


ARTICLE

“An Acre of Land to Plant or a Stick of Wood to Make a Fence or Fire”: An Archaeology of Mohegan Allotment

Craig N. Cipolla¹ , James Quinn², and Jay Levy²

¹Department of Anthropology, Tufts University, Medford, MA, USA; and ²Mohegan Tribal Historic Preservation Office and Archaeology Department, Uncasville, CT, USA

Corresponding author: Craig N. Cipolla; Email: Craig.Cipolla@tufts.edu

(Received 20 November 2023; revised 13 April 2024; accepted 29 April 2024)

Abstract

Although land loss is among the most profound impacts that settler colonialism had for Indigenous societies across North America, archaeologists rarely study one of the principal colonial mechanisms of land dispossession: allotment. This process forever altered the course of North American history, breaking up collectively held Indigenous lands into lots “owned” by individuals and families while further stressing local Indigenous subsistence patterns, social relations, political organization, and more. Archaeology’s long-term, material, and sometimes collaborative vantage stands to offer insights on this process and how it played out for Indigenous peoples in different times and places. As its case study, this article considers the allotment of Mohegan lands in southeastern Connecticut (USA). An archaeology of Mohegan allotment speaks to more than land loss and cultural change. It provides evidence of an enduring and long-term Indigenous presence on the land; of the challenges faced and overcome by Mohegan peoples living through, and with, settler colonialism; and of the nuances of Indigenous-colonial archaeological records. This study also shows the importance of Indigenous and collaborative archaeologies for shedding new light on these challenging but important archaeological traces.

Resumen

Aunque la pérdida de tierras es uno de los efectos más profundos que el colonialismo tuvo en las sociedades indígenas de Norteamérica, los arqueólogos raramente estudian uno de los principales mecanismos coloniales de desposesión de tierras: la asignación. Este proceso alteró para siempre el curso de la historia de Norte América, dividiendo las tierras indígenas de propiedad colectiva en lotes “propiedad” de individuos y familias, al tiempo que alteraba aún más las pautas locales de subsistencia, las relaciones sociales y la organización política de los indígenas. La posición ventajosa de la arqueología, a largo plazo, material y a veces colaborativa, permite comprender este proceso y cómo afectó a los pueblos indígenas en diferentes épocas y lugares. En este artículo se estudia el caso de la adjudicación de tierras de los Mohegan en el sureste de Connecticut (Estados Unidos). La arqueología de la adjudicación de los Mohegan habla de algo más que de la pérdida de tierras y el cambio cultural. Aporta pruebas de una presencia indígena duradera y a largo plazo en la tierra, de los retos que afrontan y superan los pueblos Mohegan que viven a través y con el colonialismo, y de los matices de los registros arqueológicos indígenas-coloniales. Este estudio muestra también la importancia de las arqueologías indígenas y colaborativas para arrojar nueva luz sobre estas difíciles pero importantes huellas arqueológicas.

Keywords: allotment; Indigenous presence; historical archaeology; New England; Mohegan; collaborative Indigenous archaeology; colonialism; settler colonialism

Palabras clave: asignación; presencia indígena; arqueología histórica; Nueva Inglaterra; Mohegan; arqueología indígena colaborativa; colonialismo; colonialismo de colonos

An Acre of Land, a Stick of Wood: Archaeological Perspectives on Allotment

Like many Mohegans, Zachary Johnson (1687–1787) was a steadfast defender of his tribe’s lands (Figure 1), which were under constant threat during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Councilor to Mohegan sachems Ben Uncas II and Ben Uncas III, Johnson understood how dire it was to seek relief from the constant weight of settler colonialism in New England. He made the situation crystal clear in one of several pleas written to the Connecticut State Assembly:

That your Memorialists are of the true Tribe of the Mohegan Indians and have an ~ Hereditary Right to all Priviledges belonging to the same, But that they are at present under great Disadvantages and Inconveniencies from the Incroachmts of Strangers Inhabiting on the Mohegan Land, and that said Strangers as well White people as Indians Commit great wastes and Depredations on the Produce of the Same, more perticularly in Cutting The Timber and transporting it from said Land to their own private advantage [Johnson 1780].

Johnson argued that if things were to remain as they were, if state representatives were to continue disregarding the problem, encroachers would doubtfully leave the Mohegan “an acre of land to plant or a stick of wood to make a fence or fire” (Johnson 1780).

Allotment is the process by which Indigenous, communally held lands (i.e., held “in trust”) were divided up into privately owned lots, with the remaining lands typically sold off to settlers for the “benefit” of tribes. As with many histories of allotment, requests like Johnson’s often preceded decisions to break up land. In these situations, unchecked intrusion and poor reservation conditions often left tribes with few alternatives to allotment. Through allotment, settler-colonists grabbed land from tribes, often with serious consequences. Indeed, colonial histories sometimes frame allotment as erasing the final vestiges of Indigeneity in North America, breaking long-term social ties and connections to land. These framings are examples of what Michael Wilcox (2009) referred to as “terminal narratives” that serve to erase and ignore ongoing Indigenous history up to the present. This article presents alternatives, considering Mohegan allotment from a collaborative archaeological perspective. It documents the long-term and material dimensions of this history, asking what (and how) an archaeology of allotment contributes to broader understandings of Indigenous–colonial interactions and histories while pushing back against simplistic erasure narratives.

