

Native American or Early Colonial Large Stone Artifact, Rahway, New Jersey

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A large sandstone cylinder weighing over half-a-ton was salvaged from the demolition of a late 1800s -1900 property in Rahway, New Jersey. The artifact weighs 1,350 pounds, is open at both ends, and was carved by hand with tool marks visible on all its surfaces (**below and figures 13 and 14**), and with signs of its interior having been grinded out . The property is within two blocks of the Rahway River, a known Lenni Lenape Indian occupation site from where many stone points have been collected.

This artifact is nearly three feet across, 6 inches thick and just over 2 feet high. Its exterior tapers very slightly toward the base. The only similar known artifact is the “Well Stone” that was donated to



Rutgers University in 1931, with similar characteristics. That object was from a nearby Lenni Lenape land along the Raritan River obtained by colonists in 1651, and which was used as a “well head” over “Indian Spring” (**fig. 6**).”

The Rahway artifact was donated by the salvor, Michael Sancilarti, of Big Top Construction, to the Merchants and Drovers Tavern Museum in Rahway.

A professional stonecutter who was consulted opined that the “tool marks [straight marks each about 1 ¼ inches long (**fig 12**) do not look like they were made by any chisels made in the last 200 years or so,” surmising an Indian origin. The interior of the artifact shows a few of the same tool marks, along with smoothed walls and a slightly undulating interior indicating the use of a grinding stone with an abrasive to polish it relative to the rough exterior (**fig. 5**).

The massive size of the half-ton plus artifact, cut by hand from a single piece of stone, the adze-like tool marks, interior grinding and exterior weathering, would indicate either a Native Indian or Early Colonial origin of significant age.



Figure 2. The artifact, 33' x 25" x 6".



Figure 3. Top view



Figure 4. The subject in the photo is 5' 8" tall. The artifact is 2 feet 1 inch high (25" tall).



Figure 5. The inside of the artifact has been ground smooth relative to the rough exterior. The interior walls are virtually vertical. The dark lower area is still soaked with water from the soil removal.

The Rutgers Artifact



Figure 6

This artifact is located outside of Rutgers' Geology Hall on the Old Queens campus. It was donated in 1931 and relocated here from a nearby site on the Raritan River, purchased from the Lenni Lenape by colonists in 1651. The plaque on it reads:

WELL STONE
FROM
INDIAN SPRING
Martin's Dock, NJ
Given By Martin Conway
1931

This artifact is thinner and narrower than the Rahway artifact, and it has been broken and repaired. A hole is visible on the side,

presumably so that, placed over a spring, water would gather inside and overflow through the hole. A descendant of the original colonial property owner was contacted and the site is still extant. Although the site was a well known fresh water spring used by the Indians in antiquity, it is not known who manufactured the well stone, which exhibits extreme weathering.

The Rahway Artifact

Three branches of the Rahway River meet within the four square-mile city and exit into the Arthur Kill tidal strait, connecting Newark and Raritan Bays. The Minisink Trail, a major Lenape Indian throughway, crossed two of the river's tributaries (**fig. 7**) from where many stone points have been recovered. The property where the artifact was found is two blocks from the river.



Figure 7

This 1747 map shows the confluence of the tributaries of the Rahway River (center).

The Minisink Trail crossed two of its tributaries. The property in question is very close to the river, a known Lenni Lenape habitation site where many stone points have been collected.

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The Shingle Style home was

constructed between 1880 and no later than 1905 (**fig. 8**). It recently sat on well over half an acre but was originally much larger, with a carriage house and horse stables. The artifact is known from photographs taken on the now-demolished property in the 1930s. A former occupant who grew up in the house in the 1980s stated that there was an extensive rose garden on the property, and the stone artifact sat in the middle of it, filled with earth and with a sundial placed on top.



Figure 8

The Shingle Style property and its gardens in Rahway, NJ 1930s

Collection of Alex Shipley



Figure 9

A 1930s photo of the artifact in the property's rose garden. The natural flaws visible in the photo match the artifact today.

Collection of Alex Shipley

Acquisition

The artifact was noticed upon touring the property on September 6th, 2023, prior to its demolition. It had been moved from its place in the rose garden (**fig. 9**) after that part of the property had been subdivided around 1980. It had a shrub growing completely throughout it and was filled with soil and several heavy pieces of flagstone. It was completely surrounded by pieces of flagstone that had paved the paths of the rose garden (**fig. 11**).



Figure 10. The artifact on September 21, 2023.



Figure 11. The property around 1980. The artifact had been moved to its found location (right foreground) and was completely surrounded by flagstones that had paved the paths of the former rose garden.

