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Chepachet Village Middle Privilege Archaeological Sites, Glocester, Rhode Island

Phase II archaeological investigations in advance of the construction of a stormwater retention project identified Native American and EuroAmerican sites at the Chepachet Village Middle Privilege on the Chepachet River in Glocester, Rhode Island. The Native American site consists of a lithic assemblage of six stone tool fragments (five projectile points, one uniface) and a low density of quartz and quartzite chipping debris. The majority of these materials was recovered in fill and redeposited subsoils that are associated with the nineteenth-century mill site occupation. The EuroAmerican site focuses on the middle textile mill privilege first used in the late eighteenth century to serve a tannery and a blacksmith shop, and expanded in the early nineteenth century for a gristmill, distillery, sawmill, and cotton mill. These smaller mills were eventually replaced with a large brick and stone factory operating under the name F.R. White Co. The factory's operations expanded to include worsteds production and several large mill additions, employing over 400 workers, some of whom lived in worker housing near the factory site. The complex was the largest industry in Chepachet Village until it was destroyed by fire in 1897.

The archaeological investigations at the mill were focused on the worker housing sector near Oil Mill Lane. This area contained several large mid-late-nineteenth-century tenements as well as the documented location of an earlier "Stone House" built by the early mill occupants. The excavations within and around the Stone House foundation determined that it included at least two additions as well as a stone-line well in a small yard area adjacent to the house. The main structure foundation appears to have been square, measuring about 30-x-30-ft, and constructed exclusively of drylaid stone with some limited mortar pointing. A center chimney base, measuring roughly 7 by 15 ft, was present in the main structure foundation. It was constructed of rough fieldstones and mortar. A low cellar may have been present in the southern half of the house, while the northern half may only have had a small crawl space underneath the main floor. The stone-lined well measured roughly 5 ft in external diameter, and appears to have been surrounded by a small semi-circular stone retaining wall that could have supported a fence to delineate this side yard area from the adjacent mill yard.

The archaeological investigations also recovered over 120,000 artifacts mostly dating from the mid to late 1800s. Artifact types include a wide range of ceramics (table and tea wares), glassware, medicine bottles, metal tools, silverware, and personal items including buttons, clothing and shoe grommets and leather, pipe stems and bowls, sewing items, pendants, buckles, children's toys, combs, gun flints, etc. along with structural debris (window glass, nails, door and window hardware, brick, mortar, slate shingles). Food remains include butchered cow and pig bone, shellfish, fish bones. The recovered archaeological data will be subjected to laboratory processing and analyses in the winter/spring of 2012 to address site density, complexity, age, and integrity as well as site-specific research themes relating to the construction and use of domestic/tenement space and lifeways of the mill owners/workers who occupied the site in the nineteenth century.



PAL field crew excavating and recording artifacts inside the Stone House foundation – area of center chimney.



Stone-lined well remains in courtyard area on west side of the Stone House foundation.

