

The Charles Read Archaeological Collection:  
Analysis, Interpretation and Recommendations  
for an Interpretative Program

Prepared for:

Seekonk Public Library  
Seekonk, Massachusetts

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March 1983

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The Charles H. Read Archaeological Collection represents a valuable cultural resource for the residents of Seekonk, and can be used to create an interesting and informative display of the relics of the earlier inhabitants of the town. The display need not be too large. The goal is more toward substance than quantity. The intent should be to offer an interpretative program which possesses educational value for the young and old alike. Additionally, the collection holds significance for members of the academic community who may wish to inspect closely or reanalyze the specimens during the course of detailed study, an endeavor which is to be encouraged. The interests of all parties, as well as of the Read family, can be met in a number of ways. Limitations on space, money and skills are, of course, factors to be considered. Below are a few suggestions which we feel could be economical as well as educational and visually attractive. They by no means represent the only methods of display. A visit to the Bronson Museum in Attleboro would be informative and Dr. Maurice Robbins could undoubtedly suggest local individuals knowledgeable in the technical aspects of display - an area in which we are not versed.

Charles Read apparently acquired his interest in Native American antiquities from his father and grandfather, Cyril Read, who was a State Representative in the late 19th century. At some time before 1931, possibly between 1927 and 1931, a large collection was either sold or donated to the Peabody Museum at Harvard by one of the elder Reads. The disposition of this collection is not known at this time, but inquiries should be made to verify its existence, assess its status and make efforts for its return to Seekonk where it should be merged with the Charles H. Read Collection as a permanent and more complete record of occupation.

## I. Introduction

The Charles H. Read Archaeological Collection, which is presently stored and soon to be curated and displayed at the Seekonk Public Library, represents a valuable cultural resource for the citizens of Seekonk as well as the State of Massachusetts in general. The collection documents as much as 9,000 years of continuous occupation and establishes the Read Farm as a rare and valuable archaeological site. Few sites of its type are known and the undisturbed sections hold considerable archaeological potential for future study.

The term "prehistoric cultural resources" pertains to those material forms of evidence which relate to the activities of Native Americans who lived here prior to the arrival of the first Europeans. Prehistoric resources are synonymous with archaeological resources as they both deal with the residue of past human behavior. The form which this residue and evidence takes is variable. It ranges from a few stone tools which were used for hunting or fishing purposes or for food processing; to small archaeological sites which were utilized briefly by only a few individuals, perhaps for a special purpose such as to butcher a kill or manufacture a projectile point; to large sites which were occupied by many families for extended periods of time. Regardless of its form, there are several characteristics which are mutually shared by all prehistoric resources. Prehistoric resources are finite, fragile, non-renewable resources which can never be replanted, re-established or otherwise expanded. Once destroyed, they are lost forever. They are also unique. No archaeological site or artifact is the same because they are the product of individual human and group events which occurred at a specific time and place and therefore differ from events at all other places or times.

Although Massachusetts contains numerous historic resources, many of which have national significance, the record of its prehistory, that of its non-European Native peoples, has long been ignored and ravaged. By an accident of history, Massachusetts has had longer time than any other part of the country to destroy its valuable prehistoric resource base. Over three hundred years of population growth, the development of urban and industrial centers and the construction of schools, roads, suburban residential developments and sand and gravel quarrying have destroyed an incalculable number of archaeological sites. While development should, must, and will continue, it becomes increasingly important to become aware of and protect our very fragile cultural resources. It is now incumbent upon all interested parties, federal, state, local and private, to nurture an aware and informed public. Only then can we insure that as much of the remaining information as possible can be properly cared for, thus preserving at least a part of our common public heritage.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has been engaged in a statewide survey of historic and prehistoric resources for the past three years. The basic goal of the prehistoric survey is to provide a data base upon which well informed decisions can be made concerning the management and preservation of the prehistoric resources of the Commonwealth. To this end, teams of archaeologists have been working to update, consolidate and standardize the archaeological site files of the MHC. These files presently represent the most comprehensive single facility which can be used to assess the impacts of proposed construction projects on known or potential archaeological properties. An important contribution to these files is the addition of computer indexed inventories of collections possessed by several regional and local museums as well as private individuals. Several significant site assemblages have literally been "rediscovered" in museum storerooms where they had gathered dust and added nothing

to our knowledge about an area. In many cases, some assemblages represent the only evidence of prehistoric sites which have since been destroyed. The ongoing inventory enhances MHC's ability to protect or otherwise identify areas of potential archaeological sensitivity.

