

By KARL S. DODGE, Asst. Director, Cohannet Chapter

Fort Hill is situated on the southeastern bank of the Taunton River in the town of North Middleboro. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, it was known to have been populated by Indians. Downstream approximately 400 yards the Indian fish weir was located, the remains today plainly visible at periods of low water. Below the fish weir, the Indian trails crossed the river at a point where today Pratt's Bridge spans the old fording place.

The areas about Fort Hill have been prolific in producing pre-historic stone implements as private collections bear out.

Fort Hill derives its name from the early settlers who rightly called it so, as atop this elevation an Indian fort once stood. Reference is made to the stronghold in an early land deed dated 1668. Josias Chickataubut, living at a place called Mattakeeset (near the present town of Pembroke) deeded to two Indians, one Pomponoho alias Peter, and Thomas Hunter, "All the lands of all sorts that are and lie on the northeasterly side of the river unto a place where the line between Middleboro land and Titicut land doth cross the path that leadeth from the said Titicut to Middleboro Mill." This deed mentioned the eastern boundary as "On a line from the old fort on the hill now standing above the Titicut weir to a point where the said line crossed the Indian path where it joins the Rhode Island path."

From Thomas Weston's *History of Middleboro* we learn of an affair between the Titicut Indians and their enemy attackers from the following account:

"The Nemasket Indians and the neighboring tribes built this Fort for their own protection. They had two doors to the Fort, one next to the river and one on the opposite side. One day they were surprised by a formidable force of Narragansett Indians with whom they were at war at the time. Unfortunately, there were only eight men in the Fort. The others were hunting and fishing. What, therefore, now to do they could not tell, but something must be done, and that immediately.

"Therefore, every Indian bound on his blanket and arrows and took his bows and rushed out of the back door through the bushes and down the bank to the river. Then by the river, in the opposite direction from their enemies, a small distance, then ascended the bank in sight of their enemy, then rushing in through the Fort and down the bank

again, then up the bank and through the Fort as before. This round of deception they continued until the enemy, being surprised that the Fort consisted of so formidable a number, left the ground precipitately and retired, fearing an attack from the vast number in the Fort."

Below this story, printed in the History book, a reference is made, "From a memorandum in the Bennett family".

On Saturday, March 22, the newly formed Cohannet Chapter held its first regular meeting at the Bronson Museum. The evening program called for a discussion of various possible Indian sites in the Taunton-Bridgewater area where the group might hold its first field activities. Several sites were mentioned as possibilities, but Fort Hill was selected. The exact location of the Indian Fort had never been discovered though many had searched the hill in vain. It was felt by all that since no Indian forts had been systematically excavated in southern New England, we could contribute something unusual and interesting to Archaeology in the form of a report.

The Archaeological Society of Connecticut published a report in their bulletin for June, 1950, Bulletin No. 24, covering excavations at Fort Corchaug, Long Island, by Ralph Solecki, a member of that Society. Other known fort locations mentioned in Mr. Solecki's report include Manhansett Fort at Fort Pond on Long Island, Fresh Pond Fort at Hither Hills, Long Island, and Fort Shantok near Montville, Connecticut. Unfortunately, the spread of modern civilization has overrun most of these sites and excavations can never be carried on at these places. I quote one phrase from the Introduction of Mr. Solecki's report. "Considerable stress was placed on the nature of the Cutchogue Fortifications because a search through Archaeological papers on the northeast coast shows a lack of good fort descriptions."

We were fortunate in receiving a clue to the location of the fort from Mrs. William Caswell, wife of the storekeeper in No. Middleboro, who related her story to Bill Taylor. Mrs. Caswell is the daughter of Arad Dunham, a Civil War veteran. Mr. Dunham was interested in local Indian history and knew the Indian trails from the 'Nip' to Assawompssett. Mrs. Caswell heard her father say that the fort stood on the hill above Sentinel or Table Rock at the river.

On March 30th a test trench was dug, 2 feet wide, starting at the river bank and working in a southeasterly direction at the highest level on the hill. This trench yielded many chips and a few projectile points and encouraged further work. The top soil consisted chiefly of black leaf mold 3" to 6" thick mixed with wind-blown sand. Small plant roots intertwined with larger tree roots to hamper the digging. It was evident that much erosion had taken place, accounting for the thin layer of humus. This topsoil was underlayed with coarse sands which extended down 18" or more where the gravels appeared. No evidence of plowing was found upon examination of the underlying subsoils. Artifacts were probably in the uppermost level due to frost action only.

At the end of a 10' trench, a dark streak appeared at the junction of the loam and subsoil. This streak measured 6" to 8" in width. In making a vertical cut beside this disturbance it was found to extend 16" into the sandy subsoil and had the appearance of a series of large post molds close together.

Several people were placed at 12' to 15' intervals along the river bank from this trench and more test trenches were started. We hoped to locate a large palisaded fort but only the first trench upstream and the first two trenches in a downstream direction from the starting point confirmed our discovery of the fort location. Test trenches to the south of these produced negative results although we were spread out on an 80' front.

At this point several members, feeling the cold biting winds, took refuge behind the hill where members assisted the Director in staking out an area in the pine grove. This area produced numerous chips and angular fragments of burned rock. One complete hearth was uncovered undisturbed in the subsoil but few finished artifacts were reported.

In order to uncover further the fort outline, we started at the trench where the disturbance was first noted and stripped off the loam, working in an upstream direction. This shallow trench, about 2' wide, exposed additional large post molds close together. Stakes were driven into the post molds to mark their location for future reference. The northeast corner of the fort was located shortly afterward and the outline changed its direction and continued to show until it became obliterated by a land depression caused by the removal of sand and gravel for fill many years ago.

