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Workshop on Research Problems in Historic Archaeology: A Report

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WORKSHOP ON RESEARCH PROBLEMS IN HISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY:
A REPORT

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GOALS OF THE WORKSHOP

This workshop in Historical Archaeology: European Settlement and Expansion was convened to develop a five-year prescriptive plan of action. Four steps were suggested in order to develop this plan in an orderly fashion during discussion. These steps were:

1. Identify the major issues in the discipline,
2. Discuss the issues and research orientations,
3. Determine the research priorities of the group,
4. Prepare a report.

After some initial discussion of the parameters of this task, the group focused in on the delineation of the important problem orientations currently in historical archaeology. This was followed by the development of a plan for practical implementation of these research goals.

Research problems in historical archaeology were first identified at three levels. Moving from general to specific these were:

1. The nature of historical archaeological data,
2. The selection of archaeological theory for application to these data,
3. Particular substantive research problems.

Three different theoretical orientations were delineated which applied to substantive problem areas in historical archaeology. Research into the nature of the data base available in historical archaeology could be accomplished within any of these substantive research problems.

1) The Nature of the Data Base of Historical Archaeology

Two research problem areas were delineated with regard to the question of the nature of data in historical archaeology. The first, held in common with prehistorical archaeology, is the concern for bridging assumptions from archaeological data to the cultural behavior inferred. Historical archaeology has contributed significant information within this area by comparing and contrasting data obtained by archaeological techniques against the historical record. The discussion progressed from this point to the relationship between the archaeological record and the historical record. This concern with ascertaining the different biases inherent in the historical as well as in the archaeological record has led to the complementary use of documentary and archaeological data, as well as the use of the areas of redundancy in the two types of data to elucidate the nature of both the archaeological and historical records.
2) Selection of Research Orientations Applicable in Historical Archaeology

Research themes available in archaeology were next discussed at the general theoretical level, and three were considered to be of major concern for historical archaeology. All of these research orientations were drawn from a systems theory framework, involving dynamic relationships among the cultural subsystems which are of particular interest to historical archaeologists. The research orientation considered, cultural ecology, is concerned with the interrelationship of the natural environment and cultural adaptations. The second theme considered was the economic, social, and political relationship of the Euro-American cultural system to other cultures. The third relationship discussed was that of cultural and technological development. These three systemic relationships (culture: natural environment; culture: social environment; culture: technological development) were considered the principal routes for investigating the changing energy procurement system of Europeans in the Northeast.

3) Substantive Research Problem Areas

These three relationships were found to exist in all of the more specific substantive problem areas delineated for historical archaeology of the Northeast. The research orientation encompassing these relationships was a concern with the evolution of energy capture processes in the Northeast, and the flow of population, materials and energy within this evolving system. The substantive research problems were organized into two major questions, which were:

1. How and why was the Northeast colonized by Europeans?

2. How and why did the Northeast develop economically and ecologically?

Thus the research problems involving the ecological aspects of the adaptation process were separated from those processes of economic development involving the variables of external cultural contact and technological development. All three factors were seen as ongoing phenomena whose interaction made difficult the delimitation of manageable research problems.

A. Colonization

The problem of European colonization of the Northeast was further divided into four specific research areas. The first of these included the questions concerning the initial immigration of Europeans to the Northeast and their adaptation to natural and cultural environment. The second problem area involved migrations within the colonies, and the resulting frontier colonization settlement pattern as the growing population expanded its area of settlement in the Northeast and beyond. The third problem area was concerned with resource utilization pattern changes, which were due to those resources initially available, those
chosen for exploitation and changes in resource availability due to utilization and exhaustion of those exploited. The factors involved in changes in resource utilization patterns were of two major types: 1) the effect of changes in natural environmental conditions, and 2) the effect of the culturally built environment on natural environmental change. The last research problem delineated within this ecological orientation was the competition for resources between Europeans and Indians, and within and between European settlements as the population of the Northeast grew and expanded. All of these problem areas were concerned with European cultural adaptation to the changing natural and cultural environment of the colonies during the initial colonization and expansion of population in the Northeast.

B. Economic and technological development

The second problem area of the economic and technological development of the Northeast was subdivided into four more specific areas of research. The first was the initial relationship of the European market network and colonial settlement and growth patterns. The second research area concerned the development of commercial trading settlements in the Northeast, due to the increasing exchange of colonial raw materials for British manufactures. The relationships between the development of this commercial economy, commercial agriculture, and the settlement pattern were also considered. The third research area involved the development of commercial agricultural production, increasingly for non-local exchange. The last research problem was concerned with the development of an industrial economy in the U.S., involving large scale factories producing for non-local markets. This type of industrial settlement pattern was superimposed on, and affected, the existing pattern of ubiquitous local mills. Industrialization also increased the agglomeration of population into urban areas. The developing industrial economy was also related to increasing commercialization of agricultural production for exchange, changing residential settlement patterns, the development of health problems, the development of industrial and transportation technology, and changes in patterns of home production, consumption and maintenance.

WORKSHOP SUGGESTIONS

Next the problem of practically implementing progress on these research problems was attacked. The major practical problem in the field was considered to be the communication of existing information and data in historical archaeology. A need was also expressed for a larger more diversified data base in historical archaeology. The need was felt for a centralized mechanism to consolidate the existing data base in the field and make it available to others. Standardized information needed in five areas was considered to form a firm basis for the continuing growth of research without reduplication. The need was expressed for an archival bibliography of the kinds of documents which have survived, and their location. A survey and record of existing ethnographic data was suggested to augment the archival bibliography. Thirdly, a comprehensive survey of the available ecological data was called for to deal with the
questions of adaptation. Fourthly, the need was felt for some mechanism to systematically contact historical societies in order to compile a record of any historical sites discovered and/or excavated by such amateur groups. Finally, it was suggested that the SHPO be called on to compile a bibliography of its reports and distribute this to historical archaeologists. It was also recommended that the following standard information should be required in abstracts of reports in the field: date of occupation, geographic location, basic ecology of the locale, basic function of the site, and whether urban or rural, industrial, agricultural, or commercial. Also, historical archaeology seems ripe for the development of an outlet for publication of research abstracts from both public archaeology and academia.

These proposals would facilitate professional growth of the field. They would serve as a basis for establishing research priorities, and would permit assessment of the areas to which archaeological data significantly complement historical information. An inventory of existing research in historical archaeology could form the basis for assessing the archaeological potential of different kinds of sites for a variety of research problems in historical archaeology. Linking kinds of sites and research problems may also assist in the development of National Register criteria of site significance in the light of research problems in the field. It may be possible to stratify the Northeast with regard to these research problems and the locations of relevant configurations of sites. Along these lines, Gorman and Lewis have computerized the characteristics of 18th century glasshouses in the Northeast so that clusters of similar sites can be distinguished which are suitable for various research problems. Other group concerns included the need to educate the public in historical archaeology, and the need to better train historical archaeologists in historical as well as archaeological research.

SUMMARY

In summary, the major goal of defining the current research problems in historical archaeology was initiated. The major underlying systemic relationships were identified as well as problems concerning the nature of data in historical archaeology. The programatic steps suggested were aimed at consolidating and disseminating the existing information in the field. With more time the group would also have been interested in discussing the specific archaeological information available within each of the substantive problem areas. It was decided that the existing information in the field needs to be compiled and assessed before any priority can be assigned to research problems.