

A VILLAGE OF OUTCASTS

Historical Archaeology and Documentary Research
at the Lighthouse Site

KENNETH L. FEDER



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PREFACE

This book presents a case study in historical archaeology. Specifically, it presents the story of the archaeological and documentary investigation of the Lighthouse site in the town of Barkhamsted, Connecticut. It is intended for students in courses in archaeology, anthropology, ethnography, and history, as well as those readers with a general interest in archaeology and history.

A case study in archaeology must work on a number of levels. It should show implicitly by example and explicitly through a detailed discussion of method how an archaeological research project is conducted. In an example such as the subject of this book, the interplay of archaeological fieldwork and documentary analysis also should be detailed. Most important, perhaps, is the discussion of the site itself. After all, it is the story of the people who lived out their lives in the village rather than the discussion of field methodology or deed research that will engage readers. With a story that is by itself compelling, a discussion of methodology becomes more interesting. It seems far easier to encourage interest in how archaeologists do their work when the reader is absorbed in the story that results from that work.

It is difficult not to be drawn into the lives of the inhabitants of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Lighthouse village of northwestern Connecticut. I have attempted to use the story itself to convey to the reader how archaeologists go about the tasks of discovery, data collection, analysis, reconstruction, explanation, and, ultimately, understanding a people now long since passed away.

Included in this case study are chapters on the methodology of documentary research (Chapter 5) and archaeological analysis (Chapter 7). For the reader with minimal background in archaeology, these chapters provide the basics for such analyses. For the student in anthropology, archaeology, or history courses where this book may be used as an adjunct to a primary text, these chapters reinforce the discussion of method presented in such courses. To assist readers, I've placed important terms in *italic* in the text and defined them in a glossary that appears after the narrative.

There is at least one additional level to the telling of this story and to the writing of the book illuminating process and result. The Lighthouse site is important in the history of Connecticut in particular, and of the United States in general. It has recently (1991) been placed on the National Register of Historic Places, a national "honor roll" of important sites in American history and prehistory. As a multicultural, multiracial settlement, the Lighthouse is a part of American history that remains largely unwritten. Though couched in legend and myth, the Lighthouse was a real place with real inhabitants. Their story, preserved primarily in the archaeological and documentary records, deserves telling. I can only hope that in the researching of their lives, and in the telling of their story, this book does them justice.

Acknowledgments

An archaeological project like the one described represents the coordinated efforts of many people; I'd like to acknowledge here those who helped illuminate the story of the Lighthouse.

First, thanks are due to all the kind people of Barkhamsted and New Hartford who shared their knowledge of the Lighthouse legend. I especially would like to thank Douglas Roberts, town historian of Barkhamsted. Mr. Roberts has always been generous with his time and extensive historical knowledge of the region in general and the Lighthouse in particular. Thanks as well go to Mark Aaron, Nina Farrell, Beverly Ganung, Walt Landgraf, Mary Nason, Beatrice Osden, and Ben Warner for sharing their knowledge of the Chaughams, Peoples State Forest, and other local lore.

Thanks as well go to the Chaugham descendants who contacted me to help in my investigation. A special thanks is due to Raymond H. Ellis, a seventh-generation descendant of James and Molly. I greatly appreciate the information Mr. Ellis supplied, and I'm glad that it was my work that got him finally to visit the home of his fascinating ancestors.

I also thank the clerks in various town halls throughout Connecticut for their help in tracking down the primary documents associated with the inhabitants of the Lighthouse. Of special note was the kind and generous assistance of Nancy Winn, town clerk of Barkhamsted. Thanks are also due to the staff of the Connecticut State Library, Genealogical Division, as well as the staff of the Connecticut Historical Society.

Without the support and cooperation of the State of Connecticut, the Lighthouse project would have been impossible. Thanks to David Poirier of the Connecticut Historical Commission, Connecticut State Archaeologist Nick Bellantoni, and Anthony Cantele of the Department of Environmental Protection for granting permission to excavate the site and for all of their assistance and support. The original project in 1986 during which I first encountered the Lighthouse was supported by a Preservation and Planning Survey Grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior, administered by the Connecticut Historical Commission.

Thanks are also due to Arts and Sciences Dean George Clark and Vice President of Academic Affairs Karen Beyard, both of Central Connecticut State University, for supporting my research in spirit as well as through research release time and financial assistance.

