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“Well, it goes back a long time, geologically the narrows in the lake. In terms of human history, when humans first came into Vermont about 13,000 years ago or so, the Chimney Point was actually under water, under a saltwater ocean, the Champlain Sea and it wasn't until about 9,000 years ago that the point became exposed and habitable but we found evidence of people there as soon as it was available. About 9,000 years ago Native American people were there using the point, using it as a crossing for sure to the other side of the lake. The way that we do it archaeologically through testing to find out how old and the different periods of occupation we use, a lot of artifact typologies, how styles of artifacts changed over time. In terms of the ancient past, 9,000 years ago, not much preserves to be studied. We were left with durable things like stone, sometimes burned materials, burned food bone or burned wood fragments, charcoal preserves. But, from the styles of things like spear points, we can tell how old the site is based on a sort of a typology, a range of different style changes over time that we can roughly identify to big periods of time and that's how we found this early archaic evidence of occupation, native occupation at Chimney Point. And, then, consecutive occupations by native people's up through the millennia, right up to the modern era where living Native Americans, living Abenaki people recognize the importance of Chimney Point as part of their own native heritage and part of their connection to Vermont and Lake Champlain.

A meeting place

I think, just like we do today, it's a crossing point. It's a point of focus for transportation, communication, collaboration, trade and exchange with people living on the other side of the lake. We find evidence of that. We find stone material that comes from Northern Canada. We find material that comes from Pennsylvania. We find materials that come from Maine all there at Chimney Point sort of representing the evidence of the travels of people and the communication, the sharing of information that took place there. This still takes place there today.

I think and some of the human themes that we can trace throughout a thousand years are evidenced in the stone material that we find and the continued use of the point, both for access to the other side of the lake as a launching off point or a landing point but also as a place, a prominent point along the lake shore that I believe people used as a meeting place, as a destination, as a point of reference when they were thinking about Lake Champlain and making it a meeting place. We have a wonderful reference from the late 1700s when people, who were staying at the Chimney Point Tavern, saw a group of native people come in by canoe on the lake and then another group comes by land ostensibly to meet there at a predetermined time. And, so, this was happening right up until the late 1700s, sort of evidence of something that had been going on there for thousands of years and how important this point of land was to native people.

Contact period

I think there's a point in time where native people and Europeans were interacting there which is really interesting. We call it the contact period. About 1690 we know the British built a fort somewhere nearby. We don't have any archaeological evidence of that but by 1731 the French built a fort at Chimney Point. There was a fort of logs or a fort de pieux and from that point there was an established French presence there. But, we have evidence of native people also being there around the same time and using European goods like glass in a native way, taking a piece of broken glass and making it into a scraping tool, for example, similar to ones they had made previously out of stone. And, so, we have this evidence where native people were certainly benefiting from trade goods that the French were bringing in and the French were certainly benefiting from native knowledge of the area probably trading with them for food and other goods as well. And, so, there's a period where there was some interaction; and, then, of course, it was the French establishment of the fort there that really brought a lot of French into this side of the lake and it was a base. There was a bakery there and so it was a center point of the French occupation at least until 1737 when it was raised, probably burned and then the French relocated to the Crown Point side of the lake and then ultimately in about 1759 it was recorded that the French settlement on the Chimney Point side was deserted. So, very, very dynamic history with English, French, native people going back and forth and so archaeologically it creates a very complicated story.

Also, when we're focusing in on about a half-acre or to an acre of land and then just how many occupations there have been, it's been a challenge for us to sort that out but we've been able to identify at least spatially some different places of occupation that specifically match up to periods of time. And, for archaeologists narrow windows of time like the French fort 1731-1737, six years is wonderful because it's kind of a very narrow window whereas usually we're having to deal with bigger periods of time and it's harder to assign space or artifacts to specific time periods. But, we have a lot of great artifacts that connect up in terms of the French history there to that initial French occupation when we also have historic records.

For the native era we don't have any written records and so archaeology is the only way we can tell this story other than folklore and information from living native people. But, for the French history we have lists of goods that were imported and the dates that they were imported and we find archaeologically some items that actually match up to some of the items on these import lists. We also have things called bale seals that were used to bundle up goods like textiles, maybe traded with native people, maybe just imported by the French but these seals tell a story of the merchant that sent them, what their goods were and so we'll be able to reconstruct some of this as we go forward with our archaeological analysis.