The analysis and report of the Read Collection is one of a series of similar studies, and although relatively small, it represents one of the most significant assemblages studied. To date, the archaeological collections from the Bronson Museum (Attleboro), the Peabody Museum (Harvard), the R. S. Peabody (Andover), the Peabody Museum of Salem, the Ben Smith Collection (Concord) and the Athearn Collection (Fall River) have been analyzed and entered onto computer tape.

## II. Background to the Charles H. Read Collection and Archaeological Site

The Charles H. Read Archaeological Collection (Seekonk Library) represents the result of twenty-five years of surface collecting by Charles Read on his ancestral farm in south Seekonk. Between 1915 and 1940 an impressive array of artifacts representing over 9,000 years of human occupation was collected from a number of favorite areas or "hot spots" on the Read Farm.\*

Mr. Read's principal and most productive collecting area is located diagonally southwest across School Street from the family home (see sketch). There an eroding sandy bank continuously exposed artifacts after heavy rains and under the foot-fall of their dairy cows which traversed the steep slope. The site is situated on a terrace which overlooks great expanses of tidal marsh to the south. Fire cracked rock can presently be seen eroding out of this bank.

At the western end of this slope is a small parcel of town-owned land which lies in the "Y" junction between School Street and Leavitt Street. Members of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society, and archaeology students from Rhode Island College, Providence College and local Seekonk residents dug at this location between 1969 and 1972. Plans to remove sand and gravel led to a more organized salvage project. Tom Lux of Providence College and Carol R. Barnes (now Fidler) of Rhode Island College conducted extensive excavations here between 1972 and 1974.

Eighty-six squares were excavated in this small area, which proved to be remarkably complex with a maze of features lying

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\* The discussion on Mr. Read's collecting activities and the historic land use of the Read Farm is based on interviews with Mrs. C. H. Read and Mr. Rodman Read.

superimposed on one another. The town decided not to destroy the site and the excavations were never completed. To date, the results of these excavations have not been published. A preliminary paper indicates that over 20 features were encountered in the 1974 season alone (Barnes n.d.). Two C-14 dates secured at that time indicated that at least some of the activity at this location could be attributed to the end of the Late Archaic Period. Presently the site records, field notes, maps and photographs are being assembled and photocopied at the Bronson Museum, Attleboro (Tom Lux: personal communication).

The exposed bank and excavated area undoubtedly represent but a small portion of a large site which extends north across School Street into the old orchard. This parcel has not been cultivated and represents the greatest archaeological potential on what is left of the Read Farm. In 1931 the eastern half of the field was planted as an orchard. The remainder of the field was wooded, similar to the tract adjacent to the field on the north. Following the destruction wrought by the 1938 hurricane, the Reads established a saw mill in the western half of the field, near the edge of the present tree lot. The debris left in the wake of the storm provided the impetus and initial stock of wood for the mill, which remained in operation for many years. The beautiful cherry frames used to display much of the collection were cut at the Read Mill. By 1949 the remainder of the field was planted with young fruit trees, turning the entire field west of the house into an orchard. In 1965 a natural spring was expanded to create a small pond in the middle of the orchard. The orchard was destroyed after Mr. Read's death, leaving the open grass-covered field one sees today.

The woodlot to the north of the orchard is characteristic of a glaciated terrain with sandy knolls and a large kettle hole which in the past held water for much of the year. This area is believed to be where Mr. Read collected three large community

grindstones. These unusual artifacts were removed from the woods and placed in the ground directly behind the house, where they remain today. According to Mr. Read, an "Indian Village" was located in this specific area when his ancestors settled here in 1644 (Thomas Lux: personal communication)..