I cannot forget the many students who contributed their time and labor to excavating the Lighthouse site, analyzing the material culture recovered there, and assisting in the documentary research. They all made important contributions, each in his or her own way. Thanks to the 1986 team involved in initially surveying the site: Marc Banks, Barbara Calogero, Dan Childers, Mark Dunacusky, Tina Thivierge, Marina Mozzi, and Bill Murdoch. Thanks to the field crew of 1990 for their work in the preliminary excavation: Joy Ambruso, Ron Breeze, John Danbury, Donna Davis, Fran Ellisio, Linda Ely, Barbara Gribbon, Rita Mushinsky, Rick Pullman, Emily Rushin, Sheila Szabo, Joe

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I wish to especially thank historical archaeologist Robert F. Gradie for his enormous contribution to the analysis of the material culture at the Lighthouse. Bob is the most experienced and knowledgeable person I know concerning seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century European-American material culture. Bob spent more than a year making the long trip from his home in eastern Connecticut to my New Britain campus lab to go over the more than 12,000 artifacts recovered at the Lighthouse. Without his assistance, the analysis of the Lighthouse artifacts would have been impossible.

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Once again I owe a debt of gratitude to the folks at Mayfield. This is my third book with Mayfield, and the magic they accomplish in taking a rough manuscript and transforming it into a polished book never ceases to amaze me. Thanks to sponsoring editor Jan Beatty, production editor Lynn Rabin Bauer, and copy editor Colleen O'Brien. Thanks also to my colleagues who reviewed the manuscript and whose suggestions contributed greatly to this work: Christopher R. DeCorse, Syracuse University; William A. Turnbaugh, University of Rhode Island; and W. H. Wills, University of New Mexico.

Finally, after writing a book about a remarkable family, I wish to thank my own remarkable family. My wife Melissa is my gentlest critic, my most understanding partner, my most patient sounding board, and my best friend. Our son Josh helped at the site, showed interest in what I was devoting so much of my time to, and is the only one who actually wears the field school T-shirt ("My Life Is in Ruins," indeed!) And I must not forget to thank Jacob, whose recent birth reminded me that we each are part of our own "generations speeding onward."

***To James and Molly
and the
“generations speeding onward”***

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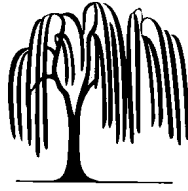
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Chapter 1

ENCOUNTERING THE LIGHTHOUSE

A true “lighthouse” is a beacon directing the lost to safe harbor. Its light shines to guide the return of sailors and fishermen to their homes. The settlement that is the focus of this book, though so named, was not a lighthouse at all, at least not in the ordinary sense. It was, instead, a rural, pioneer village made up of a fascinating mixture of Native Americans (Indians), whites, and descendants of African-American slaves. The lives of the inhabitants of this multiethnic/multicultural/multiracial village—and the procedures employed in illuminating their lives—are the focuses of this book.

After spending 15 straight days in the field at the archaeological site created by the inhabitants of the legendary “Lighthouse” village (Figure 1.1), I employed the final four weeks of the summer of 1990 laying the groundwork for the documentary research of the lives of the Lighthouse inhabitants. Early in this phase of the research I worked in the vault of the Barkhamsted town hall where local historical records—tax lists, deed transferals, and *vital records* (births, deaths, and marriages)—are housed. This was decidedly the cleaner part of the research, not to mention the cooler. Nevertheless, this was a crucial part of the investigation, and I was, in a very real sense, “digging” in the documents (see Chapters 5 and 6).

As a branch of the social science of *anthropology*, *archaeology* focuses not on the admittedly fascinating objects we unearth—the ancient burials, spear points, pots, or jewelry; nor on the remarkable documents we examine—the hieroglyphic texts or cuneiform records. Our primary desire is not to fill museums with fabulous treasure but to contribute to an understanding of the human species by examining the lives of people who have long since



Figure 1.1 Archaeology at the Lighthouse site. Archaeologists search for the material evidence of human activities. It is this physical evidence that enables us to study the lives of those who left no written record documenting their own existence and to assess the veracity of records left by those who did.

passed into the dim mists of time. We accomplish this by recovering and examining the objects and records left by these people.

