

# CRM and Native Americans

## An Example from the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation



Typical mid-19th-century Mashantucket Pequot reservation house.

The relationship between archeologists and Native Americans has often been based on conflict. Native groups throughout the Northeast have become increasingly vocal about the way in which archeological research is conducted on sites they believe to be associated with their culture and history. Although the goals of both groups are often compatible, rarely have long-term working relationships developed between them. This situation has changed in recent years, particularly in southern New England, as Native groups have become federally recognized, settled land claims, and begun to pursue economic and social developments on their respective reservations. In addition, as newly recognized tribes begin to initiate economic development projects on trust lands, they are faced with a variety of issues related to the identification, assessment, protection, and management of archeological resources. Archeologists have found themselves in a position of assisting groups such as the Narragansetts, Mashantucket Pequot, Gay Head Wampanoag, and Mohegan in identifying and assessing cultural resources on their reservations in anticipation of development projects. This situation is made more complex because many of the federally recognized tribes in southern New England reside on reservations that have been continuously occupied throughout the prehistoric and historic periods, constituting some of the most complex and significant resources in the eastern United States.<sup>1</sup> Although forced together initially out of necessity, solid relationships have been established between archeologists and native groups in the region.

Since 1980, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe has worked with federal, state, and local agencies including the Connecticut Historical Commission, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Department of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut, the Public Archaeology Survey Team, Inc., and the Planning Commission of the Town of Ledyard to develop a comprehensive research and cultural resource management plan to study and protect cultural resources associated with their cultural heritage. Collectively, this effort is known as the Mashantucket Pequot Ethnohistory Project,

with a blend of archeological and historic research and cultural resource management objectives.

Tribal regulations developed in accordance with this plan require that cultural resource management surveys be conducted prior to all construction actions undertaken within reservation boundaries as well as fee lands. All surveys, undertaken by qualified archeologists under contract with the tribe, are reviewed by the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office to assure conformance with historic preservation regulations. All cultural materials located during tribal undertakings are curated in facilities located on Reservation grounds or in the archeological laboratory of the University of Connecticut.

The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council vigorously implements historic preservation policies and regulations. The Tribal Council also continues to support ongoing research. A recently published book, *The Pequots in Southern New England*, contains scholarly papers presented at a symposium on Mashantucket Pequot culture and history in October 1987. A second conference was organized in October 1993, with presented papers on ethnohistory, archeology, history and the federal recognition process. The federal government recognized these and other efforts by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe with a National Historic Preservation award in 1988.

### *Historic Context*

The Mashantucket Pequot Reservation has been continuously used and occupied by the Pequots and their ancestors for the last 10,000 years. When the reservation was established in 1666, it was centered around a 500-acre wetland called the Great Cedar Swamp. Archeological surveys and excavations have documented sites dating from the Paleo-Period through the Late Woodland Period.<sup>2</sup> The nature of land use documented around the swamp is similar to prehistoric land use documented elsewhere in the region with a few significant differences.<sup>3</sup> The highest density of prehistoric archeological sites have been documented during the Middle and Terminal Archaic Periods (ca. 8,000–6,000 B.P.; 3,800–3,000 B.P.). The lowest frequency of archeological sites date to the Late Archaic Period (6,000–4,000 B.P.). This

pattern is in sharp contrast to other areas of southern New England, and probably reflects differences in the nature of the wetland over time. Paleo-environmental reconstructions of the swamp indicate a period of lowered water table and intermittent desiccation between 7,500–4,000 years ago. During the late prehistoric period and until the Pequot War (1637), the cedar swamp was used for hunting. This pattern is reflected in the archeological record by a number of small temporary or task specific sites.<sup>4</sup> Documents associated with the Pequot War (1636–1637) indicate that the swamp was also used as a place of refuge by the Pequots during periods of conflict.

When the reservation was established 30 years after the Pequot War, it became the focal point of Mashantucket land use and settlement throughout the historic period. In a region of the United States where the Native American archeological record is usually truncated by the middle of the 17th century, archeological sites at Mashantucket increase in density and complexity until the early-19th century. Archeological surveys and excavations have documented one of the richest historic period Native American archeological records in the region. The significance of this record resulted in the placement of the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983, and the subsequent designation of the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation Archaeological District as a National Historic Landmark in 1993. Contributing resources include 17th-century cemeteries, camps and villages, 18th-century farmsteads and hunting camps, and an 18th-century village. Most recently, a late-17th-century Mashantucket fortified village (Monhantic Fort) was identified and is believed to have been constructed during King Philip's War (ca. 1675).

Following the abandonment of the reservation by one of the Mashantucket communities in the Brothertown Indian Movement at the end of the 18th century, subsequent reductions in land base and population resulted in a dramatic decline in the frequency of archeological sites through the third quarter of the 20th century. By the middle of the 19th century the population on the reservation had declined to approximately 10 individuals, dropping from a high of 500 in the 17th century, 300 in the 18th century, and 50 by the mid-19th century. In 1993, 10 years after federal recognition, the population on the reservation exceeded 250.

