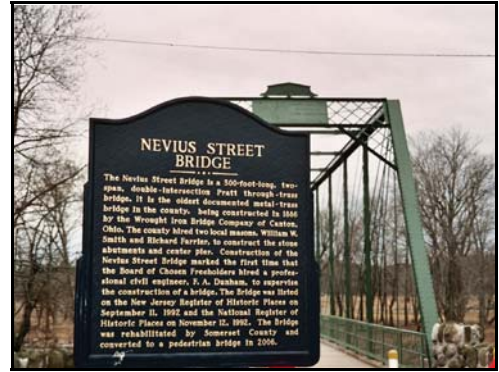




NEVIUS STREET BRIDGE PROJECT SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

From 1998 to 2005, a team of archaeologists, historians, and architectural historians from Richard Grubb & Associates (RGA) aided Somerset County Engineering Department in documenting and mitigating historical and archaeological resources in order to facilitate construction of a much needed new bridge over the Raritan River and the rehabilitation of the National and State Register listed Nevius Street Bridge (1886) for pedestrian use. This included extensive documentation of the Raritan Water Power Canal, delineation of the North Hillsborough-Raritan River Historic District, HABS/HAER recordation of the bridge and historic James B. Duke Estate, and identification and mitigation of the Lyman Street Prehistoric Site (28-So-127). RGA assisted Somerset County in preparing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the FHWA, NJDOT, and NJHPO. In 2007, the overall project received a coveted NJHPO Award for the combination of historically sensitive design and extensive historical and archaeological research.



From December 2003 to February 2004, during adverse weather conditions, archaeologists excavated portions of the Lyman Street Prehistoric Site. The inclement weather conditions called for some creative working solutions. The excavations were covered with a heated dome-like structure that allowed archaeologists to work in the cold and snow.



The Lyman Street Prehistoric Site extended east and west of Lyman Street and possibly for some distance along the Raritan River. The site is located on an upland terrace of the river north of Canal Street in a highly favorable location for people to live during the prehistoric and more recent past. Due to the rarity of similar sites along this part of the Raritan River drainage, the site was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This excavation was the last chance to recover information about the site and the people who lived there before construction of the new bridge.

The archaeological excavation was centered on the west side of Lyman Street just north of Canal Street in an area of the least disturbance and with the highest concentration of artifacts. Affected portions of the site were excavated in carefully controlled layers to depths of three to five feet with the goal of learning when people occupied the site and what kinds of activities they were involved in. During the excavation, over 1,500 prehistoric Native American artifacts were recovered, and a cooking or storage pit feature was identified.

Geoarchaeological analysis of the site's topographic setting was conducted and the results of that analysis suggest it was on a stable landform likely formed between 7000 and 5000 years ago. Analysis of the artifacts and materials included paleobotanical analysis of hickory nuts and wood and radiocarbon dating of charcoal. Artifacts were studied to determine the kinds of activities that took place at the site and when they occurred. Most of the artifacts consisted of stone tools, flaking debris from the making of stone tools, and rocks that were heated by fire. The stone tools included spear points, scrapers, drills, and knives made of argillite, chert, and jasper. In addition, small pieces of prehistoric ceramic pots were recovered from the storage pit.

Radiocarbon (C^{14}) dates ranging from over 5000 years ago to A.D. 1400 suggest that the site was occupied from the Late Archaic to the Late Woodland period. The range of activities at the site included nut harvesting, hunting, probably fishing, and cooking; getting suitable rocks from the river for hearths and toolmaking; and less obvious activities such as trade, social interactions, and communication with other Native American groups along the river. The archaeological investigations provided significant new information about prehistoric lifeways and site formation processes in the Raritan River Valley.



Sherds of prehistoric Native American ceramic vessels found in the storage pit feature. These date circa 3,000 to 2,000 years ago.



These are typical stone artifacts from the site. The argillite spear point on the left is dated circa 5,000 to 2,000 years ago. Other artifacts include large pieces of heated rock (on the right) and flakes of argillite, chert, and jasper from making and sharpening tools.

More information about RGA is available at www.richardgrubb.com.

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