

## A Re-examination of the Question of the Middle Western Origin of the Delaware Indians

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### *Abstract*

The locating of the traditional homeland of the Delaware Indians along the White River in Indiana aroused great interest not only of the historian and archaeologist but also of the layman of the Middle West. This interest culminated in the publication of the *Walam Olum or Red Score* (1)—an interdisciplinary examination of the migration legend of the Delaware, under the sponsorship of Eli Lilly in 1954. The excavation, twelve years later, of the Island Field site in Delaware with abundant skeletal material and the assigning of an approximate date to the site, provides substantiating evidence that the arrival of the tribe on the Atlantic coast can indeed be placed into the proto-historic period.

During the past summer the writer had the opportunity to do field work with the help of four students—Richard D. Hill, Randall J. Marmouzé, Turhon Murad, and David Parman—on the skeletal materials at the Island Field site, Kent County, Delaware. Also the known Delaware cranial series from the Montague site, and the known Nanticoke crania from the Townsend site, both in the collections of the U. S. National Museum, were re-examined.

The Island Field site, 7-KF-17, is a Middle Woodland cemetery, dated about A.D. 900, which is being developed as a museum exhibit by the Delaware Archaeological Board. To date, over 100 burials have been exposed and left *in situ* under the protection of a corrugated iron shed.

The purpose of the field work was to remove the skulls of 16 of the skeletons—8 male and 8 female—reconstruct, measure, and photograph them in order to determine whether this population could possibly be identified as ancestral to the Delaware tribe, which inhabited New Jersey and northern Delaware in historic times. If this were the case it would place the Delawares in the East about 500 years before the date suggested in the *Walam Olum* (1), the migration record of the Delaware and related Algonquian-speaking tribes. If, on the other hand, the affiliation of this population could be shown to be with the skeletal material from the historic Townsend site, date ca. 1400-1500, the Island Field population could be identified as Nanticoke, whose ancestors inhabited the Delmarva Peninsula since Archaic times—a circumstance that would confirm the Delaware migration account.

Actually the latter proved to be the case, for all but one of the 16 crania were clearly of the long-headed Lenid variety associated with the Algonquian-speaking coastal populations of the Middle Atlantic and New England states. The other, an individual who was buried in an extended position and accompanied by Late Woodland pottery, was Ilinid, like most of the Delaware crania from the Montague site on Minnisink Island. At the Townsend site, just south of the Island Field site, 9 of 12 males could be clearly classified as Lenid, 1 as Ilinid, and 2 seemed to exhibit Muskogid affiliations, a variety that is wide-spread

in the southern states. At the Montague site, in contrast, 7 of 10 males were Ilinid, and 3 Lenid; and of the 9 females, 7 were Ilinid, 3 Lenid, and 1 Muskogid.

In conclusion, these findings substantiate an earlier migration of Algonquian-speaking people to the Atlantic coast, followed by a second migration with Central Algonquian relationships in proto-historic times. Since both are derived from the same gene pool and spoke languages of the same linguistic family, considerable overlapping is to be expected, but the isolation had evidently been of long enough duration to differentiate the two populations in a number of morphological characteristics, characteristics which can be used to distinguish most of their members from each other (2).

#### Literature Cited

1. LILLY, ELI (Ed.). 1954. *Walam Olum or Red Score—The Migration Legend of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians*. Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis. 379 p.
2. NEUMANN, GEORG K. and TURHON A. MURAD. 1970. Preliminary Report on the Crania from the Island Field Site, Kent County, Delaware. *Proc. Indiana Acad. Sci.* 79:69-74.