

Life along the Maritje Kill

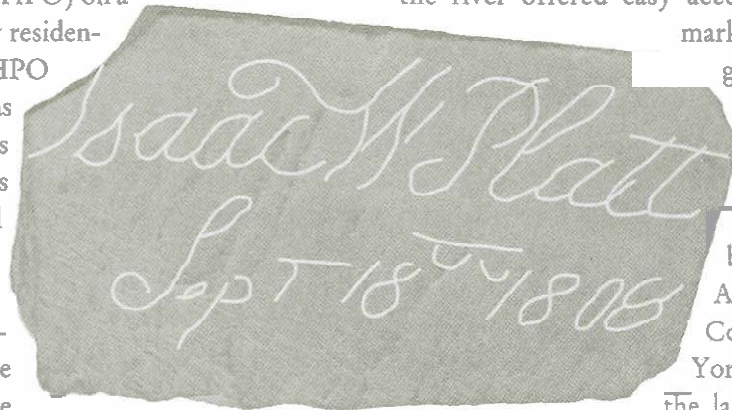
Just south of Hyde Park, where the Maritje Kill (or stream) winds its way through woodlands and ravines to the Hudson River, a fascinating archaeological site was recently documented on the campus of the Culinary Institute of America. The five-acre site contains an extraordinary collection of artifacts and features providing evidence of more than 3,600 years of human activity. The Maritje Kill Site was discovered when the Culinary Institute consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on a construction project to create a new residential complex on the campus. The SHPO required the archaeological survey as part of its review of the project's federal Army Corps of Engineers permit application. After an initial investigation of the site revealed evidence of significant archaeological remains, a more in-depth examination was undertaken to determine the site's eligibility for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Funded by the Culinary Institute and conducted by Landmark Archaeology, Inc., the comprehensive year-long study included detailed research and excavation of several large areas across the site. The exploration culminated in the assemblage of an extensive archaeological record of human behavior from the Late Archaic prehistoric period (c1700 BC) to the mid-twentieth century.

The Hudson River Valley, one of the country's most important transportation corridors, has offered a rich array of natural resources to the people who lived or traveled through the region since prehistoric times. The river was a reliable and abundant source of water, fish, and edible plants, and the lands along the river and its streams were desirable habitats for many of the area's earliest residents. The adjacent old Albany Post Road, which parallels the river, follows one of the region's oldest historic period north-south routes. The site's location between the river and the post road, with the Maritje Kill

running along its northern and western portions, figured prominently in its prehistoric use, early European settlement, and later historic development. Artifacts from the prehistoric period included projectile points, stone tools, and the evidence of stone tool production. This important collection was found below the historic period ground surface in areas of the site that had been limited to cultivation.

Later, during the area's early Euro-American settlement, the river offered easy access to rapidly expanding markets associated with the growth of New York City.

The Albany Post Road provided an additional conduit for transportation, commerce, and trade between Manhattan and Albany. After Dutchess County became one of New York's first counties in 1683, the land along the Maritje Kill



This small piece of slate inscribed with Isaac W. Platt, Sept. 18th, 1808 was found in a large excavated area east of the Maritje Kill.

was part of Water Lot 3 of the original Nine Partners Patent, awarded in 1697. Archaeological investigation dated the

site's earliest historic use to the 1750s. The stream's steep drop near the river made this area an ideal location for early industrial use, and research indicated that a sawmill was present on the Maritje Kill by 1774 and a gristmill by 1789. The latter was owned by Jeremiah Rogers, who was a militia officer on Long Island during the Revolutionary War. The Rogers' family cemetery, which includes the graves of Jeremiah, his son, daughter, and grandson, is located on the west side of the stream, across from the site. A large area of excavation east of the stream uncovered hundreds of artifacts from the last half of the eighteenth century, including ceramics, tobacco pipes, military objects, coins, buttons, buckles, thimbles, and the remains of various domestic animals. A piece of slate inscribed "Isaac W. Platt, Sept. 18th, 1808," was one of the most unusual items found. Platt was the middle name of Jeremiah Rogers'



Some of the thousands of artifacts found on the site, ranging from prehistoric projectile points to eighteenth-century house wares. Courtesy of Landmark Archaeology, Inc.

grandson, who died in 1811.

During the nineteenth century, the site changed hands several times. In the 1820s, the land was part of the estate of James Roosevelt. By the 1860s, Moses Beach had built a “comfortable Hudson River farmhouse” and constructed a series of stone terraces along the stream. During the 1890s, the Webendorfer family (who came to the area from Long Island) acquired the property and transformed the farmstead into a comfortable country estate that included a refurbished main house, barns, outbuildings, and at least one tenant house. Foundation remains of buildings believed to date to Beach’s ownership or earlier and incorporated into the Webendorfer estate were uncovered, as well as cobblestone and rock paving, a stone-lined well, and a clay-lined cistern. A hillside terrace retaining wall was also excavated near the stream, and the remains of a farm outbuilding were uncovered near the wall. Beginning in 1919 and for much of the twentieth century, the Novitiate of St. Andrews owned the estate and used the former Webendorfer house as a rest home. In 1970, the Culinary Institute purchased the property.

The Maritje Kill Site is rare in that it preserves evidence from successive historic eras; more commonly, evidence of previous eras is lost when new groups develop a site. Fortunately, as a result of the archaeological investigations and the significance of the findings, the Culinary Institute revised its project plans to preserve a larger portion of the archaeological

site. Following the excavations, the artifacts were catalogued and organized, and the data is being analyzed and assembled into a final report. This documentation, along with the physical evidence and objects associated with the site, provides a rare opportunity to study and learn about the region’s early history and later development. This important information expands our understanding of prehistoric lifeways in the Hudson River Valley and the history of rural domestic life in the region during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, helping us to envision the various people who may have lived and worked along the Maritje Kill over a long period of time.



A portion of the excavated Maritje Kill site, showing extensive mid-eighteenth-century deposits, including a stone-lined well. Courtesy of Landmark Archaeology, Inc.