Contact Between Europeans and the Delaware Indians of New Jersey

by

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A contact period, as the name implies, is one of interaction between or among societies with differing cultures. To some extent, all societies have been in such contact throughout prehistory and history. In anthropological usage, however, the term has been reserved for those situations in which the participant societies have radically different cultures. For North America, the situation has been that of contact between Native American societies and the explorers, traders, and colonists from European countries (e.g. England, France, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden) and later, the expanding United States. The contact phenomenon provides anthropologists with the opportunity to study culture change in a context where rapidity of change is greatly intensified. This faster rate of change makes the processes involved more amenable to identification and explanation.

Obviously, the Contact Period differs widely in chronological placement throughout North America. For the east coast and a few major interior rivers, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the beginning of the Contact Period (and for some Native American societies, the end as well); while for the central plains, the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries are the relevant time. The Contact Period may be said to terminate, in a classificatory sense, with the end of recognizable Native American societies. For certain areas of North America, therefore, the Contact Period continues today. However, for much of coastal eastern North America, the decimation of Native American populations through disease, warfare, and removal westward makes the period relatively short. In the area of New Jersey, it can be bracketed within three centuries at the maximum.

During the sixteenth century, occasional explorers, such as Verrazano, and fishing parties from European countries may have had intermittent contact with coastal Native American populations in New Jersey. These contacts will always be difficult to document archeologically through direct evidence. The few European-made items acquired by Indians in trade may never be found in their archeological context. Changes in aboriginal settlement patterns may have occurred, however, and this indirect evidence may be more amenable to study through archeological research.

By the early 1600's with the settlement of New Amsterdam (New York City) by the Dutch and the initiation of Dutch and Swedish trading posts on the Lower Delaware River, the Contact Period becomes more recognizable in the archeological record. With the

onset of regular Indian-European trade, the Indians began to acquire European-made tools and ornaments in sufficient quantity to increase the occurrence of these items' deposition in aboriginal sites. Also, the historical record becomes more detailed as Europeans recorded, even if only fitfully, their relations with Indians in New Jersey and surrounding areas.

Ethnolinguistic and archeological data indicate that the New Jersey Indians of the early 1600's were not culturally homogeneous. Linguistic analyses of data available in historic records concerning Delaware Indian languages in New Jersey have led Goddard (1978:215) to suggest a division of the Indian populations into at least two, and possibly three, separate groups (Figure 1). Archeological evidence in the form of differences in distribution of ceramic types among northern, central, and southern New Jersey coincides roughly with differences in dialect distribution (Figure 2). This general coincidence supports an hypothesis of cultural differences between the Delaware Indians occupying New Jersey from north to south in the 1600's, though all can be classified broadly as Delaware-speaking groups. Testing of this hypothesis requires further study of the terminal Late Woodland Period in New Jersey.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as indicated in Figures 3 and 4, saw a drastic change in New Jersey's populations. Whereas ca. 1600, most of the state was occupied by Native American Delaware Indian societies, by 1800 no recognizable separate Indian societies existed based upon present knowledge. This is not to say that Delaware Indians no longer lived in New Jersey. Persons tracing their ancestry to the Delaware continue to live in the state today. However, by 1800, Delaware Indians occupied the state as individuals who were part of the larger colonial society. The degree of cultural assimilation varied considerably. In some areas, such as Monmouth County, Indians referred to as the Sand Hill Delaware (Weslager 1972:278) continued to be culturally identifiable into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The colonial settlers of New Jersey prized the areas most important to the Delaware Indians. This is due largely to a coincidence in subsistence bases of the two groups. Both groups farmed, and the flats bordering the major rivers were the most usable farmland for both Indian and colonist. The rivers yielded fish -- a resource sought by the Europeans as much as by the Indians. As colonists spread throughout the state (Figures 3 and 4), the Indian populations were forced westward, the last known independent refuge (as opposed to missionary and reservation settlements) being the Upper Delaware Valley. There, Indian settlement has been documented archeologically as extending into the early 1700's (Ritchie 1949; Kinsey 1972; Kraft 1975, 1978; Puniello and Williams 1978).

