

## The Gnagey Site and the Monongahela Occupation of the Somerset Plateau

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With Appendices by  
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### ABSTRACT

The Gnagey Site, excavated in 1973-74 by the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, was a twice-occupied Monongahela village site located on the Somerset Plateau of southwestern Pennsylvania. Artifact and settlement pattern attributes related to the first occupation, dated between A.D. 920 and 1030, indicate a cultural continuum from Middle Woodland. The dates also confirm the hypothesized beginnings of nucleated village life in the Upper Ohio Valley by horticulturalist hunter-gatherers. Between A.D. 1085 and 1190, the site was reoccupied, presumably by the same village group that was being influenced both by Monongahela populations to the west and by central Appalachian Late Woodland populations to the east and south.

The concept of catchment area resource utilization is applicable to the Gnagey village since it was located within one of three Late Woodland site clusters that exhibited spatially constricted separation within a mountainous region believed to have been environmentally restrictive. Data produced by Works Progress Administration excavations in the 1930's were utilized to formulate these models.

The Montague-Quemahoning sites' artifact assemblages are discussed as the product of a population alien to the Somerset Plateau. Their relationship to other Drew Phase Monongahela assemblages is noted as is the minor but significant recurrence of Clemson's Island pottery on Somerset Plateau Monongahela village sites. Two poorly represented later utilizations of the Gnagey site are also briefly discussed.

### INTRODUCTION

On June 26, 1972, the author was notified by Vera Jane Hoffman of the Somerset County Archeological Society, Inc. of possible archaeological site destruction by highway construction in southern Somerset County, Pennsylvania. An article in the *Meyersdale Republican* (22 June 1972) stated that Sections 8 and 9 of new Route 219 were to be soon built in the Meyersdale area. After obtaining blue prints of the proposed right-

of-way from District 9.0, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in Hollidaysburg, the impact area was visited in the company of Somerset County Archeological Society members. It was determined that at least two prehistoric sites were in danger of destruction. These were the Kinsinger site (36SO51) and the Gnagey #3 site (36SO55) which will hereafter be referred to as the Gnagey site.

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Numerous people were involved in the investigation of the Gnagey site. Volunteers from the Somerset and Connomoch Chapters of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology devoted many hours of fieldwork and I thank them; especially Vera Jane Hoffman and Francis and Robert Strayer, who spent uncounted hours at the site. Paid field crew members who put up with my idiosyncrasies included David Banks, Gerald Lang, Allen Rankin, Thomas Reilly, Mark Ritenour and Fred Veigh.

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rare that only one was recovered, but at some Somerset Plateau sites, *Marginella* beads were plentiful. There were 371 found at Peck #2 (Cresson n.d.: 75) and five other sites produced the artifact type. They apparently were frequently found around wrists (Cresson n.d.: 75) where they were thought to have been bracelet elements. *Marginella* beads occur on the Atlantic coast from North Carolina south. Their rarity at Gnagey and presence on Peck and other Somerset Plateau sites may have temporal connotations related to the appearance of exotic shell beads at later sites.

### **Eighteenth Century Occupation**

H. Austin Cooper (1962: 11) indicates that at least by 1726, and perhaps as early as 1718, there were English trappers trading in the Stoney Creek area. Less than 20 artifacts of non-Indian origin from the Gnagey site could relate to early eighteenth century trapper incursions into Somerset County. All but one were found in shallow proveniences and no potentially related structure was located.

#### *Beads*

Other than a blue seed bead that could be very recent, only four large wire wound beads were found. Two of these are opaque black, slightly flattened spheres (Fig. 40:a). Maximum diameters of both are 10 mm and the eyes have diameters of 3 mm. An oyster white bead (Fig. 40:b) has the same dimensions. Another oyster white bead (Fig. 40:c) is donut-shaped with a maximum diameter of 11 mm. The eye's diameter is between 3 and 4 mm. Beads of close size-color affinities have been found at the Whitney site in New York state. Pratt (1961: 15-16) indicates that this site dates between 1710 and 1745. The 1673-1763 Conestoga Indian Town in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, produced large white beads similar to those from Gnagey (Fenstermaker 1974: 7).

#### *Gunflints*

Six gunflints or strike-a-light flints were found. Three of these, probably of Dutch origin, are

wedge-shaped reflecting Clactonian flaking technique (Witthoft 1966: 26). Only one (Fig. 40:d) retains a basic gunflint form while the other two (Fig. 40:e) have been reduced in size by use. All edges are extensively spalled.

The other three have concave upper surfaces typical of French blade flints (Blanchette 1975: 45-50), which were made by sectioning long flint blades. Two of the Gnagey flints are of mottled gray flint (Fig. 40:f) and one is brown (Fig. 40:g). All three exhibit extreme edge wear damage and the former two no longer even retain a flat bottom face. Both Dutch and French flints were used during the eighteenth century. The reduced size of the Gnagey flints could reflect their scarcity in an eighteenth century frontier area.

#### *Musket Ball*

A single 10-mm diameter lead musket ball (Fig. 40:h) was a surface find.