There's a wonderful photographic record that we've used of images taken in the 1800s, images taken at various celebrations, the 350th anniversary of Champlain's voyage, for example and many of these, along with historic maps, have helped us reconstruct kind of where people were living, where structures were. You know prior to their construction of the now old bridge, a lot

went on there for sure beyond the native history, the early French history, the Revolutionary War history where we have a British regiment camp there, at least for some short period of time.

Tavern history

The [Chimney Point] tavern itself gets constructed there around the time of American Revolution. Then you have -- it was a functioning tavern right up until the early 1900s. So, we have a lot of evidence archaeologically of tavern behavior, tavern life including reigns of alcohol, alcoholic containers, containers for alcohol and, as well as domestic artifacts that go along with some of the 19th Century occupations there by people who were, some of them involved in early ferry services and things like that. So really fantastic history. I mean you'd be hard pressed to find in Vermont another place that has so much and for every period and also that links up to a national and internationally significant period of time in the development of the country, for example, in one place. It's just -- it's remarkable really. One of the other interesting kind of more personal stories -- there was a guy named Moses Bradley, who in 1790 set up a pottery-making operation there making redware pottery for things like milk pans, jugs, bowls, things that before that time had been imported from Europe and if you talked about made in Vermont, we make a big deal of it today, this is one of the first guys to do this was making pottery right there at Chimney Point and we found evidence very close to his kiln of pots that failed, broken pieces and we even have pieces of clay with his fingerprints on it. So, we're connecting directly these archaeological pieces with the history of Chimney Point and actual individuals who lived there, which is really, really neat for us.

Rich archeological site

We didn't even realize how significant the archaeological site under the old bridge was. We -- there was a -- we knew everybody -- you know we weren't the first to figure out that Chimney Point was significant archaeologically. That had been known for a couple of centuries at least but what was news was that there was so much intact under the old bridge and we found this out by doing some preliminary archaeology prior to the demolition, which became almost the archaeology of bridge construction. We actually excavated a small trench close to one of the bridge piers and found that the builder's transfer of the bridge only extended about a foot out from the concrete pier. And, so, it was almost surgical how they had built the bridge in and amongst this archaeological site and effectively preserving everything else outside of these small disturbances that were used for the piers. And, so, that was really fascinating for us and I think one of the new things that came out of both archaeology done prior to demolition and subsequent to the demolition before the new bridge was built was just how intact things were there and also kind of documenting construction techniques of 1928 versus today and the construction of the new bridge presented challenges because we had found all of this sensitive area underneath it and part of the process was to preserve that in place to work around it building the new bridge. And, so, it's presented extraordinary challenges for the contractors to work down this narrow road, to stay off the archaeological site, which is underneath the new span of the bridge and to be very careful and working around it. So, we've monitored their

work, worked collaboratively with NYSDOT, with Vtrans, with the Vermont Department of Historic Preservation, the Division for Historic Preservation together to make sure that what's left is preserved for the future because we don't even want to dig it all up because we believe that in the future we'll have better research questions, better technology and this is such a significant site that it deserves to be preserved as much as it does to be studied.

I know there was some references that they [1929 bridge contractors] came down on a - - what they thought was a French cellar hole and it turns out that that very pier, we believe, was one that impacted a foundation. We found early on a piece of a constructed stone foundation, didn't know what it was, whether it was related to the fort.

The fort was reportedly built of logs, the French fort, the 1731 fort so, but, it may have been related. And, so, when we got back and exposed more of it, it actually turned out to be an H-shaped foundation for a chimney, potentially, the chimney that gave Chimney Point its name. And, these would have been very common French constructions so you would have had two fireplaces essentially on either side of the chimney base. And, one of these piers impacted that and that was recorded as a French cellar hole. But, other than that there wasn't much reference that we could find explicitly saying we need to be careful. It was just - - it wasn't the way things went back there and more likely this was just a result of how construction was done back there, more with shovels than big machines. And, so, there's a lot of that evidence that we find in terms of the impacts of the bridge construction, the early bridge construction on the site.

Remains an important crossing

I mean it's a logical progression from canoes or kayaks to ferries to the bridge and then we saw when they demolished the 1929 bridge, the first people across were people in canoes and kayaks and then the ferry started again and here we have the new bridge almost open, so, very, very important keeping that connection. It's never stopped. The bridge did not stop - - the bridge demolition did not stop people from crossing over on that location. It makes it a little more difficult compared to modern standards and I know people are anxious for the new bridge to be finished to continue that, particularly people who cross every day for work and everything."