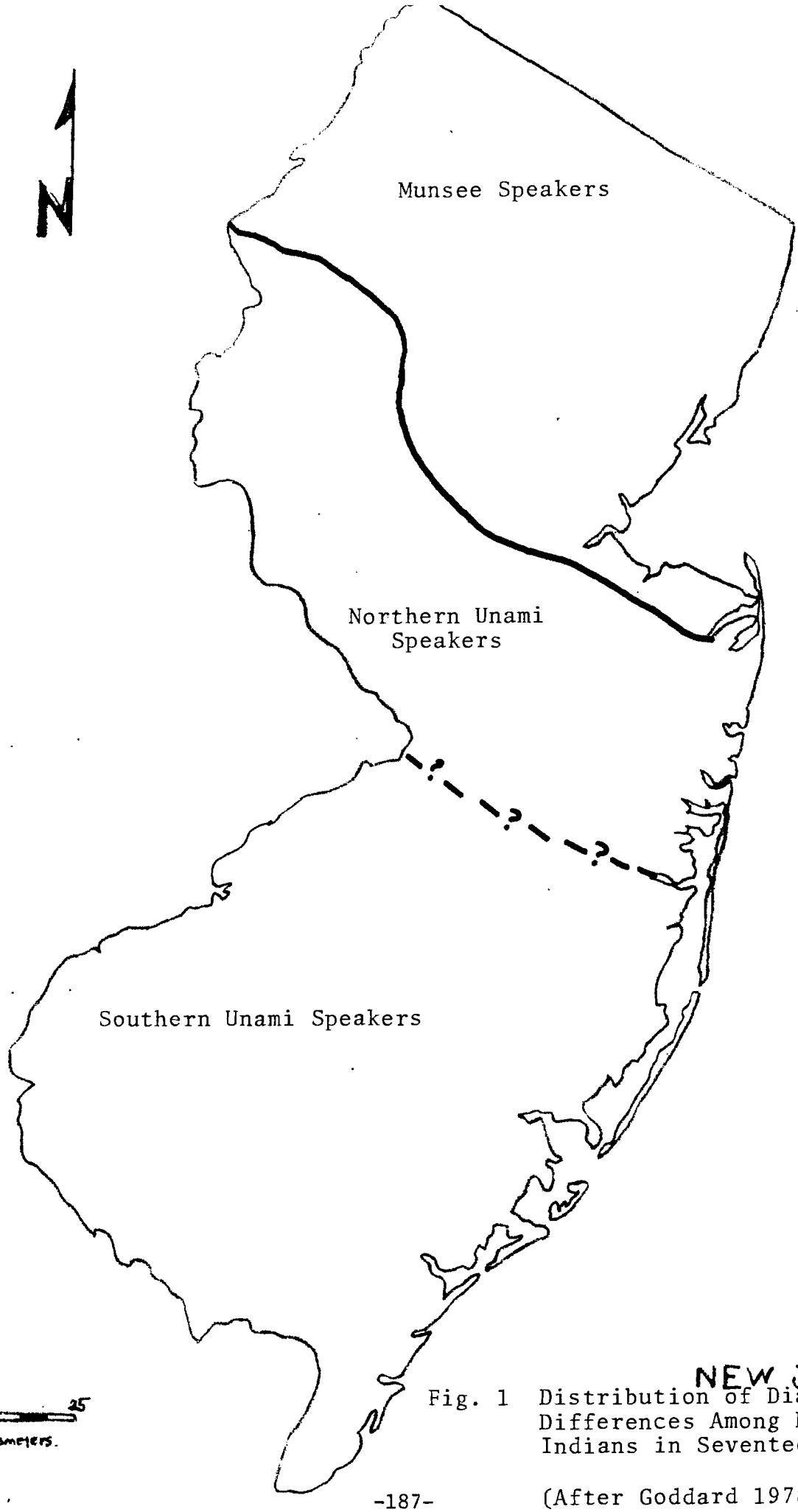


Fig. 1 Distribution of Dialect Differences Among Delaware Indians in Seventeenth Century