#### *Ball Clay Pipes*

Six stem sections (Fig. 40:i) and one bowl fragment of ball clay may have been associated with the other eighteenth century artifacts. Enough of the bowl (Fig. 40:j) remains to indicate an outside diameter of 21 mm. The smoke hole at the bottom of the undecorated bowl is 6/64" in diameter. Three of the stem bores have diameters of 6/64" and three, 5/64". Several people have shown that ball clay pipe stem bore diameters increased through time (Hanson 1969: 2) and that they sometimes can be used to date sites. However, the Gnagey sample is too small to be an effective dating tool.

#### *Brass Fragment*

An 11-mm long trianguloid piece of brass was recovered from Feature 81, a 7.0 × 6.6-foot postmold lined pit that was apparently intrusive into House 5. Charcoal from a hearth within the feature was assayed at A.D. 1720 ± 70 (GAK-5348) corrected to A.D. 1630. Dr. J. Alfred Berger, Department of Metallurgical and Materials Engineering, University of Pittsburgh, subjected the brass fragment to micrography analysis. He indicated that it has "an Alpha

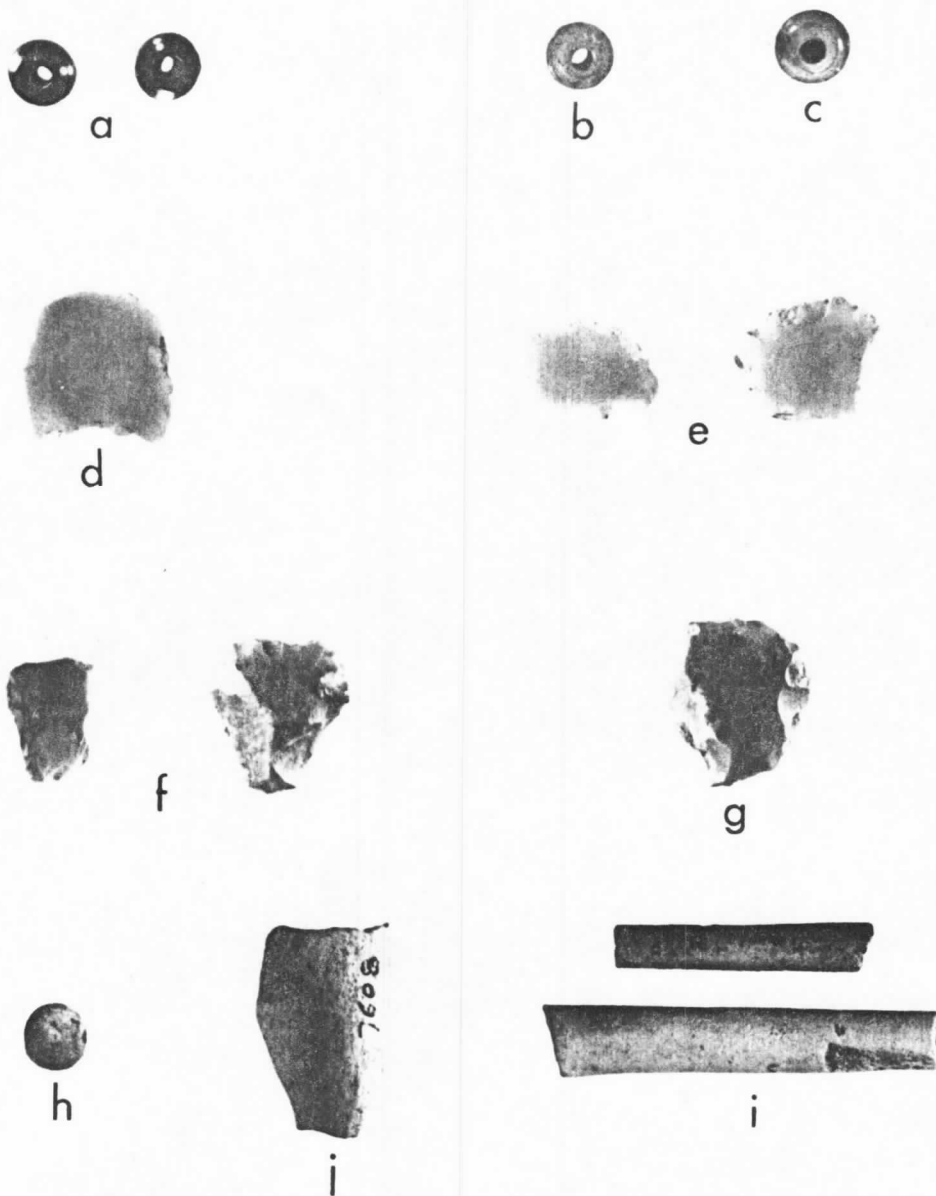


Fig. 40. Eighteenth Century Artifacts: Opaque black wire wound beads; b-c. Oyster white wire wound beads; d-g. Gunflints; h. Musket ball; i. Kaolin pipe stem fragments; j. Kaolin pipe bow.