We address allotment through a particular archaeological site and landscape at Mohegan—the Hillside Site and surrounding lands (Figure 2). The site and its immediate surroundings include several plots of land assigned in the second half of the nineteenth century to individual Mohegans, all part of an extended family. Among this family was Emma Baker, an important community leader, who served as Mohegan Medicine Woman and who was known for safeguarding traditional knowledge, heritage, and land against settler incursion (Berger and Scherpa 2022; Mohegan Tribe 2023). The broader landscape speaks to long-term Indigenous presence in the area, including several areas where Mohegan people collected sacred resources—medicinal plants and quartz. The site itself, a small dry-laid stone foundation footing and depression built into the side of a gently sloping hill, reveals new information on life at Mohegan during the allotment era, especially the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, the parcel of land on which the Hillside Site sits officially passed out of Mohegan hands to Euro-colonial landowners. The Mohegan Tribe reacquired the land in 2006, and in 2012, placed it back into trust (communal ownership).

As with many archaeological sites, the foundation challenges us in certain ways. First, the site shows evidence of an otherwise undocumented, large-scale burning event. Second, we do not know definitively who built and lived in this structure (see Voss 2015), and, of course, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there are a few different possibilities, including Mohegans and possible encroachers (as described by Johnson above). We see these ambiguities as intimately linked with settler colonialism—specifically, the history of land invasion in New England and southeastern Connecticut. We argue that, in documenting and studying sites like Hillside and in wrestling with the uncertainties of the archaeological record, there are valuable opportunities to rethink settler colonialism in general, Indigenous resistance and community preservation efforts (Schneider and Panich 2022; see also

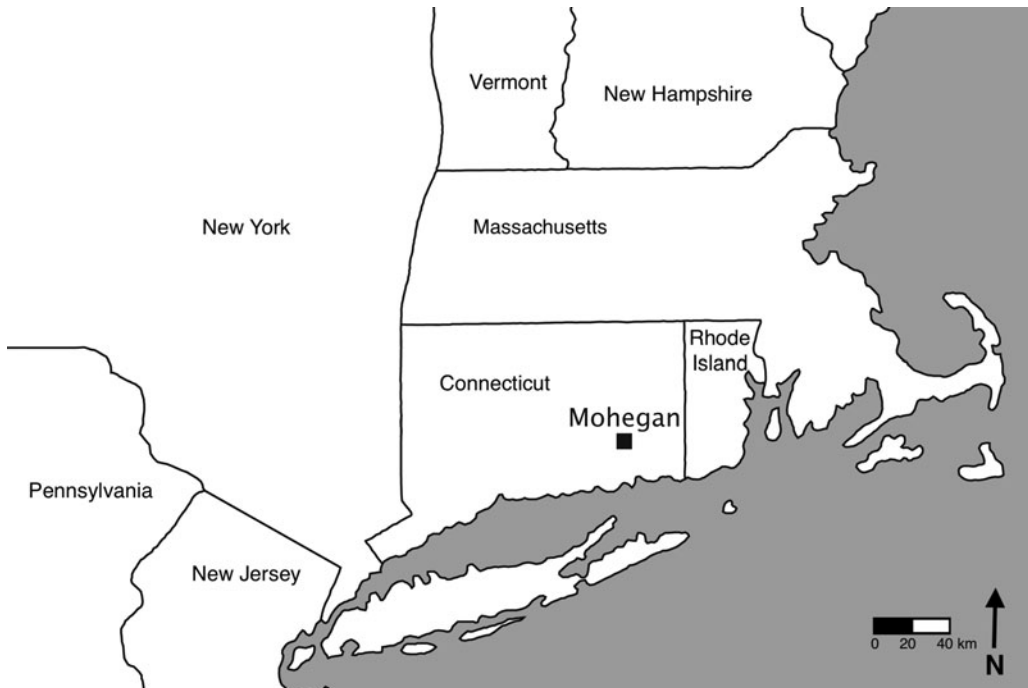


Figure 1. Map of New England showing the location of the Mohegan Reservation. Map by Craig N. Cipolla.

Lightfoot and Gonzalez 2018), and Euro-colonial histories written about Mohegan lands and peoples (e.g., Baker 1896).

In the next section, we present a summary of North American allotment history, further contextualizing this study. From there, we outline land struggles at Mohegan during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries before describing the Hillside Site; the archaeology of Hillside speaks to long-term Indigenous presence, to the textures of daily reservation life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to ongoing Mohegan efforts to preserve communal relations and connections to the land. Our discussion of the broader landscape around the site and its cultural significance also demonstrates collaborative archaeology's potential to shed new and important light on North American allotment histories and Indigenous histories in general. We conclude by arguing that our findings speak to the promise of future archaeological allotment studies.

A Brief History of North American Allotment

In the United States, allotment and settler colonialism go hand in hand. The emergent field of settler colonial studies (see Veracini 2011) emphasizes the importance of researching later-period forms of colonialism, a topic that has received relatively limited attention within the field of archaeology. Lightfoot and Gonzalez (2018:429) argue for shifting archaeological attention beyond early colonial encounters and entanglements to consider more sustained forms of colonialism. Such considerations must remain attentive to what Kauanui (2016) refers to as “enduring Indigeneity” and to what other scholars discuss in terms of thrivance (Acebo 2021; Baumann 2023). Baumann (2023), for example, underscores the importance of understanding Blackfeet cultural production and contributions despite the settler colonial structures that threaten them. Although allotment demanded the end of Indigenous laws, governance, and autonomy (Leeds 2021:302), allotment studies have the power to shed light on how people “grappled with, responded to, and challenged the material and symbolic consequences” of allotment while maintaining connections to one another and to their homelands.

