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October 14, 2005

Archaeology Task Force  
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation  
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 809  
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Working Principles for the Treatment of Human Remains and Funerary Objects

Dear Task Force Members:

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Maine appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Working Principles for Revising the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's "Policy Statement Regarding Treatment of Human Remains and Grave Goods" (*Federal Register* 70[169]). Our comments are limited to Principle 4, which concerns consultation with all interested parties and considerations of their views subject to other federal and state laws.

Maine NRCS believes that the Advisory Council has an opportunity with this Principle to provide welcome guidance for federal agencies to follow when dealing with undertakings that affect abandoned and forgotten (and often unmarked) human remains and funerary objects. As you know, federal agencies need to make a "reasonable and good faith effort" to identify Native Americans and to seek other members of the public for consultation during Section 106 reviews (36 CFR 800.2[c][2][ii][A] and 800.2[d][1]). The long duration of archaeological time, the effects of migration, the interactions of different cultural groups in the same regions, and the presence of alternative value systems can all confound attempts to determine what is a reasonable and good faith effort to locate Native Americans who may believe identified human remains and funerary objects are significant. (The enclosed article, "Nanticoke Indian Burial Practices: Challenges for Archaeological Interpretation," provides examples of some of these difficulties.) Likewise, family movements, dying out of family lines, and incomplete historical records can make the identification of living relatives of those buried in non-Native American graves problematic.

We suggest that the Task Force provide federal agencies with clear examples or guidelines in Principle 4 to illustrate what are considered to be reasonable and unreasonable efforts when identifying consulting parties for the abandoned, forgotten graves.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Gary Shaffer, Archaeologist, of my staff at 207-990-9566 or email [gary.shaffer@me.usda.gov](mailto:gary.shaffer@me.usda.gov).

Sincerely,



# NANTICOKE INDIAN BURIAL PRACTICES: CHALLENGES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

Gary D. Shaffer

*This paper compiles firsthand and contemporary accounts of human burial practices of the Nanticoke Indians and identifies implications of these traditions for archaeological interpretation and repatriation. The Nanticokes, first encountered by Europeans on the Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay, were known for disinterring primary inhumations in order to clean bones and reinter them in local ossuaries or in secondary burials at new settlements. Assembled descriptions of mortuary customs include original translations of eighteenth-century German diaries of Moravian missionaries. Consideration of the reported burial behavior of the migrating Nanticokes indicates several challenges for archaeologists in associating interments with specific cultural groups.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper compiles firsthand and other contemporary accounts of human burial practices of the Nanticoke Indians and identifies implications of these traditions for archaeological interpretation and repatriation. European colonists first encountered the Nanticokes on the Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay. These Euroamericans and their descendants recorded several ethnographic sketches of the Nanticokes that included descriptions of mortuary customs. Nanticokes were known for removing primary burials in order to clean bones and reinter them in local ossuaries or in secondary burials at new settlements—sometimes far removed from the original graves. The current study begins with a summary of certain issues associated with the archaeological examination of Native American burials and with repatriation. It then proceeds to a discussion of Nanticoke history from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries. Next, there is a presentation of the assembled descriptions of Nanticoke mortuary customs that include original translations of eighteenth-century German diaries of Moravian missionaries. Finally, a consideration of the burial behavior of the migrating Nanticokes illustrates several challenges for archaeologists in associating interments with specific cultural groups. These challenges, of course, would raise difficulties in assessing cultural affiliation of human remains for repatriation.

## ARCHAEOLOGY, NATIVE AMERICAN BURIALS, AND REPATRIATION

This section summarizes certain elements of controversies about Native Americans and archaeology and about repatriation of human remains so as to provide some context for the discussion of Nanticoke mortuary practices. Concern with the repatriation of Native American human remains and burial goods is just one part of the debate on the relationship between indigenous peoples and the archaeologists who study their pasts. Much has been written in recent years on how archaeologists interact with the native populations living in the lands where surveys and excavations are done, and these commentaries are not limited to North America

Still, in the last few decades, Native Americans have become more actively involved in archaeology. This activity is reflected in the emergence of tribal historic preservation programs and the contracting of archaeological services, even if the purpose can be to obtain development monies (Begay 1997; Ferguson 1996; Ferguson et al. 1997; McGuire 1992). Many Native Americans have recognized that archaeologists can help with land claims, tourism, education, and the preservation of sites from destruction (Ferguson 1996; Ferguson et al. 1997; Watkins 2000). At the same time, more archaeologists understand that long-term commitments to collaborating with Native Americans can be necessary for investigating certain regions (McGuire 1992). Increased ethnoarchaeology with place-name research and site and artifact interpretation can provide more complete characterizations of archaeological resources (Ferguson et al. 1997; Greer 1997; Passamaquoddy Tribe 2004). Archaeologists might engender trust from Native Americans by asking about tribal goals for archaeology when formulating research strategies and by incorporating the different ways of viewing the past into complementary scientific and humanistic interpretations of material culture (Ferguson 1996; Kristmanson 1997; McGuire 1992; Rice 1997). In the latter regard, North American archaeologists may wish to acquaint themselves better with the methods of the *Annales* school, whose proponents study the past at several scales of time by combining the data and strengths of several disciplines (e.g., Bintliff 1991; Knapp 1992).

Within this larger context of the relationships between North American archaeologists and Native Americans arose the intense debate on the repatriation of human remains and burial goods. Native Americans became more aware of past excesses in medical and physical anthropological studies of aboriginal peoples; and, by the later twentieth century, disgust and frustration with archaeological research on burials increased in Native Americans communities (Bray and Killion 1994; Powell et al. 1993:15-17). Some early archaeologists and museum curators seem to have been on missions to obtain as many Indian skeletons as possible, and one recent estimate of the number of Native American individuals whose remains have been excavated ranges from 100,000 to two million (Trope and Echo-Hawk 2001). These excesses and those projects poorly coordinated with native groups led to limitations on field and laboratory investigations of aboriginal burials and to passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990 (25 U.S.C. 3001; Killion 2001).