Federal recognition has brought the Mashantucket Pequot an opportunity to pursue economic development on an unprecedented scale. Through the proceeds of the most successful Native American gaming enterprise in the country, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe has engaged in an ambitious program of social and economic develop-

ment. To date, this has included the construction of over 65 housing units, and the purchase of 65 more, five miles of new roadways, a community center, health center, office complex, and safety complex. The Mashantucket Pequots are currently designing a 300,000-square-foot museum and research center to be completed in 1997.

#### *Management Summary*

Four major goals have been identified by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council for the Mashantucket Pequot Ethnohistory Project: (1) reconstruct Mashantucket Pequot tribal history; (2) use the archeological and ethnohistoric data to plan and construct exhibits for the planned museum on tribal history; (3) develop a cultural resources management program for the reservation; and, (4) train tribal members in archeological field techniques and ethnohistoric methods.

The first objective, reconstruction of Mashantucket Pequot history, is an ongoing process. This effort consists of archeological surveys and excavations, document research, and compilation of oral histories. Archeological surveys have identified over 200 Native American and Euro-American components on the current 1,400 acre reservation (trust lands) and an adjacent 1,500 acres (fee lands). A number of prehistoric and historic period archeological sites have been or are in the process of being studied. These studies are complemented by an ambitious program of paleo-environmental studies conducted by botanists and geologists from the University of Connecticut, Yale University, Connecticut College, and Brown University. A number of graduate students from the University of Connecticut's Department of Anthropology and Yale University's Forestry Department have also initiated dissertation research projects, including studies of a late Paleo-Indian camp, historic period agricultural practices and land use, and reconstruction of the paleo-environmental history of the Great Cedar Swamp.

Document research has been an integral part of the Ethnohistory project from the beginning. Over 7,000 documents, photographs, and other materials related to Pequot history and culture have been obtained. These records have been secured from repositories in the United States, Bermuda, New Zealand, England, and the Netherlands. All of this information will eventually be available in the Mashantucket's planned research center.

The second goal of the ethnohistory project is to provide the information necessary to construct exhibits on the tribe's history and culture for their museum and research center. Approximately 85,000 square feet of exhibits are planned for the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. The information used in the content and design of the exhibits are based on data generated

from the ethnohistory project. Tribal members, archeologists, and exhibit designers are all involved in the design process, incorporating a wide range of data and perspectives in the design effort. Planned exhibits will span the Paleo-Indian through late historic periods including a diorama of a caribou kill, reconstruction of a 16th-century village, a film on the Pequot War, and outdoor interpretive exhibits on an 18th-century farmstead. One of the more ambitious exhibits will be the reconstruction and interpretation of a 17th-century fortified village. This exhibit will not only interpret the lifeways of the period, but will be used to inform the public on archeological and ethnohistoric methods and techniques.

The third objective of the ethnohistory project, development of a cultural resource management plan, is ongoing and the tribe is in the process of reviewing and adopting regulations regarding the protection and management of its cultural resources. The commitment of the tribe to its history and culture is directly reflected in a high degree of interest and concern over the archeological resources on the reservation. These resources are viewed not only from the perspective of being associated with their immediate or distant ancestors, but as the most important means by which the tribe can reconstruct elements of their history. No construction project takes place on trust or fee lands unless an archeological survey has been completed and the significance of all resources is assessed. This process is initiated whenever additional properties are purchased by the Tribe. This is an active ongoing process as over 3,000 acres have been acquired by the Tribe over the last 10 years.

Tribal planners are furnished with locations of all inventoried sites in accordance with tribal regulations requiring consideration of project impacts on cultural resources. To date, tribal development actions have not adversely affected significant archeological resources located within the Mashantucket Pequot Archaeological District. Construction plans associated with several projects have been explicitly altered to avoid negative impacts on potentially significant cultural resources.

The Tribe's cultural resource management plan currently includes the following elements: (1) statement of the theoretical approach and research goals in the study of the reservation and tribal history; (2) summary of existing prehistoric and historic period cultural resources (both Native American and Euro-American) and a discussion of their significance and relationship to research goals; (3) determination of individual site boundaries, assessment of integrity, and statement of significance for each identified site on the reservation; (4) discussion of factors that may affect the long-term protection and management of identified resources such as development, erosion, gravel mining, etc.; (5) recommendations for addi-

tional surveys as well as ongoing evaluation and protection priorities for identified sites; and, (6) development of a framework for using the plan to make management decisions concerning the preservation and or data recovery of sites threatened by development on the reservation or on properties owned by the Tribe.

The final goal is to train tribal members in archeological and ethnohistoric methods and techniques. One element of this training has been participation by tribal members in the University of Connecticut's Field School in Archaeology. The Tribe has recently received a grant from the Department of the Interior to aid in the excavation and interpretation of the Monhantic Fort. Tribal members have also been integral participants in the research and design of exhibits for the museum. The long-term goal is to train tribal members in key positions so that they can assume administrative and field positions in the museum and ethnohistory project.

## Notes

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