Discussions of allotment stretch back to the Pilgrims' seventeenth-century views on what to do about the Wampanoag, who complicated Pilgrim desires to settle (Deloria and Lytle 1983:8). Most



Figure 2. The Hillside Site foundation: (a) Hillside Site excavations, looking north; dotted line marks approximate foundation outline; (b) Hillside Site foundation, looking east; (c) Hillside Site foundation, southeastern corner. Photographs by Craig Cipolla. (Color online)

discussions took place between settlers, typically politicians who, of course, had vested interests in advancing settler colonialism via various assimilation efforts and more. The nineteenth century was the heyday of allotment efforts, culminating in 1887 with the passage of the General Allotment Act (Carlson and Eastman 2001:605; Smithers 2015:29). This law—better known by the name of its primary sponsor, Massachusetts Senator Henry Dawes (Deloria and Lytle 1983:9)—modeled itself after the values of a political interest group called the Indian Rights Association (IRA; Genetin-Pilawa 2012:135–136). The IRA framed its approach around what Euro-colonial peoples *owed* Indigenous peoples; one of its most outspoken leaders, Herbert Welsh, argued that the federal government was deeply indebted to Indigenous peoples after the violence and dispossession of earlier phases of colonialism on the continent. For Welsh and his followers, the best way to “pay back” this debt was for the federal government to break up lands held collectively by Indigenous groups, to assign each lot to individuals and families, and to promptly withdraw government support. According to the IRA, these steps would force Indigenous peoples to farm and “improve” their individually held lands (Genetin-Pilawa 2012:138).

With federal allotment legislation, Indigenous landholdings dropped from 55.8 million ha (138 million acres) in the late nineteenth century to only 19.4 ha (48 million acres) by 1934, nearly half of which were desert or semiarid, making those allotment lands nearly useless for farming (Deloria and Lytle 1983; see also LaVelle 1999). Surpluses of Indigenous land that were not assigned to individuals and families were sold off to settlers, with proceeds held for the benefit of tribes (Brousseau 2018:136; LaVelle 1999; Lomawaima 2013). Although this process was framed as a means of making Indigenous people the same as Euro-colonial peoples, in most cases “Indian allottees did not share the same freedoms as non-Native citizens to buy, own, and sell” (Lomawaima 2013:337).

Federal officials and politicians packaged allotment as “humanitarian” benevolence (Lambert 2016), but its codification into federal law marks one of the “bleakest periods in the history of relations between whites and Native Americans in the United States” (Carlson and Eastman 2001:605). In most cases, allotment was a form of Euro-colonial paternalism and, ultimately, a direct attack on tribal sovereignty (see Lambert 2016; see also Carlson and Eastman 2001; Deloria and Lytle 1983; Holm 1979; Lomawaima 2013; Parker 2015:61; Young 1958). Indeed, allotment played a pivotal role in the federal government’s attempts to make Indigenous peoples look, act, and think like Euro-American settler colonists, an approach narrowly designed around arbitrary Euro-colonial ideals. Allotment was also a form of forced individuality and competition (Carlson and Eastman 2001:606), hallmarks of Western capitalism.¹ As Deloria and Lytle (1983:9) describe it, for the writers and supporters of this legislation, private property “had mystical magical qualities . . . that led people directly to a ‘civilized’ state.” Furthermore, the legislators predicted that allotment would “solve the problems of the Indians in one generation” (Deloria and Lytle 1983:9; see also Holm 1979).

Most allotment research focuses on policy, law, geography, and history (Brousseau 2018:137), often prioritizing written records and Euro-colonial perspectives. In this article, we ask about collaborative archaeological insights; archaeology potentially opens a window into the material differences that the sentiments, approaches, and legislation highlighted in most allotment research made in the actual lives of Indigenous peoples. Some archaeologists have begun studying allotment histories, but these studies are few and far between (see Cipolla 2013a; Kretzler 2022). As they and others point out, scholars and the public often view allotment and assimilation as *ends* of Indigeneity in North America (see Cipolla 2013b). Archaeological perspectives complicate and push back against these narratives while further contextualizing allotment within long-term Indigenous histories that continue into the present. The collaborative dimension of our work also adds much needed Indigenous insights on allotment (see also Haake 2015; Holm 1979; Justice and O’Brien 2021) and on archaeological landscapes associated with allotment histories.

Allotment at Mohegan: Before Dawes

Not all tribes were impacted by the Dawes Act in the same way. Some tribes, such as the Mohegan, petitioned for allotment before the act was passed. To contextualize the Mohegan’s decision further, one must begin with seventeenth-century colonial politics in Connecticut (see Brooks 2006; Jarvis

2010; Silverman 2010). Unlike other neighboring groups that, in the decades following the Pequot Massacre or Pequot War of 1636 and 1637 (Cave 1996), had strictly bounded reservation lands established, Mohegan lands were never defined in such a way. In 1640, Uncas, the first Mohegan sachem, set aside lands for Mohegan farming, fishing, and hunting, allowing his English ally, John Mason, to establish the town of Norwich on 23.3 km² (9 square miles) of Mohegan land (Brooks 2006:10). About two decades later, Uncas deeded the Mohegan lands he had set aside to Mason for Mason and his heirs to protect *on behalf of* the Mohegan Tribe. Soon after, Mason attempted to transfer trusteeship of the land to Connecticut Colony, reserving about 295 ha (730 acres) for “perpetual use by the collective Mohegan tribe” (Brooks 2006:10). The Mohegan saw this last transfer from Mason to Connecticut as contrary to the previous agreements and therefore invalid (Silverman 2010:45, see also Brooks 2006:10–11; Jarvis 2010:33–38). Disregarding Mohegan challenges to this transfer, Connecticut incorporated the disputed lands in the 1660s and began selling off parts to settlers.

Land troubles persisted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Connecticut continued selling land originally “reserved” for the tribe (Brooks 2006:11). Even communally held land was not secure due to a combination of land theft, unauthorized land leasing, leasing where tenants simply stayed on the land after their lease terminated, and Euro-colonial theft of resources such as timber. To make matters worse, a complicated leadership dispute arose within the tribe at this time: two possible chiefs, each with different views of how to cope with land encroachment, vied for power (Brooks 2006; Jarvis 2010; Silverman 2010).