Archaeologists generally agree that the study of human remains and funerary objects can provide important information on a host of subjects, including past diet, health, population dynamics, evolutionary change, and the variability of mortuary practices (e.g., Brothwell 1972; Brown 1971; Chapman et al. 1981; Pearson 1999; Rose et al. 1996). Of course wholesale repatriation could curtail this activity, even if the studies needed now to assist repatriation provide new data and standards for recordation (Rose et al. 1996). Archaeologists, their colleagues in physical anthropology, and Native Americans hold a number of views on the subject of turning over aboriginal human remains and mortuary items to native communities for reburial (Baker et al. 2001; Rosen 1980). Some scientists wish to accommodate the wishes of Native Americans at least to a degree, while others are adamant that science should prevail against native claims of religious (or sovereignty) rights (e.g., Goldstein and Kintigh 1990; Meighan 1992). Also, some Native Americans appreciate how archaeologists can assist them in describing their pasts and may not request the reburial of certain classes of cultural items, while other Natives may doubt the benefits of mortuary research and insist

involving repatriation will be equally difficult to resolve. However, archaeologists can make certain efforts before these situations arise again in order to achieve a degree of cooperation and understanding. For example, scholars can consult with Native Americans when first developing research plans and try to devise projects that address the interests and concerns of both parties (Goldstein and Kintigh 1990:590; Quick 1985:175; Rose et al. 1996:90; Watkins 2000:172). Archaeologists also can consider together with Native Americans creative approaches to reburial that would permit future study of remains (Sockbeson 1994:161). Still, one of the thorniest issues archaeologists and Native Americans will face is the question of whether the cultural affiliation of ancient remains can be successfully determined. As many archaeologists and anthropologists have indicated, there needs to be careful consideration of the burden of proof in assessing such cases (e.g., Goldstein and Kintigh 1990; Rosen 1980; Watkins 2001). Another challenge for those dealing with repatriation concerns the treatment of the past movements and settlements of different aboriginal groups in areas where other Native Americans now claim a homeland. Human migration, the taking of captives, and excursions for trade and visiting all could have led to burials of various ethnic groups in a single region and complicate assignments of cultural affiliation (e.g., Baker et al. 2001; Sockbeson 1994).

The current research represents one attempt to gather information on the mortuary customs of a Native American group well known for its historical migrations in order to examine how well one might recognize its burials when it entered the regions of other Indians. It is interesting that this strategy of listing burial practices according to native group to sort out cultural affiliation of human remains came up during the 1985 Conference on Reburial Issues sponsored by the Society for American Archaeology and the Society of Professional Archeologists. The suggestion met with less than an enthusiastic response, largely due to the supposed enormity of the project (Quick 1985:164-165). However, "many hands can make for light work," and the present study of Nanticoke burial practices may offer some useful insights for the larger debate on repatriation.

#### LATER NANTICOKE HISTORY

This section highlights several, later historical events and cultural interactions of the Nanticokes to provide further context for the subsequent discussion of the group's mortuary customs. Europeans first encountered the Algonquian speaking Nanticoke Indians in the early seventeenth century within the Nanticoke River drainage of Delaware and of Maryland's Eastern Shore (John Smith, in Arber 1910:414-415; Feest 1978:240-241; Speck 1915:6). Nanticoke oral tradition indicated that the tribe had separated from the Delawares before itself growing in size and splitting into several other groups, including the Conoy (John Heckewelder, in Reichel 1881:90-91). (A description of the Conoy is found in Feest [1978]). From the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century Maryland's colonial government entered into a series of treaties with the Nanticokes. These agreements were to guarantee the Indians' use of reserved lands and their right to hunt and fish; additionally, the treaties regulated judicial and political contacts between the Indians and colonists (Feest 1978:243; Speck 1927:15). Unfortunately, the establishment of the Broad Creek and Chicone (Chicacoan) reservations failed to take into account the Nanticokes' seasonal subsistence strategies,

Nanticokes and others from Maryland moved to settlements of Wyoming in Pennsylvania and Otsiningo and Chemung in New York. While the Nanticokes remained neutral during the French and Indian Wars, they sided with the British during the American Revolution. Consequently, a number of them moved to western New York closer to British troops, arriving at Fort Niagara between 1778 and 1779 and at Buffalo Creek by 1781. Following these hostilities, some of these Indians emigrated to Grand River in Ontario to live with the Six Nations. By the early 1900s some 300 residents of Grand River claimed ancestry from these Nanticokes (Feest 1978:246; Weslager 1983:181-183).

Not all Nanticokes ended up in Ontario. Some went west with the Delawares: for example, going in 1769 from Otsiningo to the largely Munsee village of Goshgoshunk along the Allegheny River near Tionesta, Pennsylvania. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Nanticokes also traveled into Ohio and Indiana and on to Kansas. After 1867 some Nanticokes ended their westward journey in Oklahoma, where, by the early 1900s, a few Indians still recognized their Nanticoke origins despite acculturation with the Delawares (Feest 1978:246; Weslager 1983:186). Other Nanticokes remained on the Delmarva Peninsula in the mid 1700s. Following the sale of the Chicone and Broad Creek reservations in 1768, the numbers of Nanticokes in Dorchester and Worcester counties of Maryland dwindled substantially by the early twentieth century. However, a larger group of "off-reservation" Nanticokes resided primarily in Sussex County, Delaware (Feest 1978:247).

#### **FIRSTHAND AND CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS OF NANTICOKE BURIAL PRACTICES**

Several earlier authors have assembled some information on Nanticoke burial practices (e.g., Bushnell 1920; Davidson 1935; Weslager 1942, 1983). However, the present study attempts to include all available firsthand and contemporary accounts of these mortuary traditions. My research on this subject began in 1998 at the Maryland Historical Trust. The Trust was gathering information on historical Maryland Indians to assist with tribal recognition and other matters. As part of this work, Richard Hughes of the Trust sought data on the Nanticoke Indians in the Moravian Archives (see Fliegel 1970). Moravian missionaries lived and worked mainly with the Delawares, but they had contact with many other tribes including the Nanticokes. The missionaries recorded in diaries day-by-day accounts of events in their settlements, and they summarized these diaries in reports which were submitted to the church headquarters in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, for circulation among Moravian congregations (Nelson 1970).

