

Collecting From The Past

A Family Tradition

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John Domenic, Collector of Native American Artifacts

John Domenic is a self described collector of Native American artifacts. Such a brief description of John's hobby does not adequately describe the quality and quantity of artifacts that he has acquired over a lifetime of collecting. An afternoon visit with the gentleman reveals a quiet passion for finding and interpreting objects that were part of Native American occupations in the region.

His hobby began on the family farm located near McCoole, Maryland. "My dad started finding artifacts when he was a boy working on the farm. Then, dad got me started when I was about 12 years old. Next, my mother started to hunt with us. We all enjoyed finding artifacts and our farm was a good place to look because it was a Native American camp."

The Domenic family collection spans more than eight decades and includes thousands of local artifacts. "Over the years I found celts, grooved axes, points (arrow heads), pottery, flint awls, scrapers, pipes, hammer stones, cup stones, stone and shell beads, beaver tooth chisels, atl-atls, shell pendants, necklaces, and even a bone fish hook." In the process of finding Native American artifacts, John also located interesting items of general interest, including old coins, buttons, tools, Civil War bullets, and gun flints.

Some of the artifacts yield information about the commerce of local Native Americans. Glass beads, manufactured in England, were initially traded with the Susquehannocks, who subsequently used them in bartering with other groups. The glass beads eventually made their way to Western Maryland prior to arrival of white settlers. John's discovery of marginella, marine shells from the Gulf of Mexico used in making necklaces, indicates that a far reaching network of trade was established hundreds of years before Europeans arrived. Varieties of flint and other more exotic materials not found in the region also identify trade patterns.

While some artifacts identify places, others establish time periods. John's collection spans the full range of Native American occupation in Western Maryland, from Clovis to Late Woodland, a time frame of about 10,000 years. According to John, the more exotic materials such as Jasper were more typical of early inhabitants, while the more common materials such as chert are likely to be dated later. "When someone finds a small crude arrowhead, they sometimes assume it is really old. That usually isn't the case.

Facing page: John with his fluted Clovis spearpoint.

Below: Some of the many stone tools in John's collection – Celts, Grooved Axes, Cup Stones and Scrapers.





Instead, it is usually a case of diminishing technology. The small triangular points were the last examples of Native American technology. The further back in time, the more likely it is that points will be larger and have better workmanship.”

John’s knowledge increased with each discovery but was accelerated when his family responded to a call from archaeologist, Dr. Robert Wall, to assist in excavating a site at Cresaptown. “I worked with Dr. Wall in 1984, and he was great with helping me identify artifacts from different time periods. Dr. Wall also has field schools where I volunteer. We have university students, high school students, Boy Scouts, and other interested people. Volunteers are welcome.” Dr. Wall has organized many archeological sites in Western Maryland and developed friendships among the volunteers. Some of the other sites where John assisted were Barton, Sang Run, Ashby’s Fort, Rosenstock (near Frederick), and Mexico Farms.

John’s discoveries are also of interest because they were once a part of people’s everyday lives; now, mysteries surround them. Part of the fun is to speculate about how old objects arrived in Allegany County. The discovery of one small metal button has provided for plenty of speculation. “My dad and I were walking at the Barton site where an old log building had been pushed over by a bulldozer. Dad spotted a button, and after he picked it up, we noticed that it was marked with a rampant lion. The button turned out to be from the Revolutionary War. So, how did a British button find its way to Rawlings, Maryland? I think that it may have belonged to Moses Rawlings who was in charge of British prisoners at Fort Frederick in the Revolutionary War. Rawlings may have taken it from a British soldier and brought it back to Western Maryland; no one will ever know for sure.”

Each item in the collection has a companion story, and John quietly and patiently describes each one and the circumstances of where it was found. One unusual find was not far from home; “I found a cache of points down the road from our house. The points were pre-formed and made out of chert. The person who made the points probably buried them figuring that he would dig them up later. There were seven points in the cache.”

What is his most significant discovery? “Probably my most important discovery was a fluted Clovis point that I



A sampling of artifacts in John’s collection:

1. a 2-hole drilled gorget; 2. carved stone turtle effigy; 3. opaque Chalcedony serrated point; 4. stone pendant; 5. Trilobite fossil; as well as examples of points (arrow heads) and spearpoints.

found at the furthest point west in the Barton Conservatory. This is the oldest complete Clovis point found in Western Maryland.” The find is significant because Clovis artifacts are dated back to circa 8,000 BCE. The large points, like the fluted Clovis ones, are usually easier to see than the tiny artifacts. “The hardest to find are glass beads. You really have to look carefully because they are so small.”

Just like the Native Americans who undoubtedly had favorite hunting grounds hundreds of years ago, John prefers certain sites. “My favorite places are the Keyser Industrial Park, Patterson’s Creek, Ashby’s Fort, Cresaptown, and the Barton site.”

While John has spent a lifetime finding artifacts, the ones he will not uncover are burial sites. “Burial sites are never disturbed.” Nor does he dig for relics—only surface artifacts are collected.

Now a retiree from NewPage Corporation, John is able to enjoy collecting as he wishes. “I just enjoy doing it and making new friends.” And what advice can an experienced collector offer to novices—“You just have to keep looking.”

John is a member of the Western Maryland Chapter – Archeological Society of Maryland and the Archaeological Conservancy of Albuquerque, New Mexico.



Below: John's mother, Carrie's favorite point; Revolutionary War British brass button; and a carved bone fish hook (all actual size).



Above: Some of the many triangular points in John's collection.

Right: Fluted Clovis point dating back to circa 8,000 BCE; possibly the oldest complete Clovis point found in Western Maryland.

Below: Some of John's bead and pendant collection: 1. shell beads; 2. European glass trade beads; 3. antler drift; 4. stone beads; 5. Copper tinklers; 6. Copper beaver effigy pendant; 7. Marginella shell beads; 8. polished bone beads; 9. shell beads; 10. bone or antler pendants & bone fish hook; and 11. shell pendants.

