Photo taken for a "stereoviewer" by John Batchelder in 1869 of a dugout canoe in use on Cole Pond in Andover.

Dating the "Settlers Dugout Canoe"

Historical Sources Can Help Date Artifacts

John A. Hodgson

The "Settler's dugout canoe" rests prominently on display in the Andover Historical Society Museum and holds pride of place in the Society's history, too. Its recovery from Adder Pond (also known as Hopkins Pond) in 1982 was the catalyst that prompted the creation of the Society, and in recognition of that fact the dugout canoe is listed as the Society's very first acquisition – Accession No. 82.1 (the "82″ stands for 1982, the year the AHS was founded). The canoe merits this attention: it is a very fine and very rare example of a utilitarian watercraft once common across much of North America since pre-Columbian days that most people today have heard about but few have ever seen.

In recent years, many old dugout canoes have been recovered from the bottoms of lakes in southeastern American states, most notably Florida, where more than one hundred were found in a single large lake near Gainesville during a 2000 drought. But in New Hampshire, conditions are much less favorable for their preservation, and very few dugout canoes have been recovered here. In addition to the Andover Historical Society's specimen, others are on display in the New Hampshire Historical Society (Concord), the Hopkinton Historical Society, the Libby Museum (Wolfeboro), the Millyard Museum (Manchester), the Derry Historical Society, and the Sandwich Historical Society – a total of seven, some of which are hardly more than fragments of the original craft.

A photo taken of the Settler's Dugout Canoe with John Lessard who led the recovery effort in 1982.

What can we determine about the age and provenance of these dugout canoes? Only three on exhibition, those in the New Hampshire Historical Society, the Hopkinton Historical Society, and the Sandwich Historical Society, have been scientifically tested. The former, which had been recovered from Lake Ossipee ca. 1840, is made from a pine tree (a common wood for New England dugouts, although many other kinds of trees were used, too), and radiocarbon analysis dates it to 1430-1660 A.D. Almost certainly, then, this one is an indigenous, Amerindian craft. The latter two, also made from pine trees, were not old enough for such analysis to be very informative, and were simply determined to be post-1750 or post-1800 crafts.

The "Settler's Dugout Canoe" is on display at the Andover AHistorical Society. The short squared off stern is a clue in determing the age of the canoe.

But while the Indians native to New Hampshire certainly made dugout canoes, the early Euro-American settlers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries quickly adopted the tradition and began making such canoes themselves; and almost all surviving dugout canoes discovered in New England date from the period when both Indians and Euro-Americans were making and using them – a comparatively recent period of time, moreover, when radiocarbon dating is unreliable anyway. How can we determine which are which?

The question can be a complicated one for dugouts found in regions such as Southern New England, where indigenous tribes and colonial settlers lived for many decades in fairly close proximity to each other and with frequent interaction. In midstate New Hampshire, however, an area settled a century or more later, such cultural coexistence was much less common – was, in fact, quite rare. That fact is reflected in our local

See Canoe *on page 26*

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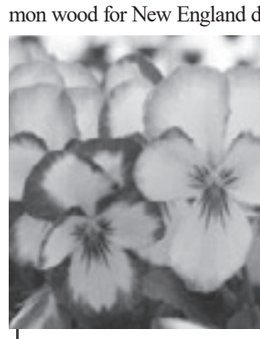

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