Hughes found several Moravian records that mentioned the Nanticokes. Since I was able to read the older German handwriting in which the missionaries' entries were written, I offered to translate them. Three of the diary entries (one by Jacob Schmick, two by David Zeisberger) noted Nanticoke burial practices. I transcribed these missionary accounts into German typescript (Appendixes 1 – 3) and then prepared original translations in English. After completing this work, my research interest grew to a study of other firsthand and contemporary accounts of the Nanticoke's mortuary customs. One goal was to examine the persistence of the cultural traditions through time and space, as the Nanticokes migrated from the Delmarva Peninsula. Another was to see how well Nanticoke burials might be distinguished in areas populated in the past by

understand English and used to live in Maryland. He went on to say:

Their customs in divers respects differ from those of other Indians upon this river. They don't bury their dead in a common form, but let their flesh consume above ground in close cribs made for that purpose; and at the end of the year, or perhaps sometimes a longer space of time, they take the bones, when the flesh is all consumed, and wash and scrape them, and afterwards bury them with some ceremony [in Pettit 1985:328].

#### **Provincial Council of Pennsylvania – 1757.**

The secretary for the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania (1851:707) recorded on 6 August 1757 minutes of a meeting held in Easton concerning a Nanticoke request for assistance in the transport of human remains:

After this the three Nanticoke Messengers came to me and congratulated the Governor [William Denny] and myself on the Conclusion of the Peace, and said they had put both their Hands into the Chain of Friendship, as they were ordered by their Chiefs before they left home, and, by a String of Wampum, desired that the Governor might send some Person with them to Lancaster, to take care of them, and supply them with necessaries on the Road, as they were come to take the Bones of their Friends which died at Lancaster to their own Town, to be buried with their Relations.

#### **Heckewelder – 1750s-1780s.**

John Heckewelder (1743-1823), who came at the age of 11 with his parents from England to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, served with Indians at Moravian missions from the 1760s to the 1780s. One of his later projects was to write a description of the work of the Moravians, or Unity of Brethern Church, with the Delaware and Mohegan Indians (Heckewelder 1971 [1820]). Of importance to the present study of Nanticoke, in 1818 he published his *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighbouring States*. In this volume Heckewelder included a description of Nanticoke mortuary behavior based on his conversations with one of their chiefs named "White" and on his own observations. As Heckewelder related White's statements:

These Nanticoke had the singular custom of removing the bones of their deceased friends from the burial place to a place of deposit in the country they dwell in. In earlier times, they were known to go from Wyoming and Chemenk [Chemung?], to fetch the bones of their dead from the Eastern shore of Maryland, even when the bodies were in a putrid state, so that they had to take off the flesh and scrape the bones clean, before they could carry them along [in Reichel 1881:92].<sup>2</sup>

Heckewelder (in Reichel 1881:92) added his personal recollection of having seen Nanticoke burial customs when he was a child or teenager:

I well remember having seen them [Nanticoke] between the years 1750 and 1760, loaded with

(1972:87 [1768]) letter to Rev. John Erskine in 1768 noted, "There is one *Tribe of Indians*, called, *Nanticooks* [sic], that, on their removal from their old to new habitations, carry the bones of their ancestors and deceased relations with them" [emphasis in original]. It is not clear if Beatty actually observed such a custom or if he learned of it from another person.

#### **Zeisberger – 1766.**

David Zeisberger (1721-1808) was born in what is now the Czech Republic, and in 1738 he followed after his parents to America where they were involved with a mission of the Unity of Brethren (Moravian) Church. After helping to found the settlement of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and learning several aboriginal languages, Zeisberger embarked on a 63-year career of conducting Christian missionary work among Native Americans. This service took him from Pennsylvania to New York, Ohio, Michigan, and Ontario. In 1765 Zeisberger and 90 Christian Indians founded the mission of Friedenshütten by the Susquehanna River at Wyalusing, Pennsylvania. Friedenshütten thrived until 1772, when a replacement mission was established at Schönbrunn along the Tuscarawas River in Ohio (Olmstead 1991:xii, 4-8, 1997:141-142). Heckewelder (1971:97-98 [1820]) wrote that in the 1760s members of at least ten Indian groups, including the Nanticokes, visited the Christian Indians at Friedenshütten or at least passed through the settlement. A major attraction of the mission was its provision of food. Zeisberger wrote the following diary entry in Friedenshütten in 1766 (Appendix 1):

February 2nd The sermon was based on today's Gospel. We had a meeting with Anton and Johannes. Among other things it came to light that Sam the Nanticoke had expressed his intention to stay here, about which Anton and Johannes expressed their doubts--to be sure, not because of Sam personally but rather in view of his nation in general. For whenever one of them dies anywhere--no matter where--and is buried, then the friends come, dig him up, cut off all the flesh from his bones and take these with them. Such an instance recently occurred here involving a deceased woman whom they carried through this area; before her death she implored her friends not to do that to her but just to bury her; however, it was all to no avail [Moravian Records 1766: Box 131, Folder 3].<sup>3</sup>

#### **Schmick – 1769.**

Several missionaries, including the Moravian Johann Schmick (1714-1778), recorded the continuation of the distinctive Nanticoke burial practices after the mid-1760s, thereby extending the chronology outlined by Weslager (1983:176). Schmick had helped to found the mission of Friedenshütten with David Zeisberger (Heckewelder 1971:93-94 [1820]). Johann Schmick and his wife, Johanna Heid Schmick, served as head missionaries at Friedenshütten before moving to the Gnadenhütten mission in Ohio (Olmstead 1991:8, 25-26, 1997:209-210). Schmick made the following diary entry in Friedenshütten in September 1769 (Appendix 2):

