

A Review of the Native American Day at Shippen Manor

By Jack Wooldridge

This afternoon we went to Shippen Manor to learn about Native American people who lived in this area. We started by discussing the different periods the Natives went through. It all starts in the Paleo-Indian Period, when the first hunter-gathers crossed over an enormous ice-bridge that crossed over the ocean into North America while tracking game. By the time they reached our area, New Jersey, the glaciers had begun to melt and the ice age was ending, so the Paleo peoples settled down in small groups that would take whatever they could, had the crudest of technologies, and lived in caves created by stones and other debris the glacier had left behind.

In the Archaic Period, things get a little bit more interesting, as technology improves, the first farming practices are seen, and temporary tribes begin to be formed. These tribes were only tribes in the crudest sense, and were basically groups of people who gathered together for mutual protection for some of the year, and moved away for other parts. The first pottery vessels were also made, which indicates that they were beginning to have agriculture, and needed pots to store food for the winter.

Then there came the Woodland Period, which saw a switch from atlatls and slings to bows and arrows. The people began to develop a more tribal lifestyle. In the middle of this period, trading routes were formed that stretched all over eastern North America, and the natives probably had a common religion.

After that, the white men arrived, changing the lifestyle of the natives forever. The difference in technology was so great, that the Europeans sailing to America and landing could be compared to aliens landing their spacecraft down at the mall! The Europeans offered the Native American Kings (or Chiefs) amazing new tools in return for skins of the different animals who lived in the area. Then they said that they would give them a lot of these goods for their land. This was a concept totally alien to the natives, because they believed that the land did not belong to anyone. They thought they were ripping the traders off when they sold their land to them, but got a big surprise when the settlers told them that they had to move off their land. Eventually, most Kings began attaching themselves to European governments, and slowly began to lose their culture, which was replaced by a European one. We did a small role-playing exercise to prove the point of this.

I really enjoyed our day at Shippen Manor, and I feel that I learned a lot!