(After Goddard 1978:215)

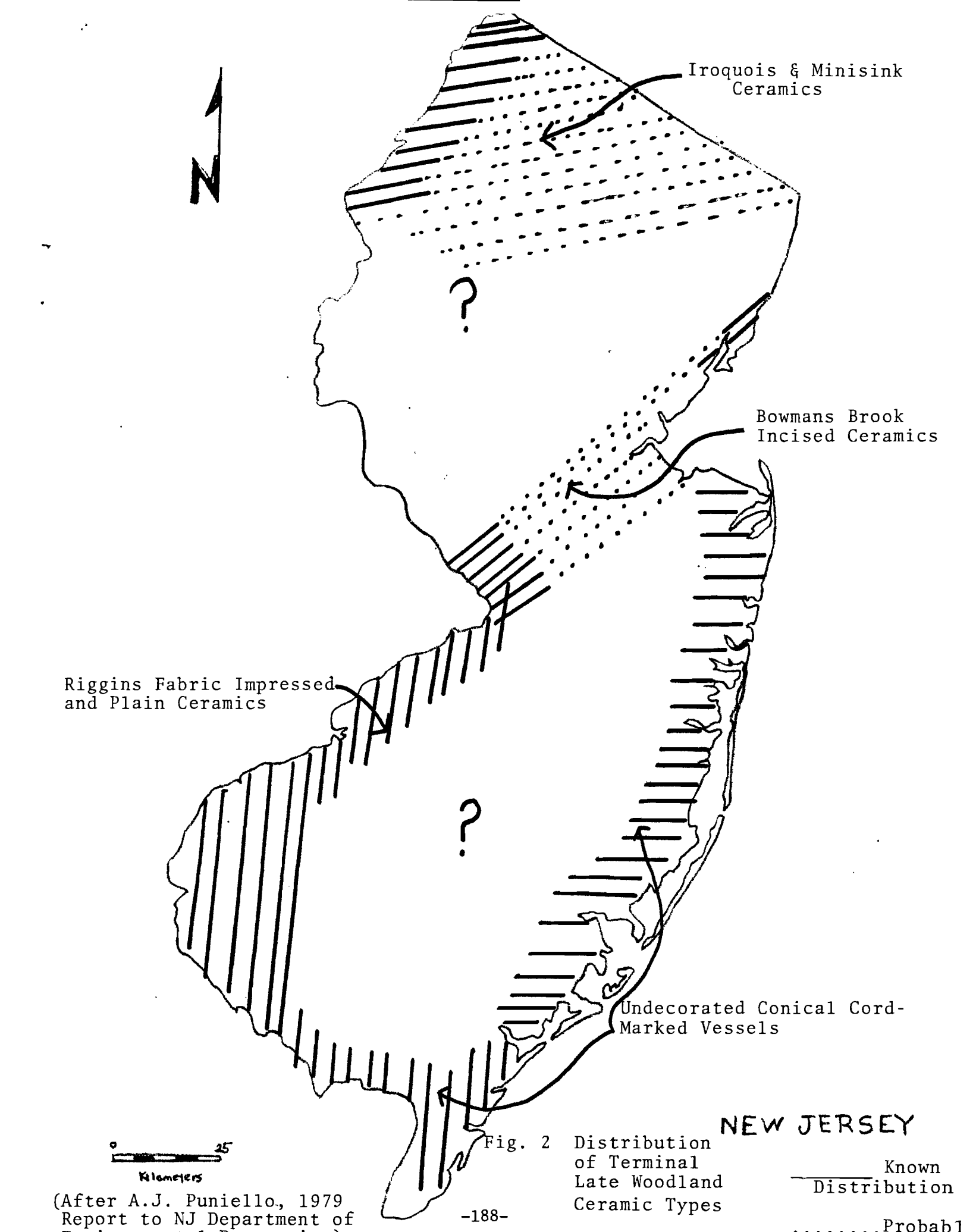


