaeology was not to provide evidence for the continuous existence of a discernible Native American community.

Thus, the document could not be used to strengthen an argument for Federal recognition. I am not familiar with state requirements.

To me, here is some of what the snapshot of 18th Century Bloomsbury shows:

The standard of living among the people of Pumpkin Neck was falling, as indicated by what they ate, their household items, etc.

These people were becoming part of what is generally known as an isolate community (sometimes known as a tri-racial isolate), with kin and network relationships to other such communities throughout the Southeast.

It is reasonable to consider that at least some of the ancestry of this evolving community is Native American, as indicated by bits and pieces of the biographical information both in Chapter 5 and at the end of the volume.

About eight out of 173 glass fragments indeed appear to be purposefully-made cutting tools; their frequency and significance require further study, but no other arguments (such as African or European origins) are compelling.

Such tools could reasonably be Native American, and thus indicate that some such skills were extant during the 18th Century (nobody would simply look at these blades and pick up the skills – some kind of apprenticeship would be required).

The Biographical information in the “piecing it together” sections outlines some of the kinship, genealogical, and network relationships among the people in the area throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Some secondary historical information (Weslager cit.) suggests that remnant Native American individuals remained in the area and became assimilated into this isolate community.

A reader might pick up from fragments that an argument is being made for the continuation of some kind of Native American community. See for example:

Page xiii: "... people who lived at Bloomsbury retained a significant connection to their native American heritage well into the nineteenth century." The study shows evidence, in my judgment, for a few possible Native American features (e.g. glass blades) through the 18th century.

Page xiv: re "Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware in Kent County" – needs to specify: non-Federally recognized group.

Page xiv: suggest rephrasing "... recover their birthright as the acknowledged Native American population of Kent County." "...explore their Native American heritage as part of Kent County"

Page 19-20: re isolate groups asserting Native American ancestry – true;

Page 27-28: re "descendants of this community identify themselves as Native Americans..." – true; "... hypothesize generalizations about community structure and status" – true;

Page 59-60: re "People named Sisco were leaders of the emigrant Nanticoke Indian group who chose to leave the lower Eastern shore to settle along the upper Susquehanna." Possible, but no evidence one way or the other.

Page 68: ..."possible beneficial cultural effects..." - might be reworded simply to point out that some factors would reinforce social structure, oral heritage, etc.

Page 70: re "Why did indigenous Native American populations largely disappear from Maryland after European settlement began?" – what does Maryland have to do with Delaware? And didn't these remnants (if they existed) simply assimilate into the evolving isolate communities?

Page 71: re Invisible Indians – "cultural disappearance appears to have been a survival strategy for remnant communities ..." – not clear. Couldn't they have simply assimilated? If there were an identifiable strategy, where's the documentation, or least citation? Same question for "...renunciation, or at least subordination, of Indian identity."

Page 72: Re "Indirect references to 'Indian' origins..." – whether or not any claims were pressed, is there genealogical evidence that James Dean (or his forbears) were Native American?

Page 72 and other pages: there is little doubt that people of many backgrounds that were not northern European were pushed into the "N" and "M" systems. However, it has to be remembered that assignments to these categories were either not systematically applied, or applied using a complicated set of criteria that shifted through time.

Page 74: re Handsor and Durham – is it possible that some of the names of masters were taken on by slaves or indentured servants?

Page 80: Re Frank Speck – let's remember that he admitted up front that his history was not intended to be accurate. I'd be very careful concluding that there were any Nanticoke remnants left anywhere.

However, the document contains disclaimers throughout the text, as well as in the introductions, sufficient to show that its authors are not making any case for a continuing Native American community per criteria in 25 CFR

83 or whatever State criteria may be applicable.

One other point: page 332: “top-down approach espoused by many historians and anthropologists” – what does this mean? My background in anthropology is admittedly atavistic, but I always thought we built our theory from the “bottom up,” i.e. from description.

Page 346ff: contains an interesting data repository for the people in Bloomsbury area of King County. I was able to pick up the presence of family line and network. Someday fully extracting the genealogical lines from this list will help in trace forward through the 19th and 20th centuries the fate of the family lines. It will also help fully characterize snapshots of social networks through time. Such information, in turn, could help inform ethnographic study of present-day communities.

I really enjoyed reading this report. Most likely it included more discussion than is usually the case for archaeological reports on the methods and approaches, but it also helped the reader understand what could and could not be concluded from the report. Also, reading about the approach in general, for me, was interesting.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this article, and best wishes to the authors.

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