Tuesday the 26th Several Nanticokes, who yesterday had arrived here from Wajomick with the

Perhaps the most remarkable point raised in this entry is that Nanticoke Indians apparently were transporting the bones of an Indian from another tribe. The individual named George could well have been a Seneca, since members of this Iroquois tribe would travel south of their New York homeland for raiding and trading in the eighteenth century (Abler and Tooker 1978:507). The Senecas themselves may have had several burial customs, but one characteristic practice was first to place the deceased on bark scaffolding or in a tree until the flesh decomposed. Then the bones would be collected and stored in the deceased's former residence or a special bark structure. Finally, after several years or at the occurrence of an event like the relocation of a settlement, skeletons from the entire community would be collected and interred in a common grave (Morgan 1962:172-176 [1851]).

**Zeisberger – 1779-1780.**

Between 1779 and 1780, and while residing in Ohio, David Zeisberger compiled notes on his ethnographic observations of the Indians with whom he had lived in the Northeast (Hulbert and Schwarze 1910:1, 10). His entry concerning the mortuary customs of the Nanticokes added more detail to that given in his 1766 diary entry:

The Nantikoks [sic] ... have this singular custom that about three or four months after the funeral they open the grave, take out the bones, clean them of the flesh and dry them, wrap them up in new linen and inter them again. A feast is usually provided for the occasion, consisting of the best they can afford. Only the bones of the arms and legs of the corpse are thus treated. All the rest is buried or burned [in Hulbert and Schwarze 1910:90].

**Zeisberger – 1797.**

The village of Fairfield, occupied by Moravian missionaries and their Indian converts between 1792 and 1813, was located about 2 km east of present-day Thamesville, Ontario, on a terrace overlooking the Thames River (Jury 1945:1-2). David Zeisberger composed the following diary entry—presented in entirety for its social context—in Fairfield in 1797 (Appendix 3):

May 5th From the look-out on Lake Erie our helper Samuel returned, who, owing to his agreement in winter with his brother, had gone there to pick him up, and now that Samuel had come, he was not ready, because he had to go for and bury the bones of some deceased of the Miami according to the custom of the Nanticokes. All the same, he still wanted to send along with Samuel some of his things as proof that he really intended to come once the burial ceremony was over. However, Samuel did not accept the belongings, for he did not believe his brother.

In the evening 28 canoes came down from above us with Chippewas and camped here. Their chief had sent ahead a scout to report their imminent arrival, and at the same time to request food and tobacco. The scout said they all intended to fire off their rifles on their arrival as a salute. We sent word to them, firstly, why should they request permission to arrive here? But secondly, they could

This passage is most interesting for its discussion of a Nanticoke Indian burying the bones of Miamis according to Nanticoke practices. At the time of Zeisberger's late eighteenth century writing, most Miamis were located in western Ohio and central Indiana (Callender 1978b:681). C.C. Trowbridge, an administrator for Indian affairs, described Miami burial practices in an 1824-1825 report to Governor Lewis Cass of the Michigan Territory (Kinietz 1938:v-vi, ix-x). The report by Trowbridge notes that the Miamis would bury the deceased in an extended position in an individual grave generally lined with planks or bark. On the other hand, some individuals would request burial above ground in either a log-enclosed structure, where the deceased would be in a sitting posture, or upon a scaffold. Trowbridge was emphatic that the Miami Indians did not retrieve the bones of the deceased as did the Nanticokes (Kinietz 1938:30-32).<sup>6</sup>

#### **Bachman – 1846.**

While some of the Nanticokes were staying with the Delaware and other Indians in Kansas in the mid-nineteenth century, Rev. H.C. Bachman recorded the perpetuation of several Nanticoke mortuary practices at the Moravian mission in Westfield. His diary entry of 24 September 1846 described the following scene:

Today the heathen (1 1/2 miles [2.4 km] from here) dug up a body or corpse that had been buried for a year. It belongs to the Nanticoke Nation, and according to the usage of that Nation it was re clothed and for more than a day there was dancing and whiskey drinking. Although this celebration was so far from us, we could clearly hear the racket evening, night, and morning [in Weslager 1983:187].

Weslager (1983:187) commented that Rev. Bachman most probably was referring to the Skeleton Dance of the Nanticokes (see Harrington 1921:183-184; Speck 1937:143-144). Evidently this dance or ceremony was practiced till around 1860 by those Nanticokes living with the Delaware Indians in Kansas. Speck (1937:145-146), who conducted ethnographic research from 1928 to 1932 with Delawares and descendant Nanticokes living in Oklahoma, concluded that Nanticoke assimilation and loss of native language caused the ceremony to cease. However, Speck (1937:146-149) succeeded in obtaining a description of the Skeleton Dance or Ghost Dance.<sup>7</sup> The ceremony, which occurred after initial platform burial and subsequent interment of the corpse's remaining soft tissue, entailed placing skulls and other bones on and near posts erected to correspond with the year's number of deceased, and it continued with drumming, singing, and dancing throughout the night. A Delaware informant of Speck (1937:149) whose mother had participated in the Ghost Dance back in Kansas recalled additional details of the ceremony, including shaking of the bones and feasting. It seems that Delawares, at least those of the Wolf clan (Munsee, according to Marshall Becker, personal communication 2005), practiced the ceremony till the mid-nineteenth century, while recognizing that it originally was from the Nanticokes (Harrington 1921:183-184; Speck 1937:143-144).

southern tribes. In this connection, Feest (1973:6) has pointed out that groups throughout the southeastern Algonquian region used the term "Quioccosan house" to refer to temples which could enclose the remains of the ruling classes. Speck (1927:35, 1937:124) further argued that the Nanticokes passed on the practice to the Delawares through a common Wolf clan. Apparently some Delaware Indians transported human bones from one place to another following initial treatment of the remains at least by the 1600s (Thomas 1912:340 [1698]).