The archival record includes multiple examples of Mohegans writing to the Connecticut General Assembly about their land struggles during these tumultuous times. This article began with a discussion of Zachary Johnson’s 1780 petition, which emphasized the ongoing land problems at Mohegan and the need for government support in helping stop outsiders from illegally living on—and/or taking from—communal lands. Decades later, the problem persisted. In 1836, for example, a petition signed by multiple Mohegans explained their land problem to colonial legislators, arguing that the laws of the time “bind us [the Mohegan] to be State paupers—which opens the door for the convenience of unprincipled white men to rob us” (Mohegan Tribe 1836). Here, “robbing” referred to the various forms of encroachment on Mohegan lands (still held communally). The petition requested that Mohegan people be made “citizens” so they could “enjoy . . . rights in common” with their “white friends” (Mohegan Tribe 1836). The petitioners explained further, “We do not ask permission to sell our lands, or have it so it may go out of our hands . . . we want it all divided & each one have his right & hold it in fee simple & that portion of us that are able . . . have management of it our selves” (Mohegan Tribe 1836). Allotment represented a means of securing their lands from intruders, and Mohegan peoples had few alternatives. Although it took about a century to complete, the land was eventually broken up. The first attempt at allotment took place prior to this petition, during the later eighteenth century, but the land was resurveyed in 1860, with land titles and citizenship granted to Mohegan tribal members in 1872. The Hillside Site, discussed next, offers a window into Mohegan life and land before, during, and after these challenging times.

The Hillside Site

The Hillside Site consists of a modest dry-laid stone foundation built into the side of a gentle slope of forest land and located next to a small ravine with a dried-up creek. This article considers the foundation and the surrounding 2.1 ha (5.3 acres) of forest. In 2010, the Mohegan archaeological field school surveyed the area and partially excavated the site. The survey yielded clear evidence of long-term Indigenous presence across the broader landscape and directly next to the foundation; this came largely in the form of debitage and projectiles (Figure 3) that stylistically date as early as 3,500 years before present (Boudreau 2008:18–19). In total, the site yielded 268 pieces of debitage, including flakes and shatter, along with two bifaces and five projectiles. Sitting on the northeast edge of the foundation are features from this more ancient occupation. The foundation’s builders impacted the older site during construction—likely an accidental disturbance. Lithic artifacts were recovered in all excavation units in and around the foundation, however, suggesting that those who lived at the site might have made and used stone tools at least some of the time. Projectiles and bifaces



Figure 3. Projectiles recovered from the Hillside Site. *Left to right:* quartz small stem projectile (BFS-2010-0046)—possibly Wading River or Squibnocket style (Boudreau 2008:18–19); quartz Lamoka-style projectile (BFS-2010-0062); quartzite small stem projectile (BFS-2010-0441)—possibly Wading River or Squibnocket style (Boudreau 2008:18–19); quartzite Lamoka-style projectile (BFS-2010-0453), dating between 3,500 and 400 years before present (see Boudreau 2008:17); quartzite projectile tip (BFS-2010-058). Photograph by Craig Cipolla. (Color online)

were found in the middle to lower levels of excavation units, but debitage—including flakes and shatter—was recovered from *all* levels.

The foundation once supported a humble structure, approximately 3 × 3.5 m in size. The house was oriented roughly to the slope it sat on, with an entrance facing downhill, to the southeast. Built into the hillside, the structure would have remained cool in the summers and warm in the winters. The northeastern, northwestern, and southwestern walls sat on full-length dry-laid stone footings. The southeastern wall had shorter stone footings at the corners, leaving an opening in the middle, which was presumably the entrance to an under-floor storage space, or alternatively, an entryway for the structure. The nails and window glass recovered from the site offer further architectural clues.

Those who lived in the house relied on a combination of domestic and local plants and animals. The archaeological assemblage includes charred maize and beans as well as fragmentary cattle bones. Of note, preserved maize and beans in the archaeological record are rare in New England's acidic soils. The macrobotanical remains that did preserve likely did so due to the large fire that occurred at the site, discussed further below. Oyster and smaller local mammalian species, such as rabbit, were also present in the assemblage.

Although the precise dates for the foundation are uncertain, the scant archaeological assemblage recovered there gives the impression of a relatively short occupation by a person or family of very modest means. Those who used the building left behind few personal possessions; the foundation included mass-produced European-made ceramics, white ball clay smoking pipes, bottle and window glass, hardware (nails and a spike), lead shot, unidentified fragments of brass and iron, slag and coal ash, a small fragment of slate, a gunflint, bullet casings, and a fragmentary horse bit (Figure 4), as well as the lithic, macrobotanical, and faunal collections already discussed. The shell casings and some of the window glass postdate other materials associated with the foundation, representing reuse of the foundation in the later twentieth century, after it had legally passed out of Mohegan hands.

Although the foundation included few (and highly fragmentary) archaeological remains, they suggest that it was a domestic context of some kind for at least some of its history. The site's occupants prepared and ate meals there, as seen in the fragmentary tableware and food remains. Hillside's occupants also warmed the house using coal fires, evident in the presence of slag and ashy layers of soil associated with the southeastern side of the structure, near the storage opening or entryway.



