

Indians and artifacts in the Westlands

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Historians have established the fact that the land in and around Chelmsford was inhabited by American Indians long before the white settlers arrived. It is known that Indians camped and fished at Pawtucket Falls in what is now Lowell, and Chief Robin had a corn field on the hill to which he gave his name, Robin's Hill.

It is also believed that the native Americans probably had a campground on what was known as Carolina Plain, a sandy area at the end of Hidden Way, off Dalton Road, because of the large number of Indian artifacts uncovered there.

Mr. Edwin L. Stearns, who lived at 16 Stedman Street for many years, amassed a collection of more than 300 arrowheads and almost as many more varied implements and decorative pieces from his back yard.

While digging out the stumps of trees overturned by the 1938 hurricane, Mr. Stearns noticed several groupings of stones about a foot beneath the surface of the ground. He piled the different groups on the surface above where they had been resting.

One day he noticed there was a regularity, or design, in the locations of the piles. They were all 20 or 25 feet apart and in straight rows. Closer examination of the stones, all of which were of a size which could be held easily in one hand, revealed that they

The way It was

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showed unmistakable signs of fire and heat. With further digging, guided by the first indications of regularity, he found six rows of stone groupings, with seven or eight piles in each row.

Although it has been suggested that early American settlers might have piled these stones in clearing the land, the regularity and signs of heat and fire give credence to the possibility that they formed campfires in an Indian settlement, perhaps seasonal.

The theory is further supported by the presence of nearby Golden Cove Brook, which was mentioned in old deeds 300 years ago, and there was some evidence that a 40-foot beaver dam may once have created a sizeable pond of clear water that would be an excellent campground inducement.

Among the objects which Mr. Stearns found are pestles, a foot and longer, and stones which were used to grind corn,

grains, and nuts in stone mortars. Sometimes these club-like stones were grooved at one end so that a thong could be attached to the branch of a tree, or a leaning birch, and the stone could be raised and lowered with less exertion.

Also, round "Muller" stones, which fit the palm of the hand, were uncovered. These were probably used for scraping the flesh from hides. Some of these appear to have been used as hammers.

A piece of quartz may have been used as a "boiling stone," heated and dropped into water in a bark pall to warm the water.

Even archaeologists disagree on the uses of some specimens. However, experts in the field viewed the collection and identified most of the stones. These included weights for fish nets, gouges, drills, flint knives, grooved stone axeheads, chisels, hammers, ceremonial pieces, mauls, arrowheads of various types and spearheads.

The greater part of Mr. Stearns collection of Indian artifacts is now owned by the Chelmsford Historical Society and may be examined at their museum at the Barrett-Byam House at 40 Byam Road.

George Adams Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in since 1654.