The wooded lot has not been cultivated in historic times and though the topography is somewhat uneven, small areas may reveal evidence of prehistoric and perhaps Contact Period occupation.

While most of Read's productive collecting occurred to the west of his house, he also followed the time-honored practice of inspecting freshly plowed fields. Because of the excessively drained soils, agriculture was not a productive venture on the Read Farm, which instead specialized in dairy farming. The large field to the east of the house which extends upslope to the north, east to the schoolhouse and south to the tidal marshes, was plowed for animal fodder. In the freshly plowed fields here Read also collected some artifacts. At the southern end of these fields, a small neck looking out over the tidal marshes contained two other sites or "hot spots" which were also productive collecting loci. Site inspection of this location revealed that extensive sand/gravel quarrying and topsoil removal has disturbed this nicely situated terrace which now holds less archaeological potential. This land is presently owned by Mr. William Cuddigan who purchased it from Frank Read in the mid 1950s.

The Read Farm dates to the early 17th century when an enormous tract of land on the upper Narragansett Bay was deeded to the Read family. Through the generations, portions of the farm were sold. Most recently, land on the hill to the northwest of the house was sold by Frank Read and privately developed. When Charles Read was actively collecting, his farm consisted of ca. 110 acres; this area comprised his collecting area. Within the limits of

his farm, he found a number of sites, which cannot be identified in the collection without the aid of records and catalogue numbers which were not maintained by Mr. Read. The Charles H. Read Collection, therefore, represents a mixture of several assemblages from a number of prehistoric sites located on land once owned by the Read family. These sites were located on the terraces overlooking the extensive tidal marshes and were in close proximity to one another. The nature of the occupation at several of these sites will never be known because of past disturbances. However, a sizeable undeveloped tract (the orchard) remains to the west of the house. This area adjoins Mr. Read's most productive collecting area and would be the subject of future archaeological research.

### III. Collection Analysis: Artifact Classes

The Charles H. Read Archaeological Collection contains a total of 756 artifacts. The assemblage is comprised of six different classes of lithic (stone) artifacts including: Projectile Points, Perforators, Bifacial Implements, Cores, Chipping Waste, and Pestles (Table I).

Projectile Points are the most numerous class of artifact in the collection. A total of 721 points and point fragments were coded. 441 of these are considered diagnostic or "typable" and can be used to develop a framework for the range of cultural and temporal occupation at the Read Farm. The high percentage of typable points in relation to "untypable" (144) greatly enhances the significance of the collection. A total of eighty-nine point tips and forty-seven mid-section fragments are included in the projectile point calculations. Because over 95% of the collection is represented by projectile points, the remainder of the report will focus on these information-laden artifacts.

#### IV. Collection Analysis: Cultural/Temporal Interpretations

The 441 typed points coded in the Read Collection documents nearly the entire range of human occupation presently known in New England, and spans over 9,000 years. The only period not represented in the collection is known as the Paleo-Indian period. The Paleo period represents the earliest known appearance of hunter and gatherer groups who entered the New England landscape approximately 12,000 years ago, shortly after the glacial retreat. Paleo sites are rare in New England and it therefore remains a poorly understood part of prehistory. To follow is a summary of those chronological periods which are represented in the Read Collection. The interpretations are based on the identification of specific point types as discussed above.

##### Early Archaic (9,000-7,000 B.P.)

The Early Archaic period is as poorly understood as the preceding Paleo-Indian period. It is identified by a very distinct projectile point known as a Bifurcate-base (two-part) point. Although many Bifurcate-base points have been inventoried in museums, they generally occur only as stray finds from disturbed contexts; seldom can they be provenienced to known sites. A cluster of sites on the upper Taunton River suggests a core area of Early Archaic activity. A similar core area also existed in the Concord/Sudbury River Drainage.

The Read Collection contains eight Bifurcate-base points, an extraordinary number indeed. Six of these were manufactured on varieties of felsite, including a reddish felsite similar to the Attleboro felsite. A maroon felsite similar to that found in the Lynn and Newbury Volcanic Complexes north of Boston Harbor is also present. Black argillite and a rare quartz

speciman were also inventoried. Although several have basal damage, the scars left by the breaks clearly indicate the presence of the bifurcate base.