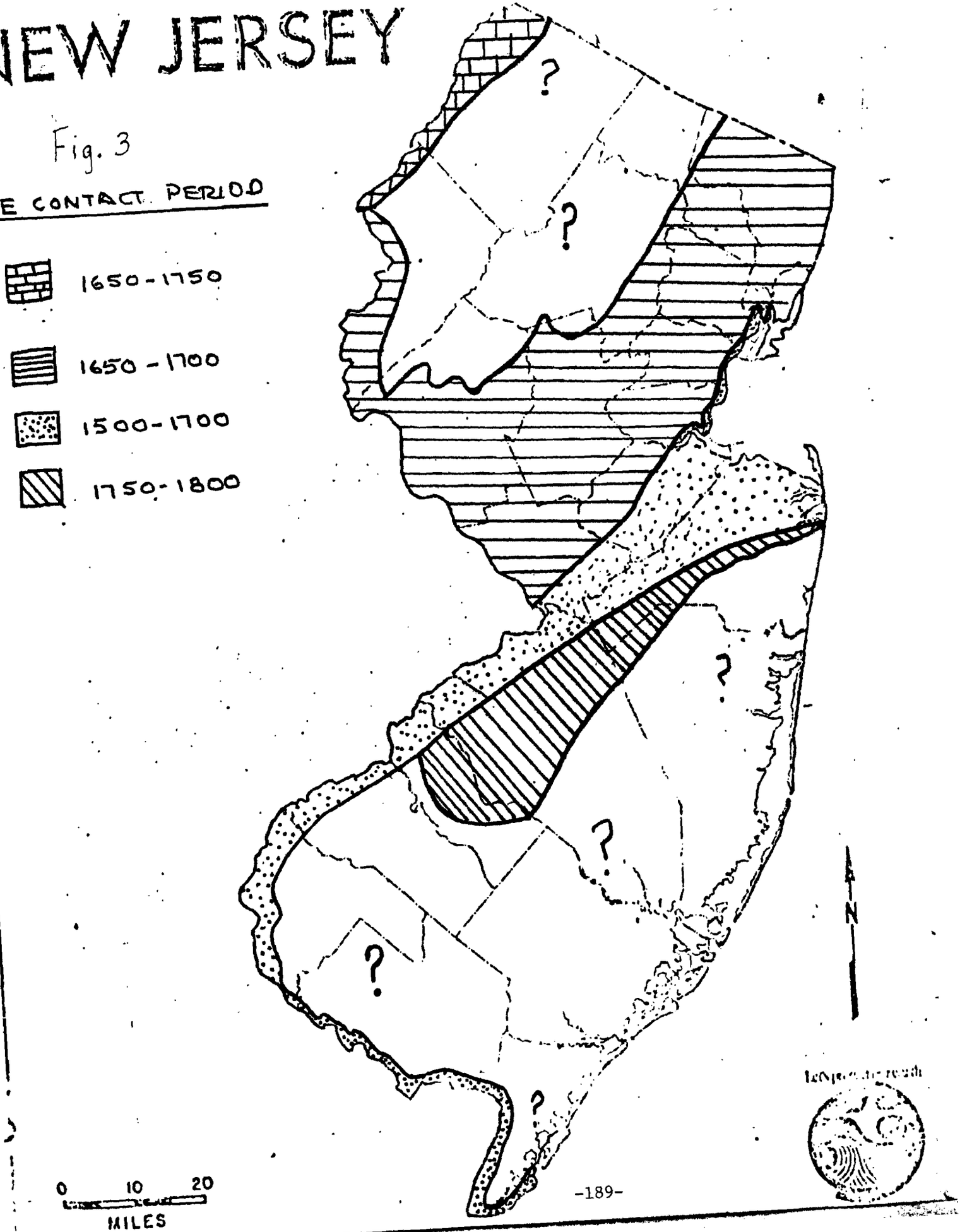
Fig. 2 Distribution of Terminal Late Woodland Ceramic Types