The salvor who held the rights to the property, Michael Sancilarti, of Big Top Construction in Rahway, NJ, graciously donated the artifact to the Merchants and Drivers Tavern Museum, the historical society in Rahway. The Museum acknowledged the donation and with the help of Rahway historian Alex Shipley and the City of Rahway, the artifact was collected.

Illustrations

Again, the sandstone artifact weighs 1,350 pounds, is 33 inches across, its walls are 6 inches wide, and it is 25 inches high (**fig. 4**). Its exterior slightly tapers toward its base.

Tool marks are apparent on all surfaces (**fig. 12**). The exterior, though uniform, is roughly finished and not polished. The interior is relatively smooth but with tool marks still visible, indicating that grinding was used in fashioning it (**fig. 5**).



Figure 12. A minor excavation of the earth next to the artifact to determine whether its bottom was open or closed. The edges are all uniform and the artifact is a cylinder open at both ends.

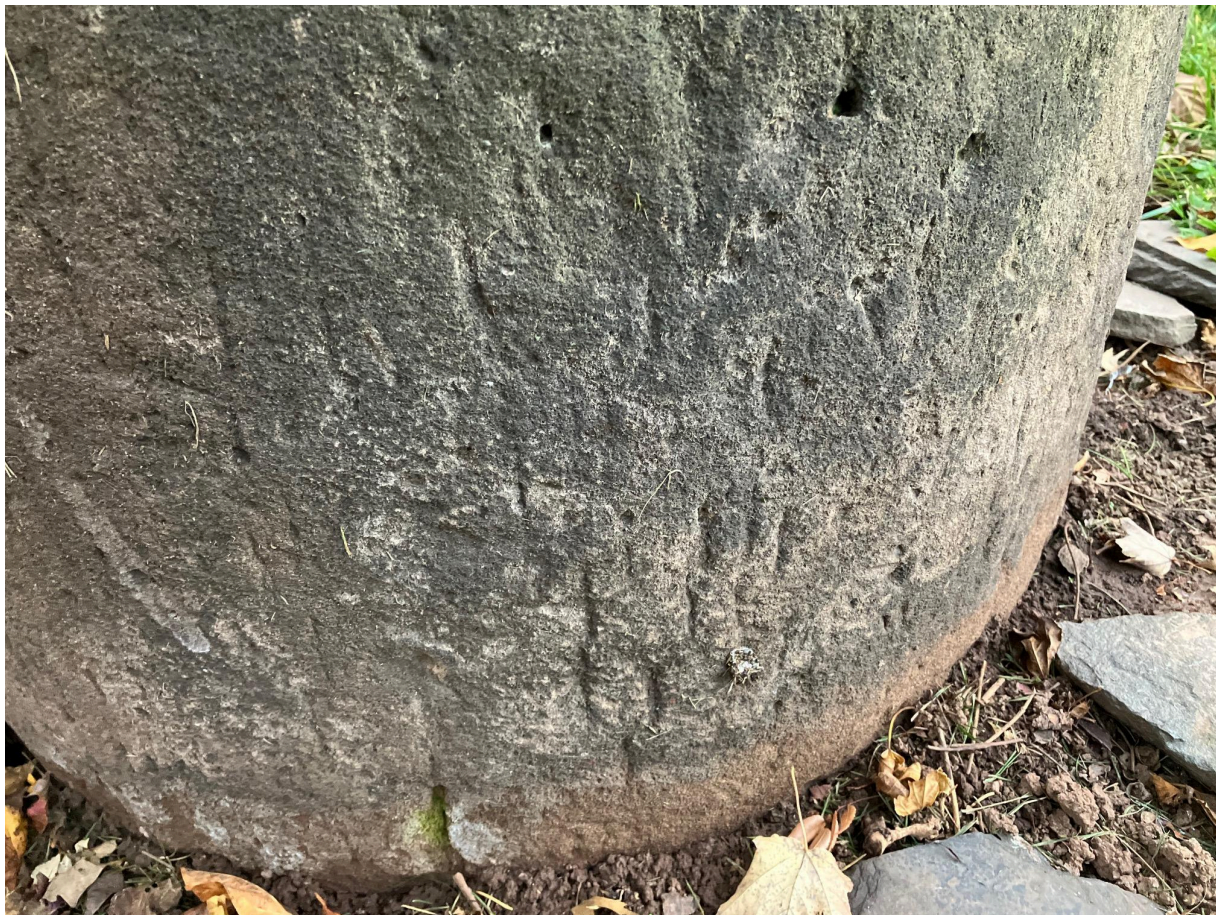


Figure 13. External vertical tool marks.



Figure 14. Exterior horizontal tool marks.