Today, the Read Farm site is situated adjacent to extensive saltwater marshes at the confluence of Runnins River with the estuary of the Barrington River, which empties into Narragansett Bay. During Early Archaic times, 9,000 years ago, the sea levels were considerably lower than today because of the quantities of water still locked up in the retreating ice mass. At this time, the site was much farther inland, the marshes would have been fresh-water, and the head of Narragansett Bay itself would have been several miles further south and with a very different configuration at that.

By 9,000 years ago, the climatic warming which began thousands of years earlier had influenced the nature of the forest cover and the animal life it supported. The existing hunters and gatherers were forced to adapt their lifeways to these changes or move north to follow their traditionally favored game. We presently do not know if the Early Archaic hunters represent groups who made the adjustment from the earlier period or whether the Paleo Indians vacated the area and New England was reoccupied by those we call the Early Archaic hunters who entered from the south and west.

The paucity of knowledge about the Early Archaic period allows us little room for speculation on settlement patterns or subsistence economy. There are currently no acceptable models concerning the nature of Early Archaic adaptations. For this reason, the Read Farm site represents a site of considerable significance which holds much potential for future research.

Middle Archaic (8,000-6,500 B.P.)

A total of fifty-four points were identified as Middle Archaic types. Each of the three common forms associated with this period are well represented, including thirteen Neville-like points, eleven Neville Variants, and eleven Stark points (Table II). Also included are nineteen Archaic Stemmed points which are specimens which have slightly damaged bases but are obviously one of the three Middle Archaic point forms.

Raw materials vary greatly. Stark points were made exclusively on greenish and blue gray argillite. Neville-Variant materials include argillite as well as hornfels, Attleboro felsite and a felsite similar to the Blue Hill River Quarry Site, Braintree. Four specimens were made on a tan quartzite. Tan quartzite was also favored for Neville-like points, as eight were made from this material. Four Neville-like points were made from the characteristic Attleboro red felsite.

The Middle Archaic period is considerably better known than the previous periods. A number of sites have been excavated and archaeologists can infer much about subsistence strategies and settlement patterns from Middle Archaic tool kits, the distribution of sites, and site sizes.

Climatic warming continued, and by 6,000 B.P. a temperate deciduous forest characterized by oak, hemlock and other mast-producing trees was present. During this time, the seasonal migrations of birds and the spawning runs of fish became established in their present patterns.

Seasonally occupied sites are known along rivers where spring and fall fishing activities would have been practiced. Such spawning fish as salmon, shad, sturgeon and eels could be easily taken at waterfalls during their seasonal runs. Other sites appear focused toward winter fishing, the spring and fall

bird migrations and upland hunting. The various site types suggest annual hunting rounds by small bands within a limited territory. Within these territories, a generalized foraging subsistence strategy oriented toward seasonally abundant resources was followed.

#### Late Archaic (6,000-2,000 B.P.)

A total of 325 Late Archaic points were coded. All four traditions commonly attributed to the Late Archaic were present (Table II). The Laurentian Tradition is represented by eleven Brewerton Side Notched and six Broad-eared points. The Small Stemmed Tradition includes 142 Small Triangles and 144 Small Stemmed points. The Susquehanna Tradition features three Wayland Notched points, five Susquehanna Broad and nine Atlantic points. Five Orient-fishtails, characteristic of the Terminal Archaic, are also contained in the collection. Virtually every type of useful local stone was utilized by the various traditions of the Late Archaic. Argillites, hornfels, quartzites and a wide variety of felsites are present in various quantities. 84% of the small stemmed points and 81% of the small triangles were manufactured on quartz, indicating a strong preference for this readily available material.

A very dramatic increase in the number of sites and variety of material culture occurred during the Late Archaic. It appears that populations increased greatly as a result of indigenous population growth as well as an in-migration from the south.

Climatic warming trends continued in southern New England. By 5,000 years ago, the climate was warmer than today and the oak-hickory forest provided excellent cover for valuable game animals such as deer and turkey, as well as a valuable source of edible nuts.