Feest's (1973) survey of ethnohistorical evidence for burial customs in Algonquian groups of North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland generally found that treatment of the dead varied by social class. Additionally, despite archaeological evidence to the contrary, he found no written sources on ossuary burials. This absence of ethnohistorical records may be due to the difficulties colonists would have had observing such infrequent burials (Feest 1973:7).

One reason why the Nanticokes continued into and throughout the eighteenth century the practice of secondary burial with the carrying of human remains to new settlements is related to the exposure of the Indians to Christian customs. Rountree and Davidson (1998:133) have assembled evidence that the Anglican clergy of the Eastern Shore did not actively pursue missionary activities with the Nanticokes. While Christian proselytizing was much more prevalent to the north, these mortuary customs—basic elements of human culture—were also slow to change. In addition, it may be that some Nanticokes retained this facet of their culture in the mixing bowl of interacting peoples in Pennsylvania and beyond in order somehow to reduce the stress of migration and to assert their uniqueness.

Apparently the Nanticokes' mortuary traditions began to change in the nineteenth century. As noted earlier, assimilation and native language loss apparently led to cessation of the Skeleton Dance among Nanticokes in Kansas by 1860 (Speck 1937:145-146). Researchers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Nanticokes of southern Delaware noted no continuation of the earlier mortuary custom (Babcock 1899; Speck 1915). Also, after Speck (1922:4, 9) studied Nanticoke descendants near Brantford, Ontario, he reported that the custom of secondary burial, which had been carried by emigrants from the Delmarva Peninsula, eventually was forgotten by the early twentieth century and replaced by Christian practices.

A final but significant aspect of ethnographic commentaries on the Nanticoke burial practices concerns the symbolism or meaning of the customs. Unfortunately, as Weslager (1983:174) astutely pointed out, "none of the early explorers or settlers bothered to learn the reason for what must have seemed a curious way of treating their dead." If they did ask Nanticokes why they had their specific mortuary customs, they failed to record the answers. Regrettably, even the later observers of the Nanticokes did not focus on explaining the burial traditions. One hint on why the Nanticokes transported bones from one region to another is found in the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania's (1851:707) 1757 minutes, which noted that they wanted the bones of their friends "buried with their Relations." Also, an explanation for another aspect of the mortuary practices is in R.C. Adams' 1890 account of the Skeleton Dance which had been borrowed from the Nanticokes by the Wolf clan of the Delawares: The dance was "given as a memorial to the dead [and] was supposed to clear a way for the spirit of the deceased to the spirit land" (in Speck 1937:143). Speck (1937:142) found a parallel here with certain southeastern tribes who believed that secondary burials released the souls from association with their living relatives.

were cleaned was a practical one--to make them easier for carrying from one settlement to another (Odette Wright, personal communication 2005). Of course, a systematic survey of Nanticoke elders from southern Delaware and from descendant groups elsewhere might reveal additional explanations of the traditional mortuary practices not influenced by modern publications. However, such an ethnographic field project is beyond the scope of this paper.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The Nanticokes probably are descended from the Late Woodland Indians of the Slaughter Creek complex (ca. A.D. 1000 – European contact) who used Townsend pottery in central and southern portions of the Delmarva Peninsula (Custer 1984:149; Custer and Griffith 1986; Rountree and Davidson 1998:26). It is difficult to identify prehistoric precursors of ethnohistoric tribes in this area of diverse ethnic and political groups, but archaeologists have found human remains evidencing reburial (Custer and Griffith 1986:34, 52-4). Unfortunately, much of the information on early excavations of Slaughter Creek sites is minimal and does not include results of inspections of skeletons for bone scraping; on the other hand, some of these data indicate partial dismemberment of corpses (Thomas 1973). The following paragraphs highlight several archaeological projects involving human burials in areas once occupied by the Nanticokes from the Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay to their migratory settlements.

With respect to archaeological research in Maryland, in the late 1940s Weslager (1948:119-123) noted the lack of data on the Nanticokes and their burials. However, during his own avocational investigations he learned that Indian skeletons had been unearthed during commercial excavations at Riverton, Maryland; regrettably there was no information on the nature of these burials (Weslager 1948:122). Curry's (1999) summary of data on ossuaries in Maryland notes that at least two such Indian burial places have been identified in the Nanticoke's heartland of the Nanticoke Drainage. Indian Bone Ossuary (18DO96), near a tributary of the Transquaking River, evidenced 20 to 25 adult burials along with "8 or 9 'French Beads,' one pendant, one coiled copper earring, two glass beads, two gorgets, three rolled brass tubes, a stone knife..., one dart, and a copper pendant (or breastplate)", dating from the Contact period of about 1635 to 1665 (Curry 1999:57-58, Table 3). Also, Henson Ossuary (18SO149), by the Manokin River, appeared as a 1-m long oval pit with the remains of one or two adults and one juvenile. The concentration and orientation of the long bones at the Henson site may indicate bone bundling. With the lack of associated artifacts, it was not possible to assign a secure date to the ossuary, but Curry (1999:58-59, 69, Table 3) supposed it might be from around A.D. 1500. The location of these sites in the Nanticoke Drainage and some evidence for skeletal reburial at Henson Ossuary indicate they could well be associated with Nanticoke Indians or their precursors (see Curry 1999:69).

Busby (2000) later conducted a survey and limited excavation within the post-Contact Chicone Indian Reservation (Chicacoan per Feest 1978:Figure 2) in Dorchester County, Maryland. Her research focused on site 18DO11, which had earlier been identified as the Nanticoke village of Chicone Indian Town. She discovered that the site's main occupation dated from the Late Woodland through Contact periods. Her finds

the remains were transferred to Native American representatives for reburial. While archaeological details of this ossuary must await publication, results of the skeletal examination are available. Among the 35 skeletons were 14 males, 13 females, and 8 individuals of undetermined sex. Their ages at death ranged from newborn to 60 to 69 years with an average age of 30.5 years. Despite considerable damage associated with their discovery, the skeletons evidenced no perimortem skeletal processing. However, there had been some postmortem burning of defleshed skeletons and one example of the “collection of ash and burned bone in an unburned cranial cap” (Dana Kollman, personal communication 2005). Given the location of the Harbor Point Ossuary and the evidence for some postmortem processing of skeletons, the remains could be related to the Nanticokes or a neighboring Algonquian group.