Archaeologists do not study artifacts and written records just because we find them interesting; we spend so much of our time searching for, recovering, and analyzing these things because we are caught in a quandary: If we wish to know more about people who lived in the past, virtually all we have left are the things they made and used, and, if they were a literate people, the documentary records they left behind. Of course such things as ancient cave paintings, flaked stone tools, and poetry inked onto sheets of papyrus are intrinsically fascinating. So you will not hear archaeologists complain too loudly or too often about the kinds of data we are “stuck” with.

As a result, archaeologists admit—perhaps grudgingly—that, although our work bears little resemblance to that of Indiana Jones, there is nonetheless a visceral element to our enterprise that goes deeper than our righteously held scientific objectivity. No archaeologist can, or should, deny the remarkable feeling that comes with the work. There is something quite extraordinary about holding an object just unearthed or perusing a document just

encountered. These things resonate with the lives of long-dead people and create, even in the most hardened of us, a feeling that transcends time and objectivity. A human being who lived hundreds, thousands, or even millions of years ago, a human being in many ways like you or me, with hopes, fears, aspirations, and loves, made and used a tool, wrote a letter, or left an official record of his or her passing. The tool was lost, the letter hidden away, the document filed and forgotten. Now, that human being is gone and all that remains to mark his or her existence is the tool that you now hold in your hand, the fragment of a letter, or the official record of birth or death. And yet, although that person is gone, he or she is not forgotten, and the object recovered by the archaeologist, the letter recovered from oblivion, or the documentary record left unexamined for so many years seems to us to reverberate with the life of that long-gone individual.

With each discovery at the Lighthouse site in that first season of archaeological research, we were making just that sort of contact. (See Chapters 8 and 9.) But nothing prepared me for what I was to encounter at the Barkhamsted, Connecticut town hall vault when our field season was over.

Primarily a prehistoric sites archaeologist, I had become somewhat inured to discovering an object created so many years ago and being the first human since to touch it and ponder the life of its creator. Perhaps I had become blasé because my prehistoric finds were always anonymous. On that summer afternoon in the Barkhamsted town hall vault, however, for me the people of the Lighthouse were to forever lose their anonymity.

I glanced down the listing of births in Barkhamsted for 1858. (See Chapter 6.) Reviewing the records had been an extremely tedious job. The old index for the vital records was incomplete. This necessitated my carefully examining each page of the old volume and looking for names that I recognized from Lewis Mills's legendary account of the village (Chapters 3 and 4). The vital records were all handwritten, the pages yellowed and brittle; there were ink stains, water stains, and rips, and some sections were missing entirely.

The records were arranged in a series of columns. These columns organized the information considered to be significant by the record keepers of nineteenth-century Connecticut: date of birth, names of parents, baby's name, sex of the child, "color" of the parents, "color" of the child, and place of parents' residence. I spent several hours skimming the columns of the birth records, looking for any clues about the inhabitants of the Lighthouse.

I was not enormously confident that I would find anything significant. The people who lived at the Lighthouse were far out of the mainstream, outside the reach, I feared, even of regular record keeping. Yet, surprisingly, names I recognized from the Lighthouse legend began to turn up in the vital records. And there, on the page listing Barkhamsted births in May of 1858, was the most interesting of all the records I had yet seen (Figure 1.2).

A baby was born in Barkhamsted on May 14, 1858. Solomon and Mary Webster were listed as the parents. On a previous page, Solomon's father,

Report of Births in the Town of Barkhamsted						
Month	Name	Sex	Name of Parents	Age	Color	Residence
April 31	Salmon Knoll	Male	Carleton Howel	36	White	Barkhamsted
+			Harriet E. "	30		
April 24		Female	Charles M. Burnell	30	White	Lenny Map
+			Frances J. "	21		
April 26		Female	Orville Leburn	30	White	Barkhamsted
+			Emily E. "	25		
May 3		Male	Henry H. Payne	39	White	Barkhamsted
+			Mary Ann "	36		
May 14		Female	Solomon Webster	30	Nearly White	Barkhamsted
+			Mary "	27		Light House
Sept 16		Male	Calvin Tiffany	23	White	Barkhamsted
+			Annetta " "	21	"	
Dec. 10		Female	Milo H. Case	27	White	Barkhamsted
+	Mary		Harriet M. Case	23	"	
Dec 20		Female	Arion L Lane	44	White	Barkhamsted
+			Julia S. "	37	"	
Nov 20		Male	Tolson T Slade	not	White	Barkhamsted
+			Julia M Slade	name		
Sept 10	Moore	Female	Affa Moore	34	White	Barkhamsted
+			"	29		
Oct 13	Loody	Male	Henry Loody	33	White	Barkhamsted
+			"	23		
Dec 1	Van Noort	Female	Jas Van Noort	31	White	Barkhamsted
+			"	29		
Dec 30	Hull	Female	Charles Hull	25	White	Barkhamsted
+			"	25		

Figure 1.2 Official list of births for the town of Barkhamsted, Connecticut between April and December 1858. Note the listing for the birth of Solomon and Mary Webster's "Nearly White" baby on May 14. Their place of residence is officially listed in these town records as "Barkhamsted Light House."