(After A.J. Puniello, 1979 Report to NJ Department of Environmental Protection)

NEW JERSEY

Fig. 3

THE CONTACT PERIOD



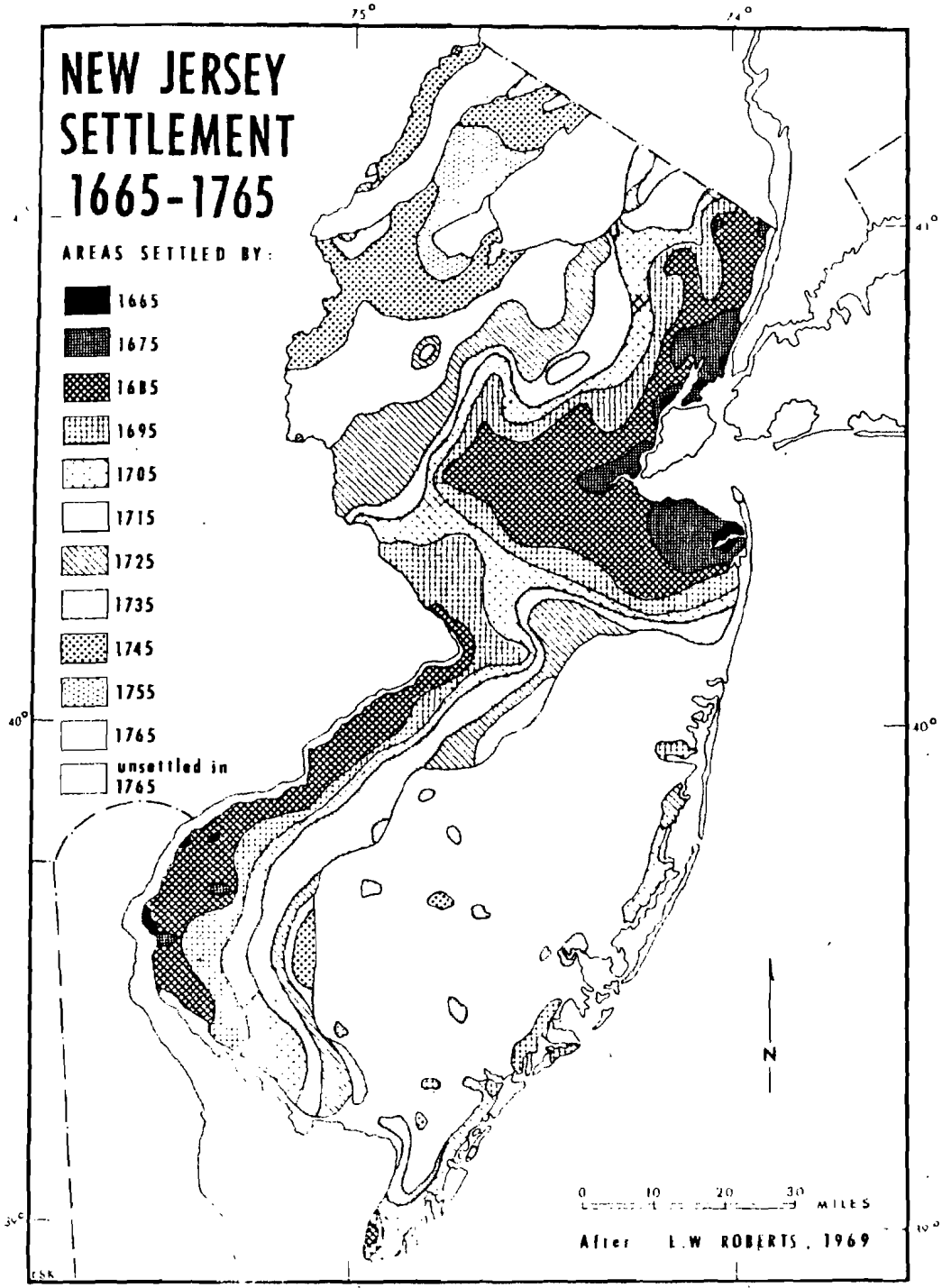


Fig. 4 New Jersey Settlement 1665-1765
(Wacker 1975:127)