Regarding finds in Delaware, an early nineteenth century discovery of aboriginal human remains in the Nanticoke drainage took place near Laurel. Workmen who were digging earth for fill near a stream encountered “several wagon loads of bones and left a large quantity still remaining in the earth. The skeletons ... [were] laid side by side and each bone in its proper place” (William Huffington cited in Weslager 1942:144). Elderly individuals who lived nearby recounted how Nanticoke Indians had gathered here in the mid 1700s shortly before emigrating. The Indians had brought the bones of their dead here for reburial amid ceremonies (Weslager 1942:144-145). Weslager (1983:175) believed that this ossuary was probably associated with Nanticokes who left the Broad Creek reservation in the 1740s. While recording oral traditions of the Nanticoke community of southern Delaware, Speck (1915:37) learned of a low sandy mound near Millsboro and about 2.5 km from Indian River. The mound evidently once had served as a “repository for the dead” or site of a mortuary house. A test pit conducted with his Nanticoke guide recovered brick and glass bottles said to have been obtained from early European traders.

In the mid-1930s D.S. Davidson (1935) of the University of Pennsylvania excavated five human burials at the Slaughter Creek site (7S-C-1), located some 16 km southeast of Milford. Later work has shown that the site is a macroband base camp of the Late Woodland (Woodland II/Slaughter Creek complex) period (Custer 1984:159-161). According to Davidson (1935), the burials included males and females and evidenced different mortuary treatment. One female had a partially disarticulated skeleton in an undisturbed pit and was covered by a thin layer of charcoal. It seems that there had been an attempt to place her bones in the pit in anatomical position. A second female skeleton was situated “in a partially upright flexed position” with skeletal elements which generally were articulated. Finally, three disarticulated male skeletons were found nested in a single grave that had been dug into a refuse pit. Davidson (1935:91) believed that the skeletons were of Nanticoke ancestors, and the graves’ age and location would seem to affirm this. While the variety of mortuary treatments may indicate changes in burial practices over time, they might instead reflect different stages in the interment of the dead for a society with a single tradition.

More burials at sites of the Slaughter Creek complex are reported near Lewes (Townsend site [7S-G-2]) and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware (Custer 1984:161-162). These could also be from early Nanticokes (cf. Goddard 1978: Figures 1, 2). Human remains at the Townsend site by Lewes were recovered from several pit features, including a plow-truncated “trench” measuring 1.2 m wide and 6.1 m long. T. Dale Stewart identified 14 males and 29 females among 58 individuals (36.2 percent aged between birth and 20 years). His analysis recorded several pathologies but noted no marks on bones indicating perimortem skeletal

monument identified fire hearths, as well as Late Woodland artifacts and eighteenth-century Euroamerican items. In spite of these finds (from site 36BR80), the interpretation of aerial photographs showed that Friedenshütten proper was some 60 m away (Delaney 1973). Apparently additional testing of Friedenshütten and more thorough publication of the earlier work did not occur (Kent 1993:305; Noel Strattan and Stephen Warfel, personal communications 2005).

One example of archaeological research in Ohio concerns Schönbrunn, a mission of the Moravians in the Tuscarawas drainage during the 1770s. Moravian records list the individuals who were interred in the Indian cemetery between 1772 and 1777; the persons include Delawares, a Cherokee, and three children of Samuel and Sarah Nantikok (sic) (Weinland 1925). Archaeological testing took place in 1927 to help with marking the graves and reconstructing the village. That work located 45 burials, which apparently had been done in a Christian manner. It was possible to identify at least some specific individuals, but no details of physical anthropology were published (Olmstead 1991:xii, 1997:213; Weinland 1927).

A final illustration of archaeology at a site frequented by Nanticokes concerns Fairfield, Ontario. In the 1940s Wilfrid Jury of the University of Western Ontario conducted excavations at Fairfield to find remains of the Moravian/Indian village's buildings and associated cultural material and to compare these finds with descriptions of the settlement in Zeisberger's diary and a village map of 1793 (Jury 1945, 1946, 1948). His research found house floors, cellars, burnt clay chinking from log walls, a variety of aboriginal and Euroamerican artifacts, and preserved foodstuffs. Additionally, the layout of the excavated structures well matched that of the late eighteenth century map. Jury (1945:3-5, 24) was aware of the location of Fairfield's associated cemetery, but his research plans did not include investigation of Native American graves.

### ISSUES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION AND REPATRIATION

The firsthand and contemporary accounts of Naticoke burial practices compiled here offer a more complete sense of the traditions than those provided by earlier historians and anthropologists. The accounts reveal several common elements plus a few rarely reported particulars. In addition, the ones of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century have somewhat different emphases. These differences may relate to acculturation of the Indians, other variability in the burial traditions, and changing goals of the Euroamerican chroniclers. In any event, it is useful to summarize the mortuary practices according to the observations made in the two centuries.

During their eighteenth century migrations to and within Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Ontario, the Nanticokes generally placed the body of a deceased person in either an excavated grave or in a crib-like structure above the ground. After a period from three months to a year or more following the funeral, they would remove the corpse, cut and scrape off the remaining flesh, and wash the bones. The Nanticokes would then bury the cleaned bones. At least sometimes they treated only the limb bones in this manner—binding them somehow in linen; and they more simply buried or burned the remainder of the corpse. A ceremony and feast accompanied the reinterment.