Figure 4. Ceramics from the Hillside Site. *Left to right:* refined earthenware (BFS-2010-0519); stoneware (BFS-2010-0475); refined earthenware (BFS-2010-0504); two sherds of refined earthenware (BFS-2010-0442); refined earthenware (BFS-2010-0433); refined earthenware (BFS-2010-0406); two sherds of unidentified ceramic—one burned (BFS-2010-0353); stoneware handle and four sherds of refined earthenware (BFS-2010-0443). Photograph by Craig Cipolla. (Color online)

If only artifacts are considered, the foundation potentially dates between the late seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries. Temporally diagnostic artifacts directly associated with the foundation include refined earthenware and stoneware ceramic sherds (Figure 4) and the horse bit (Figure 5). The former includes only 15 sherds, and the collection is so fragmentary that identification beyond basic paste and firing technique was not possible. This means that the refined earthenwares could be creamwares, pearlwares, or whitewares. The earliest of the three, creamware, was developed in the 1740s (Barker and Majewski 2006:214; see also Miller and Hunter 2001) and likely did not make it onto reservations in the area until the 1760s (Silliman and Witt 2010:58). Yet, the earthenwares are just as likely to represent a mid- to late nineteenth-century occupation. All ceramics were recovered in the upper levels of excavation, as was the horse bit, which was found just to the southeast of the foundation. The latter resembles a jointed-mouthed curb, discussed by Noël-Hume as “the most popular type [of horse bit] used in the late 17th and 18th centuries” (2001:241). More specifically, the bit resembles a “curvilinear style curb branch” (Hilliard 2013:A-10), which typically date between 1686 and 1733. If the ceramics and the horse bit were used contemporaneously, their co-presence suggests an occupation no earlier than the late eighteenth century. It is, however, plausible that the two date to different phases of the foundation’s use, discussed further in the following section. The presence of slag at the site, including the concentration of slag and ashy soil mentioned above, suggest that the site’s occupants used a coal stove, a common nineteenth-century heating method.

The most important archival source offering information about the site is a plot map of the Mohegan Reservation based on the second official survey of Mohegan lands for allotment purposes. The initial attempt at allotment occurred in the 1790s, but there is no map associated with these efforts. The second survey began in 1860, and the resulting map bears the date 1872, which is the year that Mohegan families and individuals were officially assigned the lots and made citizens (see above). The Hillside Site sits on the boundary between lots assigned to Henry Baker and Rachel Fielding, and it is very close to the boundary they both share with the lot of Moses Fielding. Rachel, Moses, and Henry Baker’s wife, Emma Fielding Baker, were siblings—the children of Frances Fielding and Rachel Hoscott. Of the three siblings, Rachel died significantly earlier in life, in 1870, at age 35. It is therefore possible that the Hillside Site’s strikingly thin archaeological assemblage could be a function of its primary occupant having passed away early in her adult life. As we discuss next, the burning pattern at the site adds additional support for this interpretation.



Figure 5. Fragmentary horse bit (BFS-2010-0512). Photograph by Craig Cipolla. (Color online)

The site's occupation came to an end due to a large-scale fire that burned the structure down and impacted a surprising portion of the surrounding landscape. This burning event was evident in all excavation units. Wood charcoal was ubiquitous across the site, with concentrations of burned and melted artifacts in the center of the structure. The scale of the fire is further confirmed in the shovel test pit data (sampled on a 10 m regular interval). The ubiquity of charred botanicals across the shovel test pits suggests a past burning event of considerable breadth. Although there is evidence of burning at several other excavated Mohegan sites dating to this period, the Hillside Site is the only example with such a wide spatial extent. Nearly all excavated shovel test pits completed during the Hillside survey contained charcoal or other forms of charred botanical, which suggests a minimum burn area of 100×50 m. Additionally, later test pits, situated approximately 30 m east and 60 m south of the eastern extent of the initial testing grid, also show the same signs of burning (ubiquitously). Taken together, these two survey areas reveal a burn area that was at least 170×120 m in size, or approximately 2 ha (5 acres). To date, the archaeology team has yet to find documentation of any such large-scale burning event; there is no known oral or written record that mentions a large fire, so its nature remains uncertain. Although there are other possibilities, including violence and strategic burning, the most plausible explanation is that the fire was accidental; perhaps the coal stove caught the house and surrounding woods on fire, and the fire spread out of control. If the house was Rachel Fielding's, it is possible that the fire caused her death, which would explain the scant, fragmentary, and burned archaeological assemblage.

Comparable Sites from Neighboring Reservations

In comparison to neighboring reservation sites in southeastern Connecticut, the Hillside Site stands out in a few ways. The neighboring Mashantucket Pequot and Eastern Pequot reservations, established respectively in 1666 and 1683, provide helpful comparisons. Most Mashantucket Pequot sites dating to the mid-seventeenth through mid-eighteenth centuries represent wigwams or short-term encampments used for hunting or seasonal planting of corn or apples (McBride 1990:110). Stone became an important architectural material on the Mashantucket Reservation during the later eighteenth century. This general rule seems to apply to Mohegan sites. McBride (1990:111–113) describes mid to late eighteenth-century sites at Mashantucket as farmsteads with dwellings—both framed structures

and wigwams—and other features, including possible animal pens and sweat lodges, fields and gardens, wells, storage facilities, stone walls, middens, and more. Compared to Hillside, the sites described by McBride are bigger, with more complicated buildings and layouts. They also seem to have much higher densities of material culture associated with them.

An Eastern Pequot residential site dating between 1740 and 1760 is a closer match for the architectural patterns found at Hillside. The Eastern Pequot structure might have had mixed architecture (Silliman 2009:219–221), possibly a wigwam with nailed elements and window glass or a small wooden-framed structure without a cellar, crawlspace, and chimney. Another site on the Eastern Pequot Reservation dating between 1760 and 1800 included two chimney collapses, one full cellar, a rock and shell midden, a small trash pit deposit, a possible root cellar, and a small stone enclosure (Silliman 2009:220; see also Silliman and Witt 2010). Compared to Hillside, this Eastern Pequot structure is much bigger, with a more complicated footprint. Altogether the Hillside Site stands out because of its size, its low material density, and the burning event. To the authors' knowledge, nothing like the latter has been observed on either Pequot reservation.