Work on the fort outline in a southerly direction was delayed due to fallen trees. Mr. Robert the owner, was cutting off the hardwood trees at this time. As soon as the trees were removed by the owner, work on the fort outline was resumed by Mr. Fowler who carefully uncovered more of the outline toward the south. The southwest corner was located but for a short time we were unable to explain a three foot skip in the line. This skip proved to be an entrance to the fort and double post molds on each side of the skip suggested additional supports for a doorway.

By this time we had located three sides of the fort. The south line, like the parallel line to the north, disappeared before a gravel depression. Suspecting that this fort line may have taken a sharp right angle turn toward the south, loam in this direction was removed but nothing unusual was discovered to confirm our suspicions.

Several people were placed at 20' intervals east of the fort to run test trenches westward toward the river for the purpose of attempting to locate the eastern boundary of the fort. We had little success along this line but one member located a large pit disturbance 8' deep in the bottom of which an early European clay pipe was found. This pit is still being excavated to determine its size and shape. Twenty-two post molds were recorded while digging test trenches in the area adjoining the fort site to the south. One hearth was uncovered. These post molds, plotted on a chart, appear to outline a portion of a long house.

At the center support of Pratt's Bridge, a transit was set up to sight the end of the northernmost stone wall atop Fort Hill south of the Fort site. It was reported that the fort site was at an elevation of 35' above the river and 1200' distant from Pratt's Bridge.

Our base line was projected at a right angle to the north stone wall and roughly parallel to the east bank of the Taunton River. Stakes were driven along the base line at 75' intervals until we reached a point opposite the fort. From this base line other lines were projected at right angles. This projecting of the base line towards the fort was necessary because of vegetation which interfered with sighting through the transit at the top of the hill from the stone wall along a direct line to the fort. A temporary line was established east of the fort and parallel to the original. Stakes were driven along this line at 10' intervals and were numbered 1 to 8.

These stakes were employed in locating post molds and other features while running test trenches in the area south of the fort. While the work of searching for the fourth side of the fort was being carried on, a grid system of 10' squares was laid out to incorporate the area containing the fort. Stakes were designated starting with FA-1 near the northeast corner of the fort and ran south or downstream to FE-1 a distance of 40' parallel with the base line.

Having staked the fort site, all top soil was removed from within the fort by scraping. This required patience on the part of the people who worked at this time as all loam was deposited beyond the fort outlines in order to expose the entire sub-surface.

During the month of July the soil at Fort Hill became quite dry for lack of rain and it was deemed neither safe nor practical to attempt to explore the subsoil within the fort. Consequently, on July 20th field operations at Fort Hill were postponed. The pine woods nearby presented a serious fire hazard and the powdery condition of the soil made digging difficult as post molds were almost impossible to identify. The chapter continued its field work at Wappanucket in Lakeville, our second project for 1952.

On Sunday, September 21st the Chapter resumed its work at Fort Hill. The entire area at Fort Hill was scraped clean, the soil having been saturated with moisture from recent rains. Several post molds were clearly outlined in the sandy surface, some of them measuring 5½" in diameter. Within the fort and at the southwest corner we exposed a house floor rectangular in shape measuring 9' by 19'. This floor consisted of a hard-packed, charcoal bearing earth. While excavating the house floor, a refuse pit was examined near its north end. This pit has yielded deer bones, shells of the clam, oyster and quahaug; two carbonized kernels of corn and one carbonized bean. In addition, one small tubular blue glass bead, a badly corroded steel knife blade and a fragment of a glass mirror were found in the pit refuse.

Color photographs of the fort site have been taken as well as over all measurements along the four sides and all features discovered have been duly recorded.

The fort, rectangular in shape, measures 41'6" x 35' deep with the longer side lying along the river. It was possible to take these measurements only after a portion of the missing side had been uncovered. This side had been all but com-

pletely obscured by the removal of gravel by others. A single post mold remained near the corner opposite to the one most recently found and confirmed our belief that this was the east line of the fort. Beyond this line, a few feet east, a refuse pit has been exposed. Approximately 1400 sq. ft. of land has been excavated to date and 150 artifacts have been recorded. One hundred chipped stone artifacts recovered are here used as a basis for a cross section of the material recovered. 5% of all chipped artifacts recovered are of flint or argylite, 25% are of felsite, 70% are of white quartz. 70% of all material recovered was reported as found in the loam, 6% at the junction, 6% in the subsoil while the remaining 18% of the material was found in the house floor within the fort. Small, narrow stem points appeared as frequently as small triangular points. Following is a list of chipped implements recovered:

- 1 small corner removed flint point
- 23 small narrow stem points
- 27 small triangular points
- 4 small broad based points
- 2 large narrow stem medium points
- 3 large knives, corner removed
- 1 small snubnosed scraper
- 3 small side scrapers
- 5 small end scrapers
- 3 large side scrapers
- 3 medium broad based knives
- 1 large knife base, side notched
- 2 small oval scrapers
- 2 small rejected point blanks
- 1 small white quartz hammer stone
- 1 large projectile point, base missing
- 1 large leaf-shaped knife
- 1 quartz leaf shaped drill
- 1 broad rounded base perforator
- 1 diamond shaped base perforator
- ½ spool type atlatl weight
- 1 sandstone paint pot
- 1 quartz crystal notched for wear
- 1 fragment red hematite with ground surface

CONTACT MATERIAL

- 3 fragments of a glass mirror
- 3 musket balls
- 10 clay pipe stem fragments of European origin
- 6 clay pipe bowl fragments
- 1 small tubular glass bead
- 1 copper point
- 2 pieces of flat rolled copper
- 1 clay pipe with portion of stem missing
- 1 fragment of clay trade pottery
- 1 steel knife blade