The additional noteworthy component of the mortuary practices in this period was the transport of

The few accounts of nineteenth century Nanticoke burial practices in Kansas concerned the Skeleton Dance. This event began with the removal from graves or above-ground platforms of the corpses of those who had died within the past year. (Remaining flesh apparently was buried.) Representatives then would erect a post for each of the deceased, place the skulls on top of the posts, and dress the posts and/or remaining bones of the deceased individuals in clothing. Thereafter, a celebration with feasting, singing, and dancing around the posts took place from evening till morning. Presumably, the bones were interred in an ossuary following the ceremony.

These descriptions of Nanticoke mortuary practices present several issues for archaeologists who interpret aboriginal graves in regions where the Nanticokes dwelled and where other migrating peoples sojourned. There have been few detailed examinations of archaeologically retrieved burials that may be Nanticoke. The studies which have been done in their early historic heartland of the Delmarva Peninsula reveal a measure of variability in the graves: for example, single and group or ossuary burials; articulated and disarticulated bones, some of which may have been bundled or burned. Of course, it is not surprising that a single sociocultural group will exhibit diversity in its mortuary practices according to the social persona of the deceased and the dynamics of the living grievers (Binford 1971; Pearson 1999:32). Archaeologists could match several of the burial attributes observed in the excavations of Delaware and Maryland with the Nanticokes, including the disarticulation of skeletal elements and reinterment with possibly bundled bones.

One of the challenges in identifying Nanticoke burials archaeologically is to recognize that some of the observed mortuary variation could derive from a particular grave representing just one stage in the series of events constituting Nanticoke burial practices. Also, it is important to realize that the ethnographic descriptions of the mortuary traditions are probably far from thorough (e.g., lacking information on topics like the spatial patterning of burials within settlements). Furthermore, when neighboring groups acquired aspects of a burial custom as the Delaware Wolf clan evidently did from the Nanticokes, it could be most difficult to assign interments to one of the societies.

Migrations and relocations of sociocultural groups like the Nanticokes can further encumber the identification of the ethnicity of human burials. The Nanticokes' burial traditions persisted for over a century as the group spread to the north and west in regions with a multitude of tribes. The Nanticokes' contact with other aboriginal cultures may have been especially frequent when they were in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, and Ontario (Bliss 1972 [vol. 1]:xxvii; Elliott 1977; Jordan 1922:72; Weslager 1943:350, 1983:181-184). A mapping project focusing on eighteenth-century Indian towns in Pennsylvania found that certain settlements were occupied sequentially by one or several different tribes, while other individual towns were inhabited contemporaneously by members of a number of aboriginal groups (Kent et al. 1981:12-13; cf. Becker 1988). Nanticoke burials, including the secondary interments of transported remains, might appear to be out of place in the new regions, but it would be difficult to confidently assign the graves to Nanticokes without detailed historical records. Several archaeologists have noted similar problems with identifying particular ethnic groups among refugee Indians (e.g., Kinsey and Custer 1982).

Finally, the Nanticokes presented the ultimate interpretive challenge with burying friends from other tribes according to Nanticoke customs. This situation could occur elsewhere with the deaths and interments of captives or traders. It would seem hardly possible to identify the cultural affiliation of the deceased in such

archaeologists to state their evidence for or against determining cultural affiliation of specific remains and provide Indians swifter yet considered resolution of cases. Hopefully the insights learned from this study of the Nanticokes may encourage archaeologists and Native Americans to formulate and implement research plans together in a spirit of cooperation when burials might be found.

#### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ubelaker (1974:11) has stated that a 6 May 1686 entry in the Maryland Archives indicated “Nanticokes at Assateague saved the bones of their leaders.” However, the passage in question, while relating the theft by an English colonist of the skins and roanoke wrapped around a deceased Indian king’s bones, does not refer to Nanticokes in the list of Indian groups living in this town (Archives of Maryland Online Vol 5:479-480).

<sup>2</sup>Weslager (1983:174) believed that this passage by Heckewelder could refer to removal of bones from a Chiacason House rather than unearthing of remains (and see Weslager 1945:106).

<sup>3</sup>According to Bliss (1972 [vol. 1]:xxvii), most of the Christian Indians in the Moravian missions – at least in Ohio – were Munsee-speaking Delawares. However, it is clear from even the few diary entries of the missionaries reported below that a number of other Native American groups, including Nanticokes and their descendants, spent at least some time visiting or living in the missions from Pennsylvania on to Ontario.

Jordan (1922:78) provided an abridged translation of this diary entry with less social context. He also noted that Anton was a Delaware Indian who continued to live and serve with the Moravians as they moved to Ohio (Jordan 1922:70; and see Olmstead 1997:213). Johannes was the baptismal name of Papunhank, a Munsee-speaking Delaware from near Wyalusing who had requested a Moravian teacher for his village; this led to Zeisberger’s visit and their long association (Olmstead 1991:181, 1997:113, 384-385). Olmstead (1997:382) commented that later in 1766 Zeisberger baptized Sam the Nanticoke and the latter was active in the Moravian congregation for 40-years.

<sup>4</sup>In this passage, “Wajomick” probably refers to Wyoming. Lawanakhanack (or Lawunakhanek) was a settlement where David Zeisberger had undertaken missionary work along the Allegheny River (Olmstead 1991:10).

<sup>5</sup>In this passage, “the look out (*die Warte*) on Lake Erie” apparently refers to “The Watch Tower,” the Moravian mission on the Detroit River by Malden Centre, Ontario (Olmstead 1991:87). Samuel was the baptismal name of Sam the Nanticoke (Olmstead 1997:382). Alexander McKee was a British Indian Agent based in Detroit who assisted Zeisberger in finding land for the Fairfield mission (Olmstead 1991:37, 92-93). Gottlob Sensemann (1745-1800) was a Moravian missionary who served at several missions, including Fairfield (Bliss 1972 [vol. 1]:xxiii). Bliss (1972 [vol. 2]:482) provided another version of Zeisberger’s May 5<sup>th</sup> diary entry; while his freer translation still noted the burial of Miami remains according to Nanticoke custom, it contained additional unrelated notes that Zeisberger apparently had not fully copied from his private journal for the official records sent to the Moravian headquarters in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (see Bliss 1972 [vol. 1]:ix).