For southern and central New Jersey, historic references document the decimation of the Indian populations through warfare with the Susquehannocks of eastern Pennsylvania, alcohol abuse, and susceptibility to European diseases (Myers 1912; Jameson 1909). By the 1700's, small Indian groups are recorded to have lived in missionary settlements at Cranbury, Crosswicks, and finally by the 1750's, at Brotherton, near the present town of Indian Mills (Larrabee 1976). Brotherton was one of the first Indian reservations in North America. The site, thus, has regional if not national significance.

In the following discussion of the Contact Period in New Jersey, the authors will concentrate upon the period from ca. A.D. 1600 to 1800. By the early 1600's, as mentioned previously, direct archeological evidence exists of European-made items deposited in aboriginal sites. By 1800, recognizable Indian societies can no longer be documented to have existed in New Jersey. The evidence available is historic as well as archeological. Much more, in each case, exists than has been recorded to date. While major historic sources are generally available and have been utilized by archeologists for many decades (e.g., Myers 1912; Jameson 1909; N.J. Archives), a wealth of data concerning the location of Indian sites and the nature of European-Indian relations exist in local town records throughout the state. The latter have never been researched systematically.

No systematic archeological survey of any region of New Jersey has been completed. Archeological evidence is limited to the sites which were excavated by the Indian Site Survey of the 1930's, and by the survey and salvage work in the flood zone of the proposed Tocks Island Dam in the Upper Delaware Valley. The latter work, conducted in the 1960's and 1970's with more modern techniques, offers the best archeological evidence available. It must be remembered, however, that it is difficult to extrapolate, except in hypothetical terms, from one small section of the state to the whole. Hypotheses must be tested through systematic field surveys and testing.

One of the diagnostic ways that Contact Period sites are recognized is by the presence of European manufactured goods in what appear to be otherwise aboriginal sites. Because of the great paucity of trade goods in the central and southern portion of the state, this aspect of prehistory has frequently been overlooked or poorly reported. Some widely scattered reports of Contact Period sites are available but no concerted effort has been made to study them as contact sites per se. Much of what is known about the "ethnographic" Delaware is based on the memories of descendants living far to the west of New Jersey after considerable acculturation to diverse influences, Indian as well as European. Study of the archeology of some of the last villages and campsites is needed to broaden this perspective. Many of these sites may

be small and unobtrusive since they may represent disbanding of the larger villages and fragmentation in the face of Minqua raids (Weslager 1972:101). Variations may also be apparent in areas where contact was made with different European groups - Dutch, Swedes, or English.

1600-1700

For the seventeenth century, there is archeological evidence of contact in both northwestern, central, and southwestern New Jersey. Both the archeological data from known New Jersey sites and contemporary sites in surrounding areas along with the ethnohistoric data indicate that the Indian populations were living a relatively settled existence with cultigens (predominently corn, beans, and squash) providing an important part of the subsistence base. Hunting, fishing, shellfish gathering, and the collecting of wild plant foods, however, were still major parts of the economy.

Village sites were occupied recurrently by groups which did not exceed more than a few hundred people at maximum. Examples of such sites have been found in the Upper Delaware Valley, near Trenton within the Abbott Farm National Historic Landmark District, and near Bridgeport at the National Register Salisbury Site. Other sites were occupied as part of a restricted seasonal round of activities. Village sites thus far discovered occur on river terraces where easily cultivated land was available. These sites are complex, demonstrating: 1) remains of shelters; 2) trash accumulations with relatively high densitites of artifactual material; 3) storage and fire pits; and 4) burials. Cemeteries, separate from habitation sites, are also known to occur.