The Ambiguities and Significance of the Hillside Site

As with many forms of archaeology, the Hillside Site leaves unresolved questions about who built, used, and lived in the house. In 1782, in early anticipation of allotment, the Mohegan sent a list of tribal members to Connecticut officials (Baker 1896:58–62). On the list was a nine-year-old boy named Isaiah Hoscott. In the late nineteenth-century documentation, Hoscott's grandchildren, Emma Baker (and husband Henry), Moses Fielding, and Rachel Fielding were assigned the land where the Hillside Site sits. As described above, of the three, Rachel Fielding is the most likely occupant of the house. Yet, in relation to the nineteenth-century plot map, the house sits in a strange location—on the boundary between three lots (Figure 6). It is therefore possible that this location was chosen *before* the nineteenth-century survey. Additionally, it is also possible that the land in question was where this extended family lived since the late eighteenth century and even before. If the site was Rachel Fielding's home, the horse bit, which dates roughly to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, would have been several generations old when used by Rachel. Alternatively, the bit could have been deposited at the site during an earlier phase of use.

It is therefore possible that the structure was built during the late seventeenth or eighteenth centuries as an outbuilding for a farming operation and that it did not become a home until a later stage of its use life. The structure could have been built illicitly by outsiders, such as those described by Zachary Johnson at the start of this article. He (Johnson 1779, 1782) explained that intruders often lived illegally on Mohegan land tax-free, raising the possibility that encroachers on the land might elect to make smaller-scale houses and buildings. The horse hardware (and its comparatively earlier date) in juxtaposition to the relatively thin domestic assemblage (containing ceramics that postdate 1760) fit this possibility. Owning a horse and the appropriate hardware was expensive during this time. In the later eighteenth century, owning draft animals was a sign of relative affluence for Mohegan people; for example, a local historian noted that, during the late eighteenth century, a Mohegan man named John Cooper was considered the “richest man of the Mohegans” (Baker 1896:64) because he owned two cows and a yoke of oxen. Yet, whoever lived at Hillside seemingly had very few personal possessions. These patterns lend some support to the possibility that the structure was created as an outbuilding of some sort before allotment and was subsequently used as a home during the nineteenth century. The site's nineteenth-century occupant (possibly Rachel Fielding) could have therefore “inherited” this structure as part of the allotment process.

Even if Mohegans did not live in the structure, it was certainly part of their world and their daily lives during the nineteenth century. At present, the structure is visible on the landscape (Figure 7), so it was likely even more obtrusive during the nineteenth century. Both Henry Baker and Moses Fielding would have seen and interacted with the foundation as they farmed their respective lots, and, as discussed below, Emma would have passed by the structure as she gathered plants and other important resources in the area. Although the site is small and comes with many ambiguities, it is part of an important Mohegan landscape.

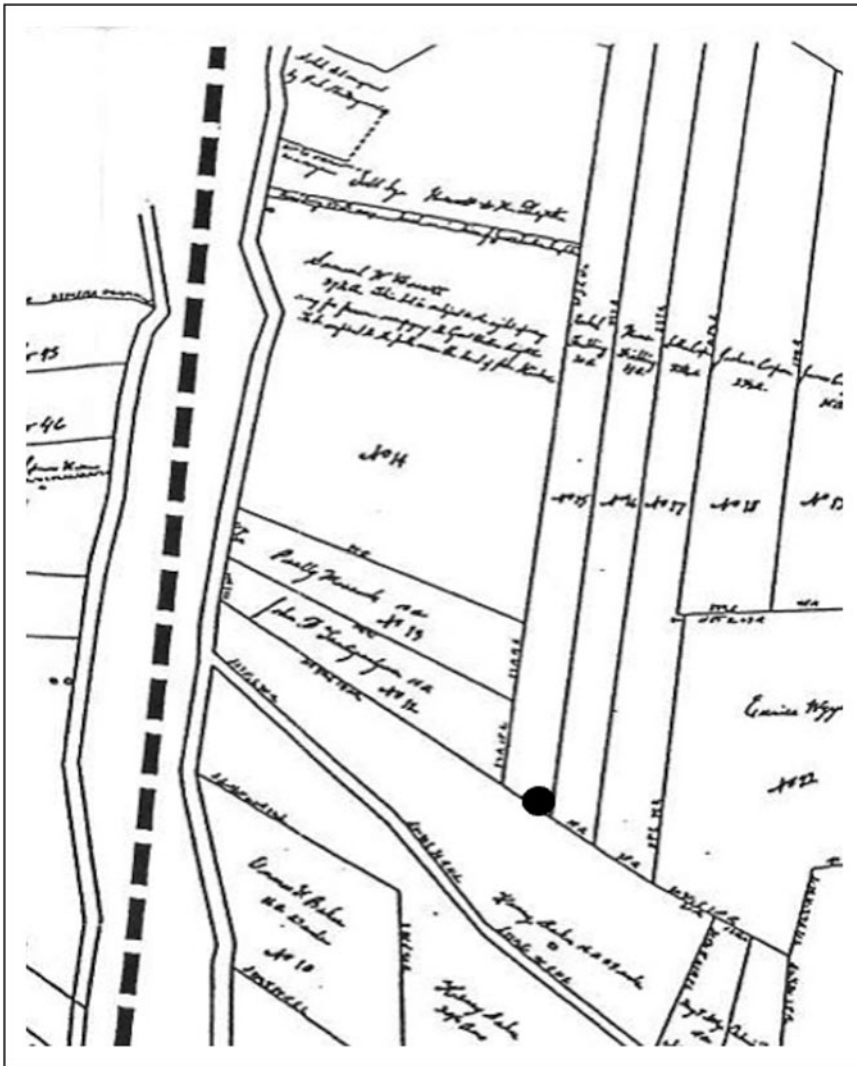


Figure 6. Location of Hillside Site (black dot) on the 1872 Mohegan plot map.