<sup>6</sup>Earlier contact-period accounts of burial practices cited by Kinietz (1965:161-162, 208-211) may mix customs of the Miami and Illinois Indians (cf. Callender 1978a:676).

decaying and falling off, to be gathered and buried right in front of where the corpse stood. And there, sometime afterward, all the bones and the skull to be used when they had their Ghost Dance.

According to the number of persons who had died during the year, they chose representatives of the dead persons. And they erected as many posts, as high as a person's head, as the number of dead during the year and there they fastened the skulls (one at the top of each post). And besides, they tied a cross piece of wood and dressed up the figure of the man or woman like a doll, upon it (beneath the skull). And they put the bones of the deceased right opposite each of the posts. Now, when it has become dark, they begin their dance. Everybody who is to take part in the dance is named, also those who do the singing. And each performer is ceremonially presented with wampum, also the leader of the dance. They dance (in a circle in front of the posts, bearing the skulls and effigies moving counter-clockwise) all night. And when it is beginning to be daylight, they sing the last song, these drummers and singers. This is what they say in the song, according to tradition, "You said before you died, 'I will come when you call me!' Now here I am calling you."

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#### APPENDIXES

The following appendixes contain the three diary entries from Moravian missionaries David Zeisberger and Johann Schmick that I transcribed from photocopies of the original, older German handwriting. Prof. Emeritus James C. King of The George Washington University edited the content and style of my transcriptions and subsequent translations. Occasionally the missionaries mixed English letters with their German script. More commonly their journal entries evidenced unusual spelling and grammar. Sections of the transcriptions in brackets indicate words or phrases that are abbreviated, missing, syntactically peculiar, or incompletely legible in the photocopies. Elements in parentheses represent alternative spelling and punctuation. One may compare the German transcriptions with the copied diary entries (Figures 1-3) or with the original journals at the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

**Appendix 1. David Zeisberger's Diary from Friedenshütten (Wyalusing), Pennsylvania, February 2, 1766.**



sie [bitten] sol[1]ten[, hier einzulangen], das andre aber könnten sie unterlassen, welches auch geschah. Ein paar Diener gingen von Haus zu Haus, samm[el]ten Essen u[nd] Korn[,] welches sie dann abholten u[nd] sehr dankbar waren.

Vom Al[exander] McKee[,] Agent of Indian Affairs, an welchen Br[uder] Sensem[ann] geschrieben hatte, erhielten wir etwas Kleidung für unsre Alten u[nd] Schwachen mit dem Versprechen[,] künftigen Herbst im Stande zu se[i]n[,] uns mehreres zu t(h)un[,] da er je[t]zo knapp an Vor[r]at se[i].

Abends sangen wir: Jesu deine Passion ist mir lauter Freude.  
[Moravian Records 1797: Box 161, Folder 3]

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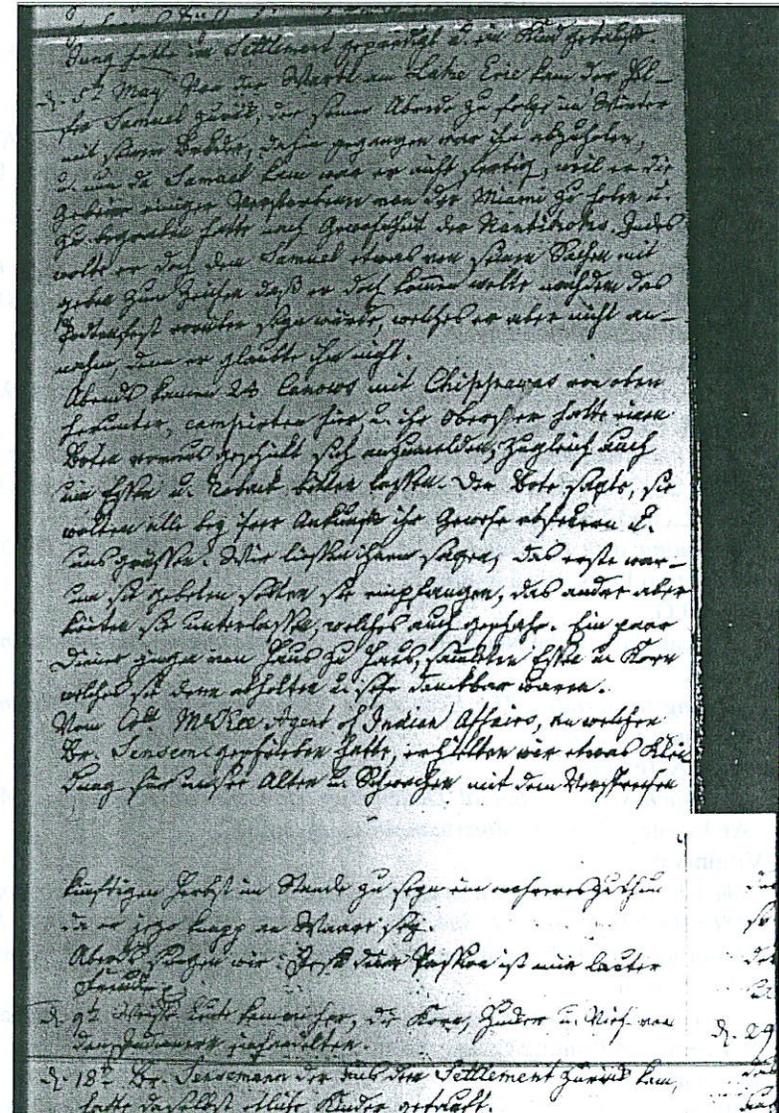


Figure 3. David Zeisberger's May 5, 1797, diary entry from Fairfield, Ontario, Canada. Courtesy Moravian Archives.

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