Given the known reliance of the Late Woodland Period Indians upon horticulture which involved depletion of soil fertility and upon the use of wood for house construction and firewood, archeologists expect villages to have been occupied for a period of time (10-20 years?) until soil and wood were depleted. The village would then be reestablished, perhaps not very far from the earlier location. Where a number of archeological habitation sites occur, for example, along a river, it is important to determine which were occupied contemporaneously. For an area such as the Upper Delaware Valley where archeological data are available, it is possible to identify both contemporaneous sites and the sequence of shifting village locations (Puniello and Williams 1978). For the rest of New Jersey, the data are, as yet, too fragmentary to do so.

In the northern part of New Jersey, aboriginal rock shelter occupations with evidence of European-made items have been found. These shelters may represent seasonal occupation (perhaps fall hunting camps) by small groups (nuclear families?). Undoubtedly, some other kinds of known sites (i.e. open-air hunting camps) which

are attributable to the Late Woodland Period on the basis of diagnostic projectile point occurrences were actually occupied during the Contact Period. The Indians of the latter time did not lose or otherwise deposit European-made items at every small site occupied during the seasonal round. The smaller sites will, therefore, be more difficult to identify.

In the Upper Delaware Valley, two contemporaneous seventeenth century Indian Village sites occurred about fifteen miles apart on the Jersey side of the river. It may be predicted from this evidence that a similar distribution of village sites also occurred along other major rivers. Given the relatively limited amount of tillable land in the Upper Delaware Valley area compared to the lower Delaware and its tributaries as well as sections of the Passaic, Hackensack, and Raritan Rivers, it is probably safer to expect more dense site distributions in the latter areas.

The most probable locations for contact Indian village sites in northeastern New Jersey are the very places that have seen the most intensive nineteenth and twentieth century ground disturbance through industrialization and urbanization. A number of sites may survive in the northeastern part of the state within long-time parks, large private estates, rare undeveloped tracts publicly or privately owned, and in undisturbed or deeply buried contexts.

These sites are of extreme value in reconstructing the Contact Period, particularly during the first half of the seventeenth century. A preservation priority should be to find the few sites extant in the northeastern portion of the state. Strong positive measures for preservation should be taken, involving potential land acquisition. Fortunately, such sites are ideal for public interpretive purposes offering possibilities as education and tourist resources.

For southern New Jersey, historic records indicate that villages existed during the early 1600's along the Delaware River and its tributaries. Only one of these sites has thus far been located (the National Register-listed Salisbury Site). The intensified warfare between the southern Delaware and the Susquehannocks of eastern Pennsylvania (to which the European presence in the lower Delaware River Valley undoubtedly contributed) caused a shift of Delaware Indians inland. Sites are, therefore, to be sought in the headwaters of the Delaware's tributaries and possibly in the western portion of the Outer Coastal Plain. Given the disruption of the Delaware societies through encroachment, such sites are expected to be small. Intensive surveys will be required to locate them.

Along the southern New Jersey coast and along rivers flowing into the Atlantic Ocean, there are documentary records of Indian settlements during the seventeenth century. A few archeological remains of contact occupation have been found fortuitously. This

area of the state has received, to date, only cursory survey. In view of the modern development along the New Jersey shore, it is important to locate any extant Contact Period sites as soon as possible. It is likely that only a few survive and those few deserve preservation consideration.

It is evident from Figure 3 that with increasing colonial settlement during the seventeenth century, the zones of Indian occupation became restricted. By the latter half of the century, sizable aboriginal settlements and a range of sites within a subsistence system (Winters 1969:110) are to be expected in progressively fewer parts of the state. Many Indians left New Jersey to move westward in the face of colonial expansion.

Fortunately, some of these "refuge" areas have not been subjected to extensive modern development. All are threatened, to some extent, with such development and its concomitant destruction of archeological sites. While it is still possible, survey programs should be conducted in these areas to locate and characterize Contact Period sites. With information on the number of sites, nature of preservation, and threat of destruction, a plan for preservation can be developed on a sound basis.