The Small Stemmed Tradition probably developed locally and is seen as the best contender to have evolved from the Middle Archaic cultures. Small Stemmed points are the most numerous projectile points in southeastern New England. They also occur at more sites than any other form. Site distributions suggest that human populations readily expanded across the landscape, occupying every available habitat and exploiting most of the available resources in the region. High population densities may have led to the exploitation of lower links of the ecological food chains. Small game, shellfish and seeds and nuts were increasingly important food sources.

Shortly before 4,000 B.P. a tool kit essentially similar to those found in New York is present in New England as well. Brewerton Side Notched and Broad-eared points characteristic of the Laurentian Tradition, though never abundant, occur at many sites in southern New England. The low visibility of this cultural component remains problematic. It has been suggested that these were peoples who were not well adapted to the environment of southeastern Massachusetts and represented essentially an interior-upland hunting adaptation.

Around 4,000 years ago, southern New England began to absorb peoples who infiltrated from the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain. The people of the Susquehanna Tradition possessed a very distinct culture from those of the indigenous Late Archaic peoples. Their unique projectile point forms and elaborate burials are particularly evident in the coastal lowlands. The indigenous Late Archaic groups appear to have survived in coexistence with the newcomers, but a minimum of interaction may have characterized their relationship.

Around 3,000 years ago, the climate began to deteriorate, setting off a number of cultural adaptations and disruptions to established lifeways. By the end of the Late Archaic or

Terminal Archaic, established trade networks broke down and the cultures of the Small Stemmed and Susquehanna traditions appear to have merged into the Orient phase. Fewer sites are known from this phase of the Late Archaic and a population decline with possible population shifts to the coast have been postulated as explanations for these trends.

#### Early Woodland (3,000-1,500 B.P.)

Evidence for the presence of Early Woodland peoples at Read Farm is provided by the presence of two projectile point forms. Four Meadowood points were coded in the inventory. Three were manufactured on gray chert, probably from eastern New York, which is typical of this point form and attests to long range contacts with the western interior. The fourth specimen was manufactured on felsite, an unusual choice for this point. Three quartz Rossville points are also diagnostic projectile points of the Early Woodland.

The Early Woodland is a very nebulous period in New England prehistory. Few sites are known and none have been systematically excavated. When material remains occur at a site, they generally are few compared to those of previous or later occupations. This pattern is echoed at Read Farm, where the Early Woodland material represents minor components relative to earlier and later occupations.

It has been contended that the population decline and cultural fragmentation which began at the end of the Late Archaic continued for an additional 1,500 years. During this time, sites occur on the coast at which shell middens were the predominant feature. This has been interpreted as evidence of a major population shift, albeit a low population, to the coast with a concomitant increased reliance on shellfish.

Recent collections analysis, similar to that of the Read Collection, has identified many previously unknown Early Woodland sites. Most of these occur in the interior, within the same major river drainages favored during earlier times; thus they appear to have been following much the same settlement pattern during at least a part of the year.

Two major cultural traits make their initial appearance during the Early Woodland. Some time shortly before 2,500 years ago, the technology of pottery-making appeared in New England. Ceramic technology is not indigenous; rather, it was introduced from somewhere to the south and west of New England. Regional variants of what is commonly known as Vinette I pottery were manufactured by localized groups.

The second technological achievement also comes from outside, but comes into New England at a later date. The introduction of horticulture provided a means of supplementing the traditional subsistence activities of hunting and gathering. In its early stages, the unreliable harvest of a few crops probably had little impact on the practitioners, distinguishing them little from their predecessors. However, during the course of the next 1,200 years, horticulture was to play an increasingly important role in subsistence strategies.

#### Middle Woodland (1,800-1,200 B.P.)

Two Middle Woodland point types are present in the Read Collection. Six Fox Creek Stemmed and five Fox Creek Lanceolate points indicate that peoples also occupied Read Farm during the 600-year period which is defined as the Middle Woodland.

Raw materials such as Attleboro felsite, quartzites, a porphyritic felsite and an igneous tuff were used to make both point forms. These materials may have been locally available,

either as outcrops or as cobbles in the glacial till. One Fox Creek Lanceolate was manufactured on a felsite similar to those found at the Blue Hill River site in Braintree. Interestingly, blue/green and blue/gray argillite and quartz, so prevalent in assemblages from earlier times, are lacking during the Middle Woodland.