These woods were frequented by Emma (see Berger and Scherpa 2022; Mohegan Tribe 2023), who was Mohegan Medicine Woman and is remembered as an important communal leader. For example, in 1860, she is known for revitalizing the Green Corn or Wigwam Festival at Mohegan (Mohegan Tribe 2023). The festival came back during the many land problems described above; it was a way of gathering the tribe together just as land troubles were, in some ways, dividing it. As noted by the Mohegan Tribe (2023), “The festival helped galvanize Tribal solidarity during a time of fragmentation,” and it continues annually, each August, to this day.

Emma also chaired the Mohegan Tribal Council, interacted frequently with the Connecticut legislature (Mohegan Tribe 2023), and—perhaps most importantly—was a leader of the Mohegan Church’s “Ladies Sewing Society” (Berger and Scherpa 2022:213). Within Mohegan history, this group is known to have played a key role in preserving Mohegan traditional knowledge and sovereignty. For example, the women who helped found the Mohegan Church in 1830 (and what would eventually become the Ladies Sewing Society) persuaded the General Assembly of Connecticut to deed the land that the church sits on collectively to the Mohegan Tribe rather than to any one individual or family (Berger and Scherpa 2022:212–223). This small plot is the sole piece of the Mohegan Reservation



Figure 7. The Mohegan Tribal Historic Preservation Office at the Hillside Site, April 2024 (left to right: David McCormick, James Quinn, Jay Levy, and Dylan Russell). Photograph by Jennifer Petrario.

that has been held continuously by the entire tribe. More than this, the land, the church, and the Mohegan meetings that took place there played pivotal roles in the tribe’s successful application for federal recognition, approved in 1994.

Collaborative Insights

Collaborative methodologies often yield new insights on Indigenous history and archaeology due to the inclusion of specialized Indigenous knowledge and expertise. Panich and Schneider (2022:13–15) mention Indigenous landscape knowledge as an important contribution that typically sheds new light on Indigenous presence in later-period archaeological landscapes. This point rang especially true regarding two findings at and around the Hillside Site.

First, the archaeology team found patches of several different traditional medicinal plants in the area (see Cipolla et al. 2024). These plants include moccasin flower (*Cypripedium acaule* Ait.), pipsis-sewa (*Chimaphila umbellata*), sassafra (*Sassafras albidum*), and Indian pipe (*Monotropa uniflora* L.), as well as chicken of the woods (*Laetiporus* sp.), a traditional food source. As shown in Table 1, Mohegans use these plants for various purposes. This information is described in the writings of Gladys Tantaquidgeon (1972), Mohegan Medicine Woman for much of the twentieth century (taught by Emma Baker), who wrote about generations-old Mohegan plant traditions—still practiced today by the tribe. Given that these special plants grow on the lots formerly assigned to the Bakers and the Fieldings, it is highly likely that Emma Baker and others used and encourage these very same patches when gathering medicines. The presence of several groves of moccasin flowers—notoriously sensitive to their surroundings and sometimes taking up to 20 years to propagate—is particularly important to the Mohegan Tribe today. The groves are places that connect directly back to the work of ancestors such as Emma (Cipolla et al. 2024).

Table 1. Medicinal Plants at and around the Hillside Site.

Name	Use(s)
Moccasin Flower (<i>Cypripedium acaule</i> Ait.)	Multiple medicinal purposes; most widely, to cure insomnia, anxiety, or general tension
Pipsissewa (<i>Chimaphila umbellata</i>)	Leaves used to treat blisters (Tantaquidgeon 1972:71) and kidney stones
Chicken of the Woods (<i>Laetiporus</i> sp.)	Food source
Sassafras (<i>Sassafras albidum</i>)	Roots, leaves, and bark of this tree combined with other plant parts to treat sore eyes (Tantaquidgeon 1972:75). Viscous substance from young shoots that were put in water and left in the sun used as an eye wash (Tantaquidgeon 1972:75) or drunk as a tea.
Indian Pipe (<i>Monotropa uniflora</i> L.)	Liquid from roots steeped in water to relieve cold symptoms (Tantaquidgeon 1972:73)

Source: Modified from Cipolla et alia 2024.

Second, the land that the Hillside Site sits on is rich in quartz, an important and sacred substance for Mohegan people. As discussed in a previous article (Cipolla et al. 2019), for Mohegan people, quartz is a spiritually powerful material; it is used to protect people and places. As demonstrated by several of the projectiles and much of the debitage recovered from the site, quartz was also used readily to make tools for many generations. Given that the Hillside Site and the surrounding landscape are important sources of this precious material, it is probable that Mohegan people continued to visit the area even after it had fallen out of Mohegan hands.

Collaboratively documenting and studying places such as the Hillside Site is an important part of recognizing long-term and enduring histories of Indigenous presence on the land (see Schneider and Panich 2022). Although by traditional archaeological standards the archaeological site is perhaps less than noteworthy, it is precisely the type of archaeological signature that must be wrestled with to help acknowledge and better understand the long-term history of Mohegan presence. The archaeological ambiguities discussed above come with the territory, but these uncertainties should be embraced and reflected on rather than glossed over and left undocumented. Here, allotment looms large as an important part of this history. This study used archaeology to add new insights on Mohegan allotment and North American allotment writ large. Archaeologies of allotment reveal how a process largely known via generalizing Euro-colonial discourses looked in specific Indigenous places, including at archaeological sites. Discussions of allotment frame it as joined hand in hand with assimilation—twin solutions to the “Indian problem” identified in nineteenth-century discourse. Yet, the archaeology of Hillside complicates matters significantly. Hillside is a subtle archaeological site, surrounded by important Mohegan resources and relations. It was part of—and witness to—the important work of Emma Baker and her many efforts to maintain community cohesion and sovereignty, revitalizing communal gatherings as land tensions threatened to continue pulling the tribe apart. Rather than transforming Mohegans into simulations of competing, individualized Euro-colonial farmers, the allotment story told through the Hillside Site shows a community that maintained traditions, connections to their land, and connections to one another. Altogether the site and the wider landscape speak to the failure of the “mystical magical qualities” that settler colonists associated with private property (Deloria and Lytle 1983:9). If the interpretations of the site described above are correct, the site was part of a contested landscape for some of its history. It speaks to Mohegan struggles with—and responses to—Euro-colonial land grabs. Although it bears witness to pervasiveness of colonial land and resource theft, it also demonstrates Mohegan resistance and resilience.