1700-1800

By 1740, there were relatively few aboriginal sites occupied in New Jersey. Those known in the Upper Delaware Valley from ca. 1700-1740 include village cemeteries. The known 1700-1740 contact sites of the Upper Delaware Valley are, fortunately, within the boundaries of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Coordination of state and federal efforts can afford protection to these sites which are significant as resources for study of the last aboriginal refuge of the Contact Period in New Jersey. Survey efforts are required to identify the entire range of Contact Period sites to ensure preservation of the subsistence-settlement system.

In the central and southern portions of the state, there is historic documentation for the existence of missionary settlements of Indians. Beginning in the 1740's, through the efforts of David Brainerd and later, his brother John, both Presbyterian ministers, settlements of Indians from Crosswicks were made at Cranbury. Due to opposition from colonial neighbors (probably heightened by the tensions of the French and Indian Wars), resettlement at Brotherton occurred in 1759. As mentioned previously, Brotherton is significant as possibly the first North American reservation. By the 1760's, there is historic documentation of Indian settlement not only at Brotherton but to the north near modern Vincentown (Larrabee 1976). Other small Indian settlements probably existed in southern New Jersey during the second half of the eighteenth century. However, archeological remains of even the historically documented settlements have yet to be found.

A high priority should be to locate these sites, particularly Brotherton. Through historic research and intensive field survey, it should be possible to do so. If found to exist, the sites should be preserved.

An open question is to what extent the Pinelands were a refuge area for aboriginal groups as colonial occupation expanded. Due to lack of survey in this area, it is not even known to what extent the Pinelands were utilized by Indian groups prior to ca. 1700. While not comparable to the enviromental zones known to have been occupied by Contact Period Indian groups prior to 1700, the mere fact that the Pinelands were not much utilized by the colonists means the area was available to the Indians as a refuge. Whether or not it was so utilized must be determined through field survey and testing.

Research Problems

New Jersey offers particular advantages for study of the contact phenomenon. Although a relatively small state, the spread of colonial settlement was such as to provide opportunities for study of: 1) direct Indian-European contact along the Atlantic Coast and the southern Delaware River; and 2) indirect contact between Europeans and Indian groups in the northwestern portion of the state and, possibly, the Pinelands, areas which later became refuge communities. The colonial occupation of New Jersey by traders and colonists from a variety of European nations -- Netherlands, Sweden, and England -- offers possibilities for comparative study of an Indian culture in contact with different kinds of European colonists.

Fortunately, despite the intensity of nineteenth and twentieth century development in New Jersey, there is the potential to locate a number of surviving Contact Period sites. This situation, however, will not be true much longer. It is imperative that intensive efforts be made to locate contact sites now.

It must be noted that contact aboriginal sites may have occurred in areas which on Figure 4 are marked as mainly colonial occupation zones. While rare and predicted to be few in surviving number, these sites are of critical importance to the understanding of contact situations and processes of culture change.

Some of the more important research problems for the Contact Period include:

1. To what extent were the subsistence-settlement systems of Contact Period Indian groups similar and different in space and throughout time? This research problem is directly relevant to the determination of National Register significance and the determination of preservation priorities. Archeologists must know which extant sites are comparable before they can determine significance objectively and identify representative sites for preservation.

2. To what extent, and in what ways, were the Pinelands utilized by aboriginal groups during the Contact Period? Thurman has suggested minimal use and has pointed to the need to field test this hypothesis.
3. What changes took place in aboriginal settlement patterns as a result of the contact situation?
4. How did contact of aboriginal populations with different Europeans (Dutch, English, Swedes) vary? Is the variation manifested in the archeological record?

Survey Priorities

1. Locate and preserve the Brotherton Site.
2. Research documentary records (e.g. deeds, surveys, explorers' and settlers' narratives) for references to Indian place names, locations of settlements, and nature of Indian-European contacts. Sources should include the state archives, proprietors' records, town and county records.
3. Through systematic field survey, determine if historically-documented sites can be identified on the ground and, if possible, test and evaluate those sites.
4. Restudy extant collections in light of the improved ability of archeologists to date items of European manufacture from the seventeenth century.

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