UNCOVERING THE LIVES OF NATIVE AMERICANS THROUGH ARCHAEOLOGY

What We Are Learning at the William Trent House Museum

Shawn Carney – April 2020
Who were the **Native Americans** that lived on the Trent house property before Trent?

The **Native American** people who lived on the Trent House property are called the **Lenni Lenape**.
The Lenni Lenape

They settled in the New Jersey area thousands of years ago. They fished and hunted and collected seeds, roots and nuts. After some time, they began to farm the land.

As more and more European colonists came, the Lenni Lenape were pushed from their lands and eventually most were relocated to Oklahoma where many descendants still live today.

These are descendants of the ancient Lenni Lenape people.
How can we learn about the Lenni Lenape people through archaeology?

We can study the things they left behind thousands of years ago.
What did the Lenni Lenape leave behind?

They left behind pottery, also called ceramics, made for cooking and storing food.

They are most often found in pieces; these pieces are called potshards.

These potshards were found at the Trent House!
What did the Lenni Lenape leave behind?

They also left behind arrowheads – chipped stone tools used for hunting animals - and *wampum*, which was made from clam shells and used as jewelry and money.
Some of what the Lenni Lenape left behind would not last under the ground. 

For example, the houses the Lenni Lenape built would not last. They are made of wood, which is organic.

*Organic* means that something comes from living things. *Organic* things rot or *decay* under the ground.
What is Archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of how humans used to live by uncovering the remains of their belongings from the earth.

Square holes are dug in the ground to find these belongings. Digging these holes is called **excavation**.

These belongings, like the pottery and arrowheads made by the Lenape, are called **artifacts**.
Artifacts are objects made or changed by humans. For example, the pottery pieces and nails that you see here are artifacts.
Most artifacts are in pieces when found. Archaeologists try to put the pieces back together. It is called mending and it is like putting a puzzle back together.
What is an archaeologist?

An archaeologist studies how humans lived in the past through the artifacts they find.

Archaeologists excavating at the Trent House

The work is done very carefully
Archaeologists are different from Paleontologists

Archaeologists look for artifacts – remains of human belongings

Paleontologists look for fossils – remains of dinosaurs and extinct animals
Archaeologists are also different from Historians

Archaeologists study the past through the artifacts they find

Historians study the past through written documents

Since the Trent house is both an archaeological site and a historic site, both archaeologists and historians have studied it.
What do archaeologists use to find artifacts?

- Maps for finding sites
- Measuring tape for measuring how deep you are digging
- Shovel and bucket for digging
- Trowels for scraping the soil
- Paint Brush for brushing soil from artifacts
- Screen for sifting soil
What kind of tools do archaeologists use?

- Compass for finding sites
- Plastic bags for bagging artifacts
- Notebook and pencil for taking notes
- Camera for taking pictures of the site and excavation
- Computer for cataloging artifacts
Archaeologists look for sites. What are sites?

Sites can be *prehistoric* – before written history
Or they can be *historic* – with a written history

The Trent House site is both a *prehistoric* and a *historic* site. People have lived there for thousands of years.

*Sites* are places where humans once lived that contain *artifacts*.
The Trent House is an *archaeological site*.
Many *artifacts* have been found at the Trent House.
How can archaeologists tell how old an artifact is?

Generally speaking, the deeper you find something in the ground, the older it is. Notice how the modern artifacts are at the top and the Native American artifacts are at the bottom.
What do artifacts tell us about Native American people?

Arrowheads tell us that the Lenape hunted animals. Some of these animals were large like deer and some were small like rabbits. Some of the stone used for arrowheads came from other parts of the country, meaning that the Lenape either traveled to get them or that other native groups traveled to meet with the Lenape.

Pot shards tell us that the Lenape made pots to cook in and store food and water. Often times the pottery was decorated. Sharpened stones, sticks, and cord were used to make designs on the clay. Native American pottery is most often found in pieces because it is very fragile.
What do **artifacts** tell us about Native American people?

Wampum tells us quite a lot about the Lenni Lenape. It tells us that the Lenape, and other Native Americans of the Northeastern United States made and wore jewelry, like necklaces, bracelets and earrings. It also tells us that the Lenape had a system of currency or money.
What do **artifacts** tell us about Native American people?

These artifacts are evidence that Native Americans traded with Europeans at the Trent House, for things like copper kettles. They would take the kettles and cut them up, making them into different things. The artifact on the left is thought to be a pendant for a necklace.
What have you learned about archaeology and Native American people?

Take this fun quiz to find out!
Archaeology Quiz

Who were the Native Americans that lived on the Trent House Property?
Archaeology Quiz

Most descendants of the Lenni Lenape live in which state?
Archaeology Quiz

What kinds of things did the Lenni Lenape leave behind?

- Artifacts
- Ceramics
- Arrowheads
- All of the above
What is *wampum* made from?

- Wood
- Very small rocks
- Purple and white clam shells
- Turtle shells
Archaeology Quiz

What is the object in the picture below?

- A potshard
- A piece of ceramic
- A Native American Artifact
- All of the above
Archaeology Quiz

Very carefully digging square holes to find the remains of human belongings is called____________________________.
Archaeology Quiz

TRUE OR FALSE
Archaeologists and Paleontologists are the same thing.
Archaeology Quiz

Which of these things do historians use to study the past?

Letters
Maps
Books

All of these things
A human-made or changed object is called a **artifact**.
Archaeology Quiz

Which of these is *organic* and will *decay* under the ground?

- Arrowhead
- Wood
- Bottle
- Coin
Archaeology Quiz

TRUE OR FALSE
Archaeologists study the past through the artifacts they find.
Archaeology Quiz

Which of these is NOT an archaeologist’s tool?

- Wrench
- Shovel
- Screen
- Measuring Tape
Archaeology Quiz

What do archaeologists use these for?

- Painting the artifacts
- Carefully brushing soil away from artifacts
- Painting a picture of the excavation
- Dusting off antiques
Archaeology Quiz

What type of archaeological site is the Trent House?

- Old
- Historic
- Prehistoric
- Both Prehistoric and Historic
Archaeology Quiz

TRUE OR FALSE
The deeper the artifact is in the ground, the older it is.
Archaeology Quiz Answer Key

1. The Lenni Lenape
2. Oklahoma
3. All of the above
4. Purple and white clam shells
5. All of the above
6. Excavation
7. False
8. All of these
9. An artifact
10. Sticks (wood)
11. True
12. Wrench
13. Carefully brushing soil away from artifacts
14. Both Historic and Prehistoric
15. True
Resources

https://www.saa.org/education-outreach/teaching-archaeology/k-12-activities-resources


https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/collections/teaching-content/native-american-heritage-0/
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