Conclusions: Archaeology and Allotment

Given the part that allotment played in North American settler colonialism, it is surprising that it has garnered so little attention in the pages of *American Antiquity* and in the broader discipline (but see

Kretzler [2022] for an example). This article argued that archaeological perspectives on allotment have much to contribute to our collective understandings of long-term Indigenous archaeological histories of the continent. As with the Hillside Site, archaeology has the potential to add critical new information on Indigenous presence during challenging times. Archaeological patterns offer new perspectives on everyday life before, during, and after allotment. The light material record associated with Hillside suggests that whoever resided there lived a challenging life, perhaps with limited access to material goods and food. Yet, the site also suggests that Hillside's occupants possibly produced and used stone tools and ate traditional Mohegan foods, including corn, beans, and shellfish. The multiple lines of evidence used in this study tell a much more complicated story than assimilation of Mohegan peoples into imperfect copies of Euro-colonial farmers. There is evidence for enduring collective ties, and there is evidence that sovereignty was maintained by community members such as Emma Baker (see arguments for thrivance [Acebo 2021; Baumann 2023] and enduring Indigeneity [Kauanui 2016] in settler colonial studies). Through the challenges of weaving the messy and incomplete archaeological record with the textual record, we gained insights on the individuals and families who lived on this part of the reservation; studying allotment therefore also focuses attention on how extended family members remained clustered together in the face of a changing world. The archaeology shows the daily challenges they faced and, in the case of the fire, the potential tragedies and losses they lived through.

Some might still argue that studies of allotment be left to historians or that ambiguous or light archaeological signatures such as those at Hillside have little importance in the archaeological discipline. These positions overlook archaeology's potential to produce new information and counternarratives. These exist with the fragmentary ceramics, the stone footprint of the building, and the remains of fire at Hillside. If we ignore these remains because they are too complicated or ambiguous, what might a history of Mohegan lands look like? A different Henry Baker than the one discussed above, of Anglo-American descent, offers some answers to this question. In the later nineteenth century, he published a history of the area, detailing his perspective on the Mohegan. The excerpt below centers assimilation as the key to North American "improvement." Baker (1896) began his history of Mohegan lands arguing the following:

Had the aborigines of this land remained unmolested and unvisited by Europeans till the present day they would now have been as rude, as poor, as warlike, as disdainful of labor, and in every way as uncivilized as when the white man first explored the river Thames and sailed along its virgin shores. . . . If one was to stand upon some of the highest ridges which overlook this town and take a survey of the landscape . . . where now the hum of industry is heard and the voice of the white man and the civilized Indian awake their echoes . . . he would be amazed and wonder at the change that has come over this region of the country in the last two centuries [Baker 1896:1–2].

Such histories carve out little space for who the Mohegan were, what their lives were like, what struggles they faced, and how they fought to maintain their sovereignty. In such narratives, Mohegan peoples are reduced to imperfect copies (see Cipolla et al. 2021) of Euro-colonial peoples, to whom Baker referred as "the more intelligent and civilized race" (1896:2). As described in this essay, a collaborative archaeological history of Mohegan allotment adds new depth and detail to flawed and fragmentary narratives like those of Baker.

Archaeology alone is not always enough, though. This article demonstrates the importance of collaborative methodologies in adding new and vital understandings of history, archaeology, and the broader landscapes into which archaeology takes us (see also Cipolla and Quinn 2016). Collaborative methodologies point beyond the temporality of a singular building footprint to think through a site's broader landscape, its history, and the importance it has for Mohegan people today. The landscape discussed in this article is more than archaeological materials and patterns. In addition to these, we also discussed less traditional archaeological subjects of study, including living plants and unmodified stones that make up the landscape today. The medicinal and food plants along with the quartz found on the land remain sacred to Mohegan peoples; some of these same stones

and some of these plants' ancestors bore witness to countless generations of Indigenous history. Without these specialized forms of Mohegan knowledge, we would not understand the land in the same way nor the impacts that allotment had when it began attempting to disconnect this place from its people.

Acknowledgments. All archaeological research reported on in this article was conducted with the consent of the Mohegan Council of Elders and in collaboration with the Mohegan Tribal Historic Preservation Office. We thank Hector Salazar for providing a Spanish translation of our abstract. We are also grateful to Debra Martin and two anonymous peer reviewers for offering excellent advice on how to improve the manuscript. We offer special thanks to the Mohegan Tribe, colleagues in the Mohegan THPO and field school, our students, and our families.

Funding Statement. Funding for this research was partially provided by the Mohegan Tribe and by a Bridge Fellowship from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Data Availability Statement. All data reported on in this article are housed at the Mohegan Tribal Historic Preservation Office.

Competing Interests. The authors declare none.

Note

1. These policies were also directly linked to debates over authenticity, ultimately undergirded by racial profiling and gatekeeping—both based on arguments about blood quantum (Beaulieu 1984). These problems and other allotment-related issues persisted into the twentieth century (e.g., see Tong [1997] for a discussion of alcoholism; see also Keeler 2016; Parker 2015).

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