Montgomery Webster, was listed and his color was given as Mohegan, an Indian tribal name in southern and eastern Connecticut. Solomon's mother, Sibel, was listed as being Creole. Sol's wife Mary, as we shall see, was a direct descendant of the original settlers of the Lighthouse village—Molly Barber, a white woman, and James Chaugham, her Narragansett Indian husband.

Under the column heading "Color," most of the babies on the page bore the designation "White." On other pages, babies bore the designation "Negro," and there were a few labeled "Creole," or mixed. Sol and Mary's child bore none of the common designators for its color. In fact, its racial category was unique in the entire volume of Barkhamsted's vital records: Sol and Mary's baby was listed as "Nearly White."

But it was the column for parental residence that so astonished me. The town of Barkhamsted is one of 169 incorporated Connecticut towns. Within many of these towns are smaller entities with names but little or no political significance. Within the boundaries of the town of Barkhamsted in 1858, for example, were the villages of Pleasant Valley and Hitchcocksville (now called Riverton). In the parental residence column in the town's vital records, most parents were listed as living in Barkhamsted. A few were listed as living in Pleasant Valley, a few in Hitchcocksville. Just as the Webster baby bore a unique listing for its race, Sol and Mary Webster had a unique designation for their place of residence. It was given as "Barkhamsted Light House." This was the first official document I had seen that listed the Lighthouse as an actual, recognized community (see Figure 1.2).

Through the discovery of a 132-year-old, handwritten entry on the brittle page of a town record, an initially enigmatic settlement name taken from a legend had become for me a concrete reality where real people had lived out their lives. The artifacts we had been excavating were no longer merely archaeological data to be used in the scientific examination of a historical legend; they could no longer be just means to an end—satisfying my curiosity about the historicity of a legend. I began to understand on an emotional level what I had always known on an intellectual level: These were the belongings of real people from a real place. We were no longer excavating just "data" from anonymous individuals. These artifacts had been the meager possessions of Mary and Sol, of James and Molly, of Isaac and Samuel, and of all the others we were to meet in our study of the Lighthouse village.

This book details the archaeological and documentary study of the inhabitants of the fascinating place called the Barkhamsted Lighthouse and presents both the process and results of our investigation of the site. As a case study in *historical archaeology*, this book must first place the research conducted within the context of historical archaeology in general. Chapter 2 focuses on the nature of the archaeology of our own historical period.



Chapter 2

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF HISTORY

Perhaps the great satirist Ambrose Bierce said it best in his *Devil's Dictionary* when he defined “history” as “an account mostly false, of events mostly unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools” (Bierce 1911:57). To be fair, we should add that he defined “prehistoric” as “belonging to an early period—and a museum” (Bierce 1911:103).

Others have defined history similarly. Archaeologist James Deetz has characterized the historical record as “the story of wealthy, white males” (Deetz 1980). In a similar vein, a common cliché maintains that “history is written only by the winners.” Winston Churchill expressed this same perspective in a personal manner: “History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.” For Voltaire, “History is a pack of cards with which we play tricks on the dead.” Napoleon Bonaparte is supposed to have said, “What is history but a fable agreed upon?”

The point being made by these various thinkers, if somewhat exaggerated, is well taken. Particularly in the centuries preceding our own, history, as reflected by the written record, concentrates on the lives and accomplishments of “important” people. These are Bierce’s knavish “rulers”—kings and pharaohs, emperors and princes, presidents and premiers—and his foolish “soldiers”—the generals responsible for implementing the military dictates of those rulers. For the most part, common people—peasants, farmers, factory workers, and slaves—were ignored. These ordinary people, who in every period constitute the majority of the population, are barely visible historically. People on the margins of society, ordinarily not accounted for by the ruling group, even for purposes of administration, taxation, or conscription, are virtually invisible.