As with the preceding period, little is known about the peoples who lived during Middle Woodland times. There is a slightly higher site frequency and greater distribution than the Early Woodland, but not as great as during the Late Woodland. Where Early and Middle Woodland components are present at the same site, usually the Middle Woodland artifacts are most numerous.

Our sample error is much too great to discuss with certainty distinguishing aspects of settlement pattern and subsistence. Coastal sites continued to be important and many interior sites have recently been recognized in private and museum collections. It would appear that at most well situated sites, peoples constantly returned for thousands of years to exploit the natural resources there. Such was certainly the case at Read Farm. Characteristic pottery with rocker and dentate stamped exteriors typical of the Middle Woodland are not present in the Read Collection.

#### Late Woodland (1,300-400 B.P.)

Thirty-four Large Triangles, more commonly referred to as Levanna points, provide vivid evidence for the presence of Late Woodland peoples at the Read Farm from ca.1,300-400 years ago. Thirty quartz, three felsite and one hornfels specimen, are in keeping with the general pattern of local raw material utilization.

Late Woodland sites occur in greater quantities and a wider range of habitats than the preceding Woodland periods, but less

so than during the late Archaic. Site size and artifact frequencies are also greater than during the previous 1,700 years. The proliferation of Late Woodland materials and sites has been interpreted as the result of increased populations and population density. Some of the largest Late Woodland sites were at estuary heads and major waterfalls along the major rivers. These locations were well suited for the establishment of spring and fall base camps at which large concentrations of people assembled. During the summer months, groups dispersed to tend their gardens and to occupy sheltered inland camps during the winter.

It was people of the Late Woodland period whom the first explorers and fishermen saw along the New England coast in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Their early logs and letters tell of high Native American population densities and extensive gardens in cleared patches of the forest all along coastal New England.

In general, the various Woodland periods are not well understood compared to the Late Archaic. It is becoming increasingly evident that the low frequencies of sites and materials during these periods are due to factors other than merely population decreases and settlement shifts. Undoubtedly, much of the under-representation is due to the selective destruction of sites from these periods. The Woodland period sites are the youngest in the sequence of prehistoric occupation in New England. The cultural remains of the Woodland were deposited after those of the earlier periods; therefore, they occur closer to the surface and are more susceptible to disturbances by earth modifications such as plowing and various forms of construction.

At the same time, as more research is undertaken, many more sites from these periods are being recognized, suggesting that several reassessments of currently held theories of prehistoric occupation in Massachusetts are warranted.

TABLE I

## Charles Read Collection: General Artifact Categories

<u>Type</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Total Collection</u>
Projectile Points		
Typed	441	
Untyped	144	
Point Tips	89	
Point Midsections	47	
Total	721	95.4
Chipped Stone Tools		
Bifacial Implement Blades	11	
Perforators	10	
Chipping Waste	10	
Cores	2	
Total	33	4.4
Ground Stone Tools		
Pestles	2	0.3
Total Artifacts	756	100.

TABLE II

## Charles Read Collection: Projectile Points

<u>Type</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Total Collection</u>
Bifurcate Base	8	1.8
Archaic Stemmed	19	4.3
Neville-Like	13	2.9
Neville-Variant	11	2.5
Stark-Like	11	2.5
Archaic Notched	17	3.9
Broad Eared	6	1.4
Small Stemmed	144	32.7
Small Triangle	142	32.2
Atlantic-Like	9	2.0
Susquehanna Broad-Like	5	1.1
Wayland Notched-Like	3	0.7
Orient Fishtail	5	1.1
Small Pentagonal	2	0.5
Meadowood	4	0.9
Rossville	3	0.7
Woodland Stemmed	6	1.4
Woodland Lanceolate	5	1.1
Large Triangle	34	7.7
<hr/>		
Total Typed	441	100.
Untyped	144	
Point Tips	89	
Point Midsections	47	
<hr/>